DEPARTMENT OF SCOTTISH LITERATURE

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

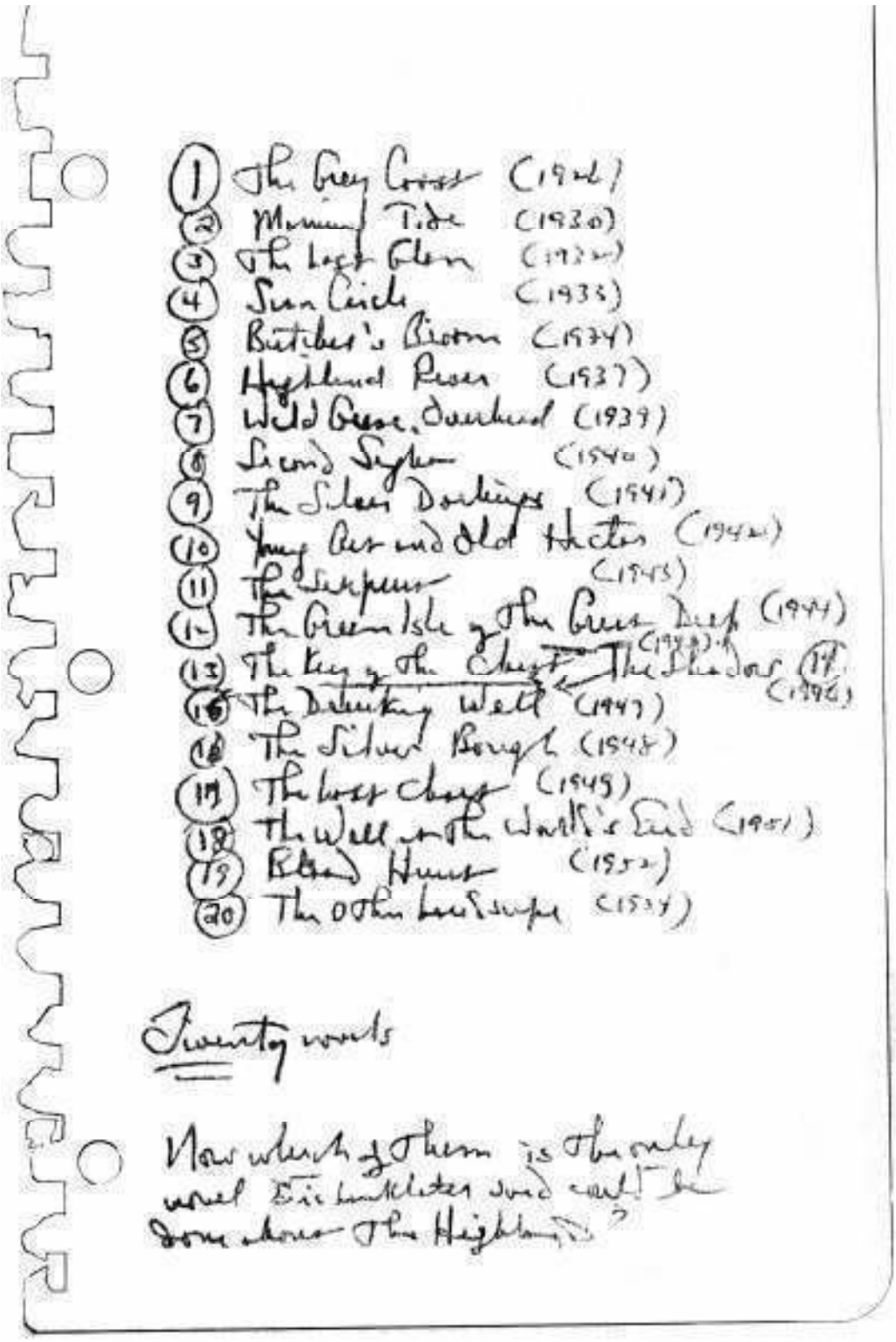
DOCTORAL THESIS

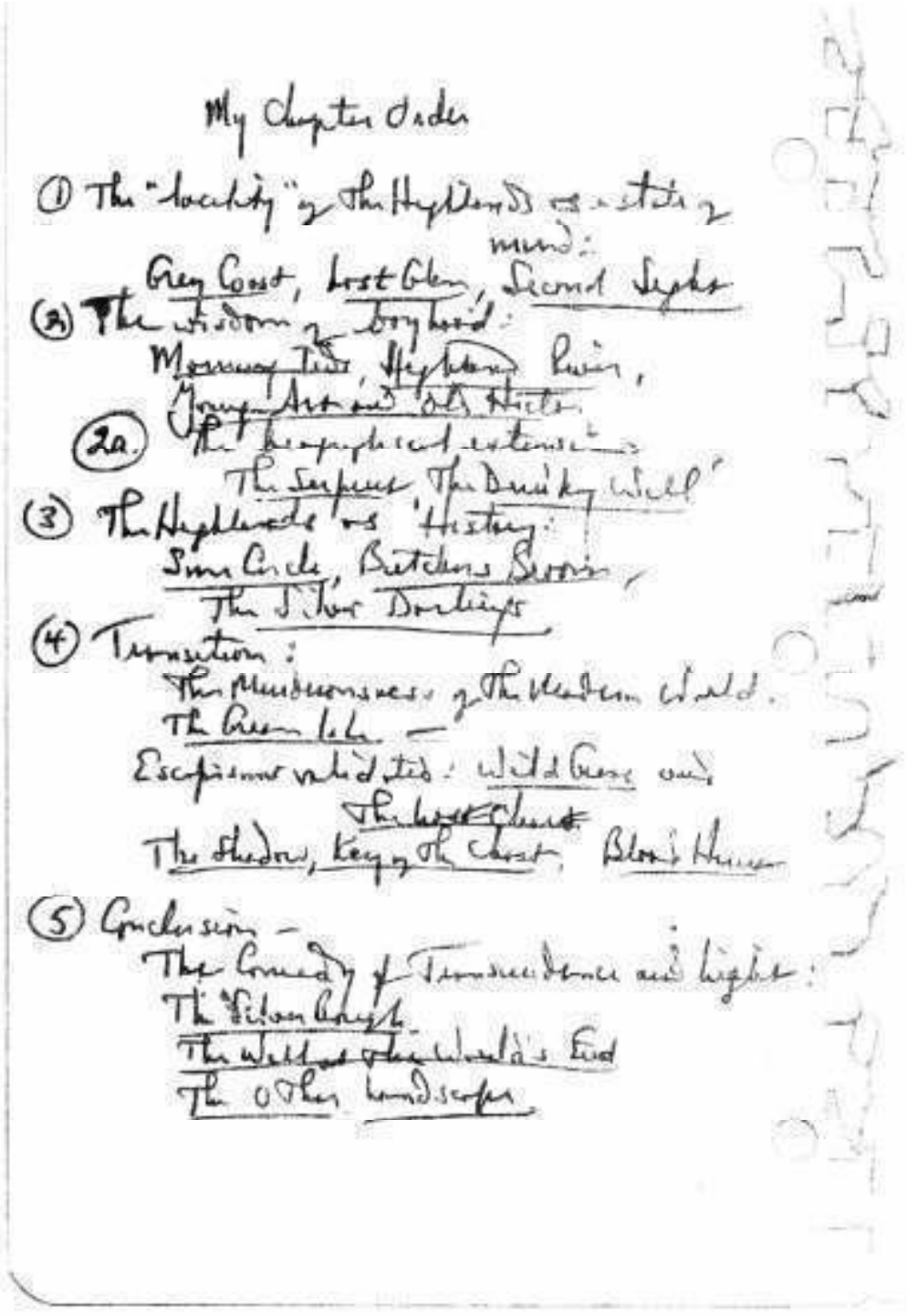
CHRISTOPHER JOHN LAWSON STOKOE

Closing the Circle: Neil Gunn's creation of a 'meta-novel' of the Highlands.

Date of submission - 6th March 2007
© C.J.L. Stokoe, March 2007

FRONTISPIECE





My Chapter Order

① The "locality" of The Highlands as a state of mind:
Grey Coast, Lost Glen, Second Sight

② The wisdom of boyhood:
Morning Tide, Highland Rain,
Young Art and Old Stories

2a. The biographical extension:
The Serpent, The Dark Well

③ The Highlands as 'History':
Sun Circle, Butcher's Broom,
The Silver Darlings

④ Transition:
The Mediterraneanness of the Western World.
The Green Isle —
Escapism and its dates: Wild Geese and
The Lost Chart
The Shadow, Key of the Chart, Blood Hunter

⑤ Conclusion —
The Comedy of Transcendence and Light:
The Silver Bough
The Well at the World's End
The Other Landscape

ABSTRACT

Whilst researching his bibliography of Neil M Gunn, the writer found photocopies of papers said to have been in Gunn's desk at the time of his death, amongst which were copies of both sides of a handwritten sheet[1] torn from a loose-leaf notebook. This document, produced in response to perceived criticism by Eric Linklater, offers a unique insight into Gunn's view of his literary achievement at the end of his novel-writing career. In it Gunn sets out the theoretical concept of all his twenty novels being components of a single, composite, 'Novel of the Highlands', an abstract concept referred to in this thesis as a 'meta-novel'.

The thesis examines the literary viability of this meta-novel; it follows a tripartite form: chapter one, which records *inter alia* Highland problems, forming the introduction, chapters two to four inclusive forming the central developmental section before culminating in chapter five, the conclusion. The developmental section offers a critique of the problems outlined in the introduction *via* a series of 'epicyclic journeys' which approach the problems from the perspectives of childhood, history and culture, each contributing to the achievement of a positive conclusion. By considering the interplay between each chapter heading and the content of the individual novels allocated to it, the implied plot structure of the overall work can be established.

Gunn habitually re-used and adapted his material over time. The evolution of this material in the individual novels is discussed. The meta-novel represents another, and final, re-use of material and, through the exercise outlined above, it is hence possible to speculate on which elements of the individual novels Gunn deemed to be important in retrospect, as it is these that develop the meta-novel's plot. Thus, crucially, the examination prompted by the existence of this primary document enables a re-evaluation of Gunn's individual novels, which this thesis also undertakes.

---

[1]Reproduced as a frontispiece to this thesis by kind permission of Dairmid Gunn, the nephew of Neil Gunn and his literary executor.

CONTENTS

Page

FRONTISPIECE 2
ABSTRACT 4
CONTENTS 5
INTRODUCTION 8
Gunn's retrospective vision: a private exercise 9
Gunn's public face 14
Gunn: language and politics 18
Gunn the writer: background, motivation, aims and objectives 22
Gunn's meta-novel: form, structure and argument 28
Aims of the thesis: Part one - structure and argument 34
Part two - contextual framework 36
SECTION ONE: The 'locality' of the Highlands as a state of mind 41
The contributory novels 42
Locating chapter one in space and time 45
Themes of chapter one 48
The 'Man who Came Back' 57
Relating the themes to the title 61
Re-appraisal 65
SECTION TWO, Part One: The wisdom of boyhood 68
The contributory novels 69
The first epicyclic journey 77
The state of childhood 79
The 'wisdom of boyhood' 86
That which was lost 97
SECTION TWO, Part Two: The Biographical extension 101
The contributory novels 102
The Biographical extension 106
The religious dimension 111
The urban influence 118
The Man Who Came Back 123
Re-appraisal 139
SECTION THREE: The Highlands as History 141
The contributory novels 142
Views of Highland history 144
Non-narrative history 157
Gunn's historical novels 158
That which was lost 188
Re-appraisal 192
SECTION FOUR: Transition
Part One: The Murderousness of the Modern World 195

The title of the chapter as a whole 196
The Murderousness of the Modern World, the contributory novel 198

Page

Identifying the issues 202
The issues revisited in The Green Isle 205
The analytical versus the intuitive mind 213
That which was lost 221

SECTION FOUR: Transition

Part Two: Escapism Validated 224

The contributory novels 225
A consideration of escapism 229
The first three novels 232
The last two novels 254
Re-appraisal 269

SECTION FIVE, Conclusion: The Comedy of Transcendence and Light 273

The contributory novels 274
Themes of the concluding chapter 277
The individual novels 279
The comedy of transcendence and light 303
Re-appraisal 323

CLOSING THE CIRCLE

A final overview 325

BIBLIOGRAPHY 336

Primary texts - The published novels of Neil M Gunn 337
Primary texts - Other works by Neil M Gunn 338
Secondary texts 343

INTRODUCTION

Gunn's retrospective vision: a private exercise

At the end of his writing career (probably in the 1960s) Neil Gunn, irritated by a remark of Eric Linklater's along the lines of 'You can only write one novel of the Highlands!', was moved to list his published novels in chronological order, adding the comment 'Twenty novels. Now which of them is the only novel Eric Linklater said could be done about the Highlands?'[2] Had Gunn only created this list, the document would have been merely a curiosity, an indication of his sensitivity to criticism, implied or actual. Fortunately he took the process a stage further and on the reverse side of the list, under the heading 'My Chapter Order', he set all twenty novels within a series of esoterically-titled chapters of a unitary and coherent 'Novel of the Highlands', thus creating a single extended work incorporating his entire output of novels. The chapter headings are:

1. The "locality" of the Highlands as a state of mind:
   [*The*] *Grey Coast,* [*The*] *Lost Glen, Second Sight*
2. The wisdom of boyhood:
   Morning Tide, Highland River, Young Art and Old Hector
   2a. The Biographical extension:
   The Serpent, The Drinking Well
3. The Highlands as History:
   Sun Circle, Butcher's Broom, The Silver Darlings
4. Transition:
   The Murderousness of the Modern World:
   The Green Isle [*of the Great Deep*]
   Escapism validated:
   Wild Geese [*Overhead*] and *The Lost Chart, The Shadow,* [*The*] *Key of the Chest, Blood Hunt*
5. Conclusion - The Comedy of Transcendence and Light:
   The Silver Bough, The Well at the World's End, The

[2]Whilst researching for his bibliography of Gunn's works, the present author discovered a photocopy of an unpublished manuscript in Gunn's handwriting. This lists his twenty published novels in order of publication, except that *Morning Tide* is quoted as 1930 rather than 1931. One novel, *The Shadow* (London: Faber 1948). was initially omitted, and was inserted against the date 1946 - the date of writing - see F. R. Hart, 'Neil Gunn's Drama of the Light', in *The History of Scottish Literature: Volume 4 Twentieth Century*, ed. by Cairns Craig (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987) p. 98.

Gunn excludes *The Poaching at Grianan*, a novel serialized in the *Scots Magazine* between September 1929 and May 1930, which was published posthumously.

This conceptual, composite, work, transcending the individual novels of which it is comprised, will be referred to throughout this thesis as a meta-novel. In this term, the prefix is not used in the sense of 'metafiction' but rather that of Mohan Sawhney's concept of a 'metamarket', with its implication both of inclusivity and of being greater than the sum of its component parts. Of this Philip Kotler writes:

> Mohan Sawhney has proposed the concept of a *metamarket* to describe a cluster of complementary products and services that are closely related in the minds of consumers but are spread across a diverse set of industries. The automobile metamarket consists of automobile manufacturers, new car and used car dealers, financing companies, insurance companies, mechanics, spare parts dealers, service shops, auto magazines, classified auto ads in newspapers, and auto sites on the internet. In planning to buy or buying a car, a buyer will get involved in many parts of this metamarket.[3]

In the case of the meta-novel, twenty individual and disparate novels are linked not only through common authorship, but also through an intimate inter-relatedness and an overarching, evolving structure. It is possible to see and describe both these aspects coherently and in so doing to illuminate the individual novels which are parts of this comprehensive vision.

Although, ironically, Gunn's retrospective exercise tends to confirm Linklater's assertion, it provides, at the end of his career, a remarkable insight into the coherence he perceived in his literary achievement. Edwin Muir, when reviewing Gunn's novel *The Serpent*,[4] made comments about Tom Mathieson, the principal

---

[3]Philip Kotler, *Marketing Management* (Paramus, NJ, USA: Prentice Hall, 2000), p. 9.

[4]Neil M. Gunn, *The Serpent* (London: Faber, 1943).
Francis Russell Hart, and J. B. Pick, *Neil M. Gunn: A Highland Life* (London: John Murray, 1981) p. 129 states: 'The two most personal of his novels - the ones he called "my own peculiar ones of which I'd say nowt" - are those in which his secret life is indirectly revealed, *The Serpent* and *The Shadow*.'

protagonist and narrator, which are just as applicable to Gunn himself and this retrospect. He said:

> The unity of the story is the unity of one man's experience as seen by himself shortly before his death, when the pattern has already woven itself, and by turning round he can see it spread out before him.[5]

The concept of all the novels forming part of an unified whole has never been advanced seriously by critics, although Alexander Reid did comment:

> [This] enables me to demonstrate something about Neil Gunn's achievement which has not, so far as I know, been noticed before by critics - that though each of his novels can be read with pleasure in isolation from the rest, all, without exception, take on a larger significance if they are viewed as contributory volumes to a single work which might awkwardly but fairly accurately be entitled *A Scottish Mystic's Search for the Conditions of Human Fulfilment*.[6]

Although Gunn always avoided the epithet 'mystic', this insight, whilst not directly suggesting 'A Novel of the Highlands', is worthy of note.

In his foreword to John Burns's book *A Celebration of the Light: Zen in the Novels of Neil Gunn* Francis R Hart states:

> I was also excited by the revelation of underlying unity in the books from the earliest to the final Saltire articles; I have never seen this done so well before. And it simply invalidates all of the clichéd divisions normally imposed on Neil's development.[7]

It is significant that Hart, a close friend of Gunn, and later one of his joint biographers, suggests no such unity in Gunn's work in his own studies, indeed he refers to Burns's work as a revelation. He contributed a biographical essay to a 1973 tribute published in honour of Gunn's 80th birthday, and which Gunn saw

---

[5]Edwin Muir, 'A Mature Book', *Scots Magazine,* Vol. 39, No. 5, August 1943, p. 382.
[6]Alexander Reid, 'Neil Gunn's Mysticism', in *Neil M. Gunn: The Man and the Writer,* ed. by Alexander Scott and Douglas Gifford (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1979), p. [344].
[7]F. R. Hart, 'Foreword', to John Burns, *A Celebration of the Light: Zen in the Novels of Neil Gunn* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1988), p. xi.

prior to publication, that made no such claim.[8] Later, when he contributed an essay on Gunn to *The History of Scottish Literature* he stated:

> [Gunn's imagination] worked by circlings back. Only the circular wisdom of a Hector knows how to go back and find what has been lost - a child, a key, crock, chart, well.[9]

These 'circlings back', or epicyclic journeys as they will be referred to in this thesis, are central to Gunn's vision and form the core of his meta-novel yet, despite his insight, Hart adopted a strictly chronological approach in his survey, linking Gunn's perceived changes of emphasis to biographical factors. He further stated:

> For many years, I read Neil Gunn's novels with the man at my shoulder. The man Neil is gone now; a new discovery of the author Gunn in his work calls for a new kind of reading.[10]

Between these two essays Hart published a major work, *The Scottish Novel: From Smollett to Spark*,[11] which devoted a chapter to Neil Gunn. As Gunn died in 1973 it is reasonable to assume that this work was in preparation 'with the man at [his] shoulder'. It is revealing that, in this survey, Hart grouped Gunn's individual novels in the same circuitous, non-chronological, way Gunn adopted when allocating them to the chapter headings of his meta-novel. It is unlikely that this was pure coincidence and it can be assumed that Gunn discussed his groupings with Hart but kept his retrospect, with its concept of a single meta-novel of the Highlands, private as, far from suggesting that the novels were 'contributory volumes to a single work', Hart specifically states: 'The development of his vision can be traced by *several* paths'.[12] Without a knowledge of the overall framework and attendant chapter headings set out in Gunn's retrospect, the order adopted by

---

[8]Francis Russell Hart, 'Neil M. Gunn: A Brief Memoir', in *Neil M. Gunn: The Man and the Writer,* pp. [9] - 60. Confirmation of Hart having shown this to Gunn comes from Hart and Pick, p. [125].
[9]Hart, 'Neil Gunn's Drama of the Light', p. 95.
[10]*Ibid.* p. 87.
[11]Francis Russell Hart, *The Scottish Novel: From Smollett to Spark* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978).
[12]*Ibid.* p. 348 - *My emphasis*.

Hart appears eccentric and may have contributed to his perceived need for 'a new kind of reading'. Some of Hart's earlier essays on Gunn suggest that his awareness of the groupings dates back to the 1960s.[13]

The nature of Gunn's 'private' exercise can now be considered. So far as is known only photocopies of the manuscript now exist but these indicate that it consisted of a single sheet of paper torn from a loose-leaf notebook. The first side contained the chronological list of his twenty published novels and the reference to Eric Linklater's comment. On the reverse side Gunn listed 'My Chapter Order'. Despite the impromptu nature of the exercise, the headings appear to have been set out without hesitation, the only alterations being the possible late addition of one, or maybe two, contributory novels, perhaps as a result of the list being out of sight on the reverse. The clarity of vision which enabled Gunn spontaneously to devise a framework embracing his *œuvre* and advancing, in a logical progression, his quest and its aims and objectives is quite breathtaking and justifies T. S. Eliot's claim that: 'Neil had perhaps the finest analytical mind he had encountered.' [14] However, in Gunn's vision, an analytical mind is not always a positive attribute as will be seen.

---

[13]Francis Russell Hart, 'Beyond History and Tragedy: Neil Gunn's early fiction', in *Essays on Neil M. Gunn* (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1971) pp. 52 - 67. This study, whilst only dealing with a limited number of books, adopts the same groupings.
Francis R Hart, 'The Hunter and the Circle: Neil Gunn's fiction of violence', in *Studies in Scottish Literature* (Vol. 1, No. 1, July 1963) pp. 65 - 82, also contains some references to the order used in the retrospect.

[14]Hart, and Pick, p. 138.

Gunn's public face

If the retrospect was an exercise kept private by Gunn, what was the public persona he wished to present to the world? To attempt to answer this question the entry in *Twentieth Century Authors: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature* can usefully be considered. As Gunn wrote this entry himself, it provides a self-assessment, a glimpse not only of who he was but also of who he thought he was, or perhaps what he wanted others to believe he was. He was born in Dunbeath, Caithness, on the 8th November 1891:

> His earliest memories center [sic] round his father's fishing boats and the tall cliffs, with inland straths and moors for background. There was the village school, but his real education was absorbed as a matter of joy from his environment, its long hours of independence and freedom, its fishing and hunting, its legends and traditions.[15]

The comment about the natural environment being a more significant educator than formal schooling clearly owes much to Rousseau and the Romantics. However, it cannot be accepted solely at face value. It is known that the only formal education Gunn received was from the village school in Dunbeath and whilst his writings suggest he was not particularly happy there, preferring to explore his natural environment, he did prove to be good at English and Maths; his biographers recording that he achieved the highest marks ever given for an essay (24½ out of 25).[16] By the age of thirteen he had left school and gone to stay with his sister where he received some instruction from a private tutor with, perhaps significantly, an interest in the Romantic poets.[17] Subsequently, he achieved very good results in the formal Civil Service entrance examination[18] and, at the age of fifteen, went to

---

[15]Neil M. Gunn, 'Biographical entry', in *Twentieth Century Authors: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature,* ed. by Stanley J. Kunitz, and Howard Haycraft (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1942), p. 588.
[16]Hart and Pick, pp. 27 - 28.
[17]*Ibid.* pp. 34 - 36.
[18]*Ibid.* p. 37.

work in London for two years before returning to Edinburgh. As his biographers note: 'he had learned to learn for himself'[19] suggesting that he had acquired, from non-environmental sources, the same rational, analytical, thinking seen in the retrospect, on the face of it very different from the intuitive, Wordsworthian, concept.

This apparent contradiction needs to be examined. John Burns claims:

> Gunn clearly does not want us to see this [Kenn's quest for the source] as a regressive movement. There is something positive in this quest back to the primitive and beyond. And this positive is the liberation of the mind from its domination by analytical thought. Gunn does not advocate a turning away from thought altogether, but he is so aware of the limiting nature of the uncontrolled intellect that he sees man as trapped by a faculty which should be one of his greatest assets. In *The Shadow*, Nan puts it thus: 'We have to rescue the intellect from the destroyers. They have turned it into death rays and it should be the sun'. (p. 42) When thought becomes reductive, as analytical thought so often and so easily does, then it becomes destructive.[20]

Burns goes on to counterpoint this potentially destructive analytical thought with: 'the delight experienced when the restrictions of thought fall away and the human being acts spontaneously and intuitively' in a world seen holistically 'as a living organism in which man is intimately involved'.[21] Burns equates these moments of intuitive insight, which Gunn referred to as 'Atoms of Delight',[22] to survival and life, and they also provide the key to progressing Gunn's vision. In this vision, the 'Atoms of Delight', achieved through intuitive 'natural' spontaneity, lead to understanding and wisdom, the qualities necessary to temper and control analytical thought. Within Gunn's novels this issue is most comprehensively dealt with in

---

[19]Hart and Pick, p. 37.
[20]Burns, p 55.
[21]*Ibid.* p. 55 and p. 4.
[22]This was also to become the title of Gunn's last book, a spiritual autobiography. *The Atom of Delight* (London: Faber, 1956).

The Green Isle of the Great Deep [23] which will be considered in greater depth later

in the thesis. It is pertinent to note that Gunn's work consistently exhibits a tension between the intuitive and the analytical.

In a supplement to the biographical dictionary produced in 1955, Gunn's entry continues to hint at the Romantic influence when he states: '"The method is Wordsworthian," the *Times Literary Supplement* wrote of his *Highland Pack*, a travel memoir of the region which Gunn knows and loves so well.'[24] Despite such comments it would not be helpful to see Gunn categorized as being part of either the Romantic, or indeed Modernist, schools *per se*.

After his return to work in Edinburgh, Gunn sought a posting to his native Highlands where he worked in various civil-service jobs, notably as an excise officer in whisky distilleries. He left his job in 1937 and became a full-time writer, but continued to live at various locations in the Highlands until his death. It is no coincidence that 'The Man Who Came Back', the title of an early study for a one-act play, became a recurring theme in his fiction.[25] As Hart noted, this concept of return, of circling back, is closely linked to Gunn's imaginative approach and forms an important element in the regenerative process he espouses.

Gunn continues the initial biographical dictionary entry referred to:

> This Northern land is in his blood and therefore in his books. Its culture is a very old one and particularly fascinates him because at an early age it managed to hold a fine balance between individual freedom and the duty the individual owes to society. He is an authority on the modern [1942] movement called Scottish

---

[23]Neil M. Gunn, *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* (London: Faber, 1944).

[24]Neil M. Gunn, 'Biographical entry', in *Twentieth Century Authors, First Supplement: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature,* ed. by Stanley J. Kunitz and Vineta Colby (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1955), p. 396.

[25]Neil M. Gunn, 'The Man Who Came Back (Study for a one act play)', *Scots Magazine*, Vol. 8, No. 6, March 1928, pp. 419 - 429. The play that followed was: *Back Home* (Glasgow: Walter Wilson and Co., 1932).

> Nationalism, having taken part in its economic, political, and literary ventures. He is an authority also on Scotch Whiskey [sic] and has written a book on the subject. For there is indeed little of his native land that he does not know at first hand.[26]

He paints a picture of himself as a modern Scot, thoroughly immersed in the culture, tradition and ways of his people. In stark contrast to many Scottish writers he consciously elected to return and spend most of his life in Scotland, specifically his native Highlands with its Celtic/Gaelic culture.[27] His literary skills were deployed in depicting this culture, the focus of his 'circlings back', albeit in the English language. One can question, of course, how authentic Gunn's depiction is as he was not a Gaelic speaker with direct access to the underlying traditions in that language. He did, however, grow up in an area that had spoken Gaelic up to and including the previous generation, and the traditions were very much living ones in his youth. The use of English, enforced or otherwise, as his chosen medium had the effect of providing a greatly expanded audience for his work, and his message. But it is, one might argue, an English infused with the sense of a culture that had prevailed for centuries in another language and idiom. That culture, perhaps, he could not go back to, literally; but in his writing, it could, with luck, come back to him.

---

[26] *Twentieth Century Authors,* p. 589.
[27] e.g. Robert Louis Stevenson, John Buchan and Compton Mackenzie.

Gunn: language and politics

Gunn was associated with the politics of nationalism both as a founder member of the National Party of Scotland and as a leading member of the Scottish Renaissance, which had nationalist associations. As such he would have been well aware of the arguments advanced for links between nationality and language - indeed his 1928 article, 'Scotsman's English', opens with the comment:

> The question of a suitable tongue for the expression of the essential Scots mind holds a fascination quite apart from any nationalist issue involved.[28]

This article concluded that the essentially 'Scottish' mind could be effectively conveyed in English, as indeed Hugh MacDiarmid believed in his pre 'Scottish Chapbook' period. However, in his 1935 *Scots Magazine* article 'Preserving the Scottish Tongue: A Legacy and How to Use It', in which these links and their political orientation are made abundantly clear, Gunn states:

> Unlike Communism or other social creed or manifestation, the Scots Vernacular is an affair exclusively Scottish, and to keep it alive, Scotland must be kept alive. For if Scotland dies, then not only the Vernacular but everything that gives her special meaning and identity dies with her.[29]

Whilst Gunn never specifies this 'Scots Vernacular' he adds later:

> Take such diverse countries as Norway, Czechoslovakia, and the Irish Free State. In each case when nationhood was resumed, the native language or languages, long fallen into desuetude, become the active concern of the whole people.[30]

Given the reference to the Irish Free State and the mention of languages (plural) it can be concluded that his definition of Scots vernacular does not exclude Gaelic,

---

[28]Neil M. Gunn, (Writing as Nial Guinne) 'Scotsman's English', *Pictish Review,* June 1928, p. 87.
[29]Neil M. Gunn, 'Preserving the Scottish Tongue: A Legacy and How to Use It', *Scots Magazine,* Vol. 24, No. 2, November 1935. Later collected in, *The Man Who Came Back: Short Stories and Essays*, ed. by Margery McCulloch (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991) p. [77].
[30]*Ibid.* p. 78.

which is more likely to have been of importance to Gunn than Scots, which was never the native language in Caithness. This support for vernacular languages as an integral part of what it is to be Scottish and therefore a valid focus for active concern seems at variance with the position Gunn took in the earlier article, 'Scotsman's English', and this apparent ambivalence towards Gaelic may stem, in part at least, from a sense of guilt in feeling so close to the Gaelic culture of his native Highlands, yet not speaking the language in which it was expressed. The background to this can usefully be considered.

Linguistically Caithness was not a major stronghold of Gaelic, owing much to the Norse influence from Orkney. However, as a result of the Clearances, Gaelic speaking people evicted from the Sutherland glens moved into the coastal areas of the County certainly as far as Dunbeath which, the writer was advised, was a 'frontier' area in terms of language.[31] Gunn's father, the skipper of a boat fishing from Dunbeath, was a Gaelic speaker and, as he employed an itinerant crew of Gaelic speakers from the Hebrides, it can be safely assumed that he was fluent in the language, communications within a small craft on dangerous waters being something of a priority. Despite his father having this facility, Gunn never learned the language and wrote exclusively in English throughout his career.

Formal education was clearly important within the Gunn household. Gunn's father attended school in the 1850s even though compulsory education did not commence until 1872.[32] By the time Gunn attended school the largely English curriculum was taught exclusively in English with Gaelic forcibly repressed. As his father could speak Gaelic and Gunn could not, it must be assumed that English was used at home. In part this can be ascribed to the fact that Neil's mother, 'who

[31]From conversations with George and Nan Bethune of Dunbeath.
[32]Hart and Pick, p. 19.

was born a few miles nearer Wick', was not fluent in the language.[33] Additionally, in adopting English in the home, his parents would consider they were serving Neil's best interests by promoting the language of education, of the future, of progress. However, as Neil identified so strongly with Gaelic culture, tensions were created that are evident in his work.

Corroboration of this sensitivity over language can be obtained from the article considered earlier, 'Scotsman's English'. In arguing that the essentially 'Scottish' mind can be expressed effectively in English, Gunn cited T. S. Eliot who, speaking of W. B. Yeats, was quoted as saying:

> Our poetry is of such various and incompatible inheritances - English, Irish, and American - that it is impossible for us to point to the work of any one poet as representing our time, or even as representing our living generation. If we assign the place of honour to Mr. Yeats - and there is certainly none other whose accomplishment and influence entitle him to that position - we must qualify our respect by the admission that an Irish poet can only be accepted with qualifications by English disciples.[34]

These 'qualifications', Gunn suggested, attest to Yeats' achievement of a specifically 'Irish' voice in English. The article is a closely reasoned work which argues that a specifically 'Scottish' voice can be achieved so long as the authors do not slavishly seek to think 'themselves into an Englishman's cultural skin'.[35] The

---

[33]In 1961 Ian Grimble prepared a Radio tribute in honour of Gunn's 70th birthday. He submitted the script (which no longer exists) to Gunn for approval and in his response Gunn requests just one alteration which relates to his parents' grasp of Gaelic. He stated:

> Not a word would I presume to alter except over a simple matter of fact. My mother did not speak Gaelic. She was born a few miles nearer Wick, and though I suspect now (things come back to one), that she knew enough of the old tongue not to be misled at critical moments, still she did not actually speak it. So perhaps you might consider changing slightly the two opening sentences of your second paragraph to something like this:
> Neil Gunn's father used Gaelic, particularly with fishermen from the West, but already the young generation were speaking English only, and one of Neil's earliest memories is waiting for the Gaelic service in the church to finish before going in to the service in English, taken by the same minister.

The above quotation is taken from an unpublished letter from Gunn to Grimble dated 2nd November 1961.

[34]'Scotsman's English'. p. 88.

[35]*Ibid.* p. 88.

Scottish author should rather 'be creatively preoccupied with himself as a cultured Scot in whom his "remote predecessors" live with their own "indispensable air of consequence"'.[36] Apart from hinting at Jung's concept of a collective unconscious, to which reference will be made later, this suggests the use of English with a colloquial or local flavour, as Yeats had done in Ireland. Gunn's cogent argument for a valid 'Scottish' voice in English would be endorsed by Scottish literary and linguistic studies today and yet he may have remained emotionally unsatisfied, the intuitive 'Atom of Delight' lacking, for he chose to sign the article with the Gaelicised form of his name, 'Nial Guinne'.

[36]'Scotsman's English', p. 88.

Gunn the writer: background, motivation, aims and objectives

Gunn's first appearance in print was in May 1918 when the poem, 'Toast', appeared on the front page of the first issue of *The Apple Tree*, the house magazine of 'The Aspirants' Fellowship', a group of would-be writers.[37] The Fellowship had organised a number of literary competitions, in which Gunn had achieved excellent results, some of which were published in this issue along with the report of the judges. It is informative to have, at the very beginning of his career, an independent assessment of Gunn's early ability. Their conclusion read:

> Considering the entries for the paper as a whole, the honours are divided by N. M. Gunn and Wellsted Miller, both of whom attempted most sections, and each of whom did well in all he attempted. The literary level of Mr. Gunn's work is particularly high.[38]

This first sonnet is quoted below:

TOAST

> Here's to it! The one fine thought that will thrill
> The mind of each to some divine desire;
> In deeps of mockery and strife and dire
> Defeat we'll stumble - but we'll hold to't still.
> Come, fill up! We'll drink to it while the wine
> Bursts its fragrant bubbles in youth's frail glass,
> And pledge ourselves, by this our solemn sign,
> To follow our lone quest. And as we pass
> Along life's shifting waste, where staring sphinx
> And ageless pyramid discuss our dreams
> In mocking silence, we'll not halt, but on
> And on we'll press, until our dim star sinks
> Beyond the desert's rim. Then, if it seems
> We have done little - we'll ask Death's pardon.[39]

---

[37]Hart and Pick, p. 52.
[38]Neil M. Gunn, *Poems and related early work* (Ampthill: Peglet Press, 1994) p. [9].
[39]Neil M. Gunn, (Writing as Nial Guinne) 'Toast', *The Apple Tree,* Vol. 1, No. 1, (May 1918) p. 1. Later collected in *Poems and related early work*, p. [5].

This piece is couched in more romantic terms than the novels spearheading the Scottish Renaissance would be and is closer to the intuitive 'natural' spontaneity that has been noted earlier. It is also fair to say that Gunn used this symbolic first, and emotionally charged, piece to declare his aim, and the aim of the Fellowship, namely to make an impact on the literary scene. Additionally, 'Toast' is the only work apart from 'Scotsman's English' signed 'Nial Guinne'. As there were other contributions to this issue of the magazine under his own name, there is no question of his seeking anonymity. Rather it suggests a secondary declaration, support for Gaelic, its culture and tradition. Although Gunn had clearly made a promising start to his literary career, as only the first two issues of the *The Apple Tree* are known to exist, it is not possible to track his early development between June 1918 and 1923.

Hart, from conversations with Gunn, identified his first commercially accepted story as having appeared in the magazine *Pan,* which had not then been traced.[40] In fact, only one story, 'The Spectre of the Sign-Post',[41] appeared in *Pan,* an earlier name for *The 20 Story Magazine* which was to publish four further short stories by Gunn. Hart and Pick also record that when Maurice Walsh, a fellow excise officer, had returned to Ireland, he and Gunn challenged each other to write, presumably on a commercial basis, and this probably prompted Gunn to re-commence writing.[42] It seems highly likely that the series of five stories in *Pan* and *The 20 Story Magazine* was the result of that challenge, particularly as they were the only works written under the pseudonym Neil McPhee, a likely pun on the financial stimulation for the contest.

More importantly, Gunn, who had married in 1921, had his request for a

---

[40]Hart, 'A Brief Memoir', p. 32.
[41]Neil M. Gunn, (writing as Neil McPhee), 'The Spectre of the Sign-Post', *Pan*, Vol. 9, No. 23, (May 1923), pp. 117 - 124.
[42]Hart and Pick, p. 61.

transfer back to the Highlands approved in 1922 and he and Daisy were to live for over a year in Lybster, close to his birthplace, Dunbeath. The physical return to boyhood haunts, after a lapse of some eighteen years, accentuated his sense of loss over the three brothers who died as a direct result of the First World War; the death of his father; and his mother's loss of mobility following an improperly treated hip fracture. The visible reality of an affectionately remembered area and culture in almost terminal decline would have added to his natural feelings of bitterness. His work at this time brought him into close contact with many impoverished crofters and this experience would have reinforced the visual evidence of decline.[43] Against such a background, it is unsurprising that Gunn's aims of literary achievement should have become more focused and that he should employ his burgeoning literary skills to help stem the cultural and economic decline by highlighting these issues, which increasingly became his stories' subject matter.

Chronologically, after the appearance of 'Toast' in 1918, a second poem was published before the *Pan* story appeared. This poem, 'La Madeleine', appeared in February 1923 in the *Scottish Chapbook* and provides a first link with Christopher Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid), the editor and publisher of the magazine, who was destined to become a major influence on Gunn.[44] Grieve was an ardent nationalist as well as a poet and he promoted the cause of both Scottish Literature and Scottish Nationalism through his own work and through the medium of the publications, *Scottish Chapbook*, *Scottish Nation* and *Northern Review* which he launched between 1922 and 1924. Grieve appears to have been willing to print almost anything Gunn wrote, and works by Gunn appeared in each of these publications.[45] These contributions are in differing genres and of uneven quality

[43]Hart and Pick, pp. 60 - 61.
[44]Neil M. Gunn, 'La Madeleine: From a Painting by Henner', *Scottish Chapbook*, Vol. 1, No. 7, (February 1923), p. 200.
[45]Hart and Pick, p. 69.

with commercially prompted formulaic stories resting cheek by jowl with more serious ones dealing with Highland decline.[46]

Gunn's reputation rests primarily on his novels, the focus of this thesis, yet nothing up to this point, the early 1920s, had pointed specifically to this genre. It seems reasonable to argue that the collaboration with Grieve provided the encouragement for Gunn to attempt the larger format which, by drawing attention to the contemporary problems of the Highlands, could help him achieve his aim of stemming decline. It is clear that both Gunn and Grieve saw nationalism as being important in achieving these aims and both were to become founder members of the Scottish Nationalist Movement. Grieve's publications were overtly nationalist and the *Northern Review* had a quoted aim to 'promote a nationalist renaissance', a term capable of both literary and political connotations.[47] Under the name Hugh MacDiarmid, Grieve was to become the major twentieth-century Scottish poet and was, ultimately, to work to re-introduce and develop Scots, or Lallans, as a literary language. In this latter respect he was markedly different from Gunn with his ambivalence towards the Gaelic language.

It has now become commonplace to see the novel as being the form most closely linked to the rise of nationalism in Europe, although this would have been less obvious in the 1920s.[48] However, it seems likely that Grieve, who had no desire to write novels himself - considering them intrinsically inferior to verse - would have realised that a like-minded novelist would prove a powerful ally in his

---

[46]This view of the standard of Gunn's fiction at the time is corroborated by Grieve who wrote in his essay on Neil Gunn in *Contemporary Scottish Studies: First Series* (London: Leonard Parsons, 1926) p. 269:

> His work remains unequal - now almost anonymous in its resemblance to "modern fiction" in the mass, now falling into a Kailyard rut, now tinged with the Celtic twilight.

[47]Hart and Pick, p. 70.

[48]For example, Timothy Brennan has said in 'The National Longing for Form', *Nation and Narration,* ed. by Homi K. Bhabha (Routledge: London, 1990) p. 49:

> the rise of European nationalism coincides especially with one form of literature - the novel.

'nationalist renaissance' and probably sought to groom Gunn for this role. Grieve could also have considered that a liaison with Gunn would provide the movement with a representative of the Highlands, and its Gaelic culture, to balance his Lowland and Scots background. Whatever the thinking, the fact remains that only three years after the commencement of their literary collaboration, Gunn's first novel *The Grey Coast* was published, with the first appearance of a verse by MacDiarmid on its title page.[49]

In his collection of essays, *Contemporary Scottish Studies: First Series*, Grieve devotes a chapter to Gunn which claims that:

> [He is] the only Scottish prose-writer of promise, that is to say, to that which is distinctively Scottish [. . .] and is our nearest equivalent to the Irish Liam O'Flaherty.[50]

This essay, given the predominately acerbic tenor of the collection, is remarkably positive and complimentary. However, it is also extremely selective. Despite the fact that Gunn had twenty-five published stories to his credit by the time this essay was written, only one, 'Half Light', which had the right Scottish Renaissance credentials, was mentioned along with *The Grey Coast*, the main subject of the essay.[51] This selectivity, seen against the background of Grieve's stated editorial policy and his reference, in the 1920s, to O'Flaherty all reinforce the argument that Gunn was being groomed by Grieve to be a major contributor to the 'nationalist renaissance'.

Whilst the two men later became estranged, as evidenced by their published collections of letters, through a growing political divergence there is little doubt

---

[49]Neil M. Gunn, *The Grey Coast* (London: Cape, 1926).
[50]Grieve, p. 268.
[51]Neil M. Gunn, 'Half Light', *The Cornhill,* Vol. 59 New Series, No. 353, (November 1925).

that Grieve was a major influence in getting Gunn started as a novelist.[52] There can equally be no doubt that Gunn, who remained politically active during his career, was a willing convert and, in the process, found the medium which best suited his style. As will be seen later, Gunn often used names symbolically (such as Art, Kenn and Finn) and it seems reasonable to speculate that his choice of the name Hugh for the hero of *Morning Tide w*as an embedded tribute to his mentor.[53]

To summarise, apart from the financial motive, the main stimuli for Gunn's embarkation on a literary career were: an inherent ability in the craft of writing; a deep distress over the economic and cultural decline of the Highlands; and a wish to be a part of the Scottish Renaissance Movement with its emphasis not only on a cultural and political nationalism but also on the realistic representation of contemporary Scotland. To these can be added his implied support for Gaelic.

Gunn's retrospect, which provides a coherent and complete framework embracing all of his novels, necessarily encapsulates the aims and objectives he believed had been achieved.[54] As the thesis progresses, comparisons will be made between the original aims identified here and those deemed to have been achieved. These will show the extent to which Gunn revised and adapted his aims to meet the needs of changing circumstances or the harsh realities of life. The thesis, then, will attempt to see the novels in their own particular contexts but also to consider seriously the collective achievement that they articulate: the meta-novel.

---

[52]Neil M. Gunn, *Selected Letters*, ed. by J. B. Pick (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1987).
Hugh MacDiarmid, *The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid.* ed. by Alan Bold (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984).
[53]Neil M. Gunn, *Morning Tide* (Edinburgh: Porpoise, 1931).
[54]The meta-novel moves to a conclusion, so Gunn clearly did not regard it as 'work in progress'.

Gunn's meta-novel: form, structure and argument

The form of the meta-novel that Gunn sketched out follows a regular pattern. It has five chapters with the central chapter, perhaps symbolically, being concerned with Highland history. The second and fourth chapters, which frame this middle chapter, are each sub-divided into two parts. Despite its five chapters, the meta-novel does, in fact, follow a tripartite form, a recurring theme in Gunn's thinking that will be examined in more detail when 'The wisdom of boyhood' part of chapter two is considered. In the case of the meta-novel, these three parts are: an introduction, a developmental phase and a conclusion. Chapter one, 'The "locality" of the Highlands as a state of mind', forms the introduction, chapters two to four inclusive the developmental phase and chapter five, as its title proclaims, the conclusion.

In his first chapter Gunn sets the scene for the whole work. The novels allocated to this chapter are all situated in the Highlands of his own time and, when read in conjunction with the chapter title, combine to give an accurate assessment of the realities of Highland life with its, often externally caused, problems and difficulties. The chapter title is concerned with the negative 'state of mind' then prevalent, and its state and causes can be deduced from the contributory novels. Whilst there are only hints as to how these problems will be redressed, such matters properly belonging to the developmental phase, an agenda of problems to resolve is constructed.

The function of the central developmental phase in Gunn's meta-novel is to address the problem areas identified in the introductory chapter and to pave the way for the positive conclusion which is signposted in the title of chapter five,

'Conclusion: The Comedy of Transcendence and Light'. In terms of methodology, insights can be gleaned from Hart's comments referred to earlier, namely:

> [Gunn's imagination] worked by circlings back. Only the circular wisdom of a Hector knows how to go back and find what has been lost - a child, a key, crock, chart, well.[55]

This suggests both the method, a series of epicyclic journeys, and the quest, the search for 'that which was lost'. The developmental phase incorporates three such journeys, and the implication is that each will recover something lost and that these re-found items will, collectively, support the positive conclusion. As the problems enumerated in chapter one are related to a mental attitude it is not surprising that the quest for a modern day equivalent of the 'philosopher's stone' also concentrates on the cerebral.

To be more specific, chapter two is an epicyclic journey which returns to an earlier state of human development, to childhood or, more precisely, boyhood. Essentially the same topographical area as was depicted in chapter one, is viewed through the eyes of a child. The boy's vision differs dramatically from that of the adult, highlighting the latter's reduced ability to see life positively. This, of itself, points towards a remedy but the second part of chapter two reinforces the message through the recurring image of 'The Man Who Came Back', an integral part of Gunn's remedy, often linked, symbolically, to the regenerative return of the salmon to its native river. Here are demonstrated the positive values which can accrue when the boy, who has left for further education or to learn new skills, returns in maturity and helps to revitalise his community.

The third chapter, an epicyclic journey on the temporal plane, explores 'The Highlands as history'. Here many of the problems identified in the first chapter

[55]Hart, 'Neil Gunn's Drama of the Light', p. 95.

have their genesis, and examining them identifies not only causes, always a precursor to reparative action, but will also enable positive lessons to be drawn from what may, at first sight, appear tragedies. For example, the tragedy of the Clearances recorded in *Butcher's Broom*[56] was the direct cause of the community having to relocate to marginal coastal land and yet this move, allied to commercial need, led directly to the triumph of the Herring fishing boom described in *The Silver Darlings*.[57] As will be seen when chapter three is discussed in detail, this novel, rather than dwelling on the subsequent decline which was depicted in the first chapter, finishes with the fishing industry at its height. This device serves to accentuate the positive achievements of the community, an achievement which is, again, driven by a positive state of mind. More controversially there is the suggestion that the maritime skills recorded in *The Silver Darlings* were part of a genetic heritage emanating from the invading, and settling, Vikings depicted in the earlier novel, *Sun Circle*.[58] This book, taken at face value, tells the story of another tragedy for the indigenous Celtic tribes and yet one not without its positive lessons for the seeker of 'that which was lost'. *Sun Circle* also depicts the coming of Christianity to the Northland, and introduces thereby a consideration of religion. This is an important theme in the shaping of the contemporary Highlands and one which will be considered at various points in this thesis.

In the fourth chapter the epicyclic journey has a cultural focus. The first part of the chapter centres on Gunn's dystopian novel *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* which features Young Art and Old Hector, characters appearing in the novel of the same name allocated to the 'boyhood' part of chapter two. Here the wisdom of

---

[56]Neil M. Gunn, *Butcher's Broom* (Edinburgh: Porpoise, 1934).
[57]Neil M. Gunn, *The Silver Darlings* (London: Faber, 1941).
[58]Neil M. Gunn, *Sun Circle* (Edinburgh: Porpoise, 1933).

boyhood and the wisdom of old age (Gunn writes of three ages of man, of which these are the first and third) are pitted against the Questioner, the representative of both the power of government and of the analytical mind. Art and Hector, in triumphing, draw on the strength of their cultural inheritance. In this tension between the individual and the modern state there is a reminder of the inherent balance Gunn believed existed in the old Highland culture. As he wrote in his biographical dictionary:

> Its culture is a very old one and particularly fascinates him because at an early age it managed to hold a fine balance between individual freedom and the duty the individual owes to society.[59]

'That which was lost' is again found, in this case a dilution of the essentially Gaelic cultural tradition and values of the Highlands. The second part of chapter four is entitled 'Escapism Validated'. Gunn was sensitive to the charge that he wrote escapist fiction, a charge carrying with it the suggestion of unhealthiness. Here he justifies his stance by depicting it as an antidote to the essential unhealthiness of the modern world, as explored in *The Green Isle of the Great Deep.* Accusations of escapism have also been levelled against the work of J.R.R. Tolkien and, in his defence, Timothy R. O'Neill states:

> The idea of escape literature carries with it the implication of unhealthiness, of trivial, unwholesome fantasy, and denial of that which is 'real' and hence worthy of our interest. My proposition is just the opposite: that it is the relative ill-health of our age which creates the need for the special kind of fantasy that Middle-earth provides, and that the narrow view of 'reality' that the critics champion may be the beginning of what is really unhealthy.[60]

---

[59] *Twentieth Century Authors,* p. 589.
[60] Timothy R. O'Neill, *The Individuated Hobbit: Jung, Tolkien and the Archetypes of Middle-earth* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), p. 2.

Even though Gunn is not principally known as a writer of fantasy, this comment is equally true of his stance in this chapter. Colin Manlove identifies a number of Gunn's novels in his survey of Scottish fantasy literature as falling within this category, principally *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*, the only novel allocated to the first part of chapter four, entitled 'The Murderousness of the Modern World'.[61] 'Escapism Validated' being the second part of the same chapter is, therefore, clearly linked to the entirely understandable urge to escape from the horrors of a sick modern world. The importance Gunn ascribes to this exercise is amply illustrated by the number of individual novels allocated to this part of the chapter, no less than five, a quarter of his total output.

The final chapter, 'Conclusion: The Comedy of Transcendence and Light', returns to his contemporary Highlands and, in this sense, mirrors the opening chapter. However, in this case, the 'state of mind' has altered from the negative and destructive one of the opening to one, as the title suggests, of transcendence and light. The change has been effected as a result of the lessons learned from the epicyclic journeys which were the concern of the developmental phase. In this chapter a seeking after spiritual strength and wholeness is seen, a seeking after the light and, as such, it concentrates on the individual mental attitude. There is an inner consistency in that both the introduction and the conclusion are concerned with the 'inner' man, with states of mind. However, the question of whether the aims encapsulated in Gunn's retrospect remained true to the aims identified earlier in the thesis as being his original ones, must be posed. This will be addressed in the detailed assessment of the final chapter.

---

[61]Colin Manlove, *Scottish Fantasy Literature: A Critical Survey* (Edinburgh: Canongate Academic, 1994), pp. 170 - 181.

It will be apparent from the foregoing that the Highland community plays the central role in Gunn's thinking. Although he frequently concentrates on individuals they are predominantly individuals within this community. His first chapter describes the current reality of the crofting communities. His second shows the young acquiring wisdom, which is seen as being undertaken within, or for the benefit of, the group. Chapter three concentrates on the history of the people whilst the fourth shows how the strength of their traditions is a positive benefit in the modern world. His conclusion seeks to show how regeneration of these communities can be achieved. However, as has been hinted at above, during the course of his writing career, Gunn's aims appear to have undergone a subtle shift of emphasis. Instead of seeking a direct political solution, he latterly seems to favour the regeneration of individuals. It is through these enlightened individuals that the regeneration of the community will be achieved. As these changes in his thinking become apparent, they will be commented upon further.

Aims of the thesis: Part one - structure and argument

The structure of the thesis will mirror that of the meta-novel itself with a section devoted to each of Gunn's chapters, suitably subdivided in the case of chapters two and four, To avoid any confusion in the reader's mind the term chapter will be used only of Gunn's chapters as set out in the retrospect. The corresponding division within the thesis will be referred to as a section.

A synopsis of the argument contained in each chapter of the meta-novel has been given in this introduction so as to make the general argument of the work clearer to readers but this needs to be considered in much greater detail on a chapter by chapter basis and this will be undertaken in the appropriate sections of the thesis. In each case the contributory novels allocated to the chapters will be discussed and, from the interplay between the subject matter of these novels and the chapter title, Gunn's themes will be advanced. Gunn frequently developed arguments, and re-used material, previously appearing in short stories or essays and an examination of these sources can bring helpful insights to the thesis. These bibliographical issues will be covered as the contributory novels are considered.

Gunn did not, of course, write in a vacuum and, although the retrospective approach in this case militates against a chronological viewpoint, the influences on him at the time of writing the novels must be borne in mind, which necessitates placing him within the wider literary context, especially that within Scotland. Gunn's retrospect does, however, inform this work and, it must be accepted that Gunn could, as Muir suggested, see unity in his work:

> The unity of the story is the unity of one man's experience as seen by himself shortly before his death, when the pattern has already woven itself, and by turning round he can see it spread out before him.[62]

[62]Edwin Muir, 'A Mature Book', *Scots Magazine,* Vol. 39, No. 5, August 1943, p. 382.

It is necessary to establish the thread that unites the work and leads inexorably to the conclusion Gunn believed his work had achieved. Each section will, therefore, seek to establish how the corresponding chapter fits into the overall structure.

The concept of all the individual published novels forming one meta-novel permits his work to be viewed as a whole in a way that has not been possible before. By seeing Gunn's output as a single meta-novel it is possible to identify recurring themes and events as repetitions rather than as unconnected events. For example, there is the Hector of *Young Art and Old Hector* and its sequel *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*, Hector the roadman in *Morning Tide* and Hector the storyteller from North Uist in *The Silver Darlings.*[63] Once the individual novels start to be considered as component parts of a meta-novel it becomes clear that these different characters are, in reality, manifestations of the same thing. Hector is an archetype embodying the culture and accumulated wisdom of the community.

Gunn writes essentially from the rural standpoint and it has been argued that he is anti-city. Whilst there may well be some truth in this assertion, the viewing of Gunn's *œuvre* as a single entity teases out considerations which are likely to have been overlooked when viewing the novels individually. One such consideration is that there is evidence in Gunn's work of a symbiotic relationship between the rural and the urban. This relationship may often be uneasy but it will be argued during the course of this work that the rural and urban each has a need for the other.

The meta-novel is a further re-working of Gunn's material. The relationship between the individual novels and the meta-novel will not only identify themes and issues that were not previously obvious but will also enable the individual novels to be re-assessed in the light of their function within the greater work.

---

[63]Neil M. Gunn, *Young Art and Old Hector* (London: Faber, 1942).

The conclusion will explain realistically how all the threads come together. It also examines the solutions Gunn has offered to redress the problems of the contemporary Highlands outlined in his opening chapter. It is in this section of the thesis that a consideration of Gunn's aims, and the degree to which they were achieved, will be undertaken. It will already be apparent that there appears to be some divergence between the aims Gunn originally set himself and those which the retrospect suggests he achieved. Put simply, the emphasis seems to have changed from the regeneration of society, one of the aims of the Scottish Renaissance, to the regeneration of the individual. Whether this is the case, or indeed whether the terms are mutually exclusive, will be discussed.

Aims of the thesis: Part two - contextual framework

In the above discussion on the 'aims of the thesis: structure and argument' the principal emphasis has been on the internal structure of the meta-novel and the relationship between that structure and the individual novels of which it is formed.

As Gunn was a Scot writing in and of Scotland, his contribution to Scottish literature is important and his legacy will be assessed as part of the conclusion. However, the meta-novel's aims and tripartite form also suggest broader comparisons and invite methods of examination beyond that of the purely literary. Whilst these may not provide parallels at every level, an awareness of how other disciplines reflect Gunn's concept, can aid the interpretation of the meta-novel.

Gunn's interest in Zen Buddhism has been well documented. He was first introduced to the subject in 1953 when J. B. Pick gave him Eugen Herrigel's book *Zen in the Art of Archery* (although the letter of thanks was dated 1954).[64] In his book, *A Celebration of the Light: Zen in the Novels of Neil M Gunn*, John Burns

[64]Eugen Herrigel, *Zen in the Art of Archery*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge, 1953). Hart and Pick, p. 242 For the thank-you letter dated 1954 see: *Selected Letters,* pp. 114 - 115.

considers Gunn's work in the light of Zen Buddhism. That study concentrates on a limited selection of Gunn's individual novels but, as has already been recorded, Francis Hart was excited at Burns's suggestion of an 'underlying unity in the books'.

Although Burns discovers much in Gunn's work that is explicable in Zen terms he is undoubtedly correct in saying:

> The picture that emerges is of a man who perceived something of the parallels between his own work and an apparently alien tradition, and who was sufficiently impressed by these parallels to investigate the matter seriously.[65]

This is demonstrably true as, given the date of Gunn's introduction to the subject, only *The Other Landscape* (1954)[66] can have been directly influenced by Zen thinking. For the present purpose, however, it is important that the parallels between Zen and the structure and themes of the meta-novel with its specific quest for the light, a single pathway from darkness to light, and the associated sense of being 'on the way' are examined. It is pertinent to add that, even if only one individual novel could have been directly influenced by Zen, this is not true of the retrospect which was certainly prepared after 1953 as *The Other Landscape* features.[67] It follows that the meta-novel may owe a greater debt to Zen than any contributory novel. The insights prompted by a consideration of Zen can, therefore, be valuable in interpreting the meta-novel and comment will be made as appropriate as the thesis develops.

Another approach which could potentially prove illuminating is suggested by the sub-title of Gunn's final chapter heading, 'The Comedy of Transcendence and

---

[65]Burns, p. 5.
[66]Neil M. Gunn, *The Other Landscape* (London: Faber, 1954)
[67]The retrospect was said to be in Gunn's desk at the time of his death.

Light'. This is not comedy in the sense of entertainment. However, thinking of 'Comedy' in its historically literary sense, there are parallels to the structure and form of the meta-novel as a whole. Speaking specifically of Comedy in its Shakespearean guise, Alvin Kernan observes that a three-part movement is evident; a movement from the present and the familiar, through the strange, returning changed to the familiar, or:

> From an old society which has become repressive, tyrannous and life-destroying to a revolutionary explosion [. . .] leading to a second period of disorder and excess [which] gives way in turn to the third period of the formation of a new society, which, while including all within its feasts and celebrations, is centred on youth and the new generation.[68]

The meta-novel also commences with a portrayal of the familiar world with its, often externally imposed, problems and difficulties. It is in Gunn's chapter one that the problems associated with the contemporary Highlands are identified giving rise to an implied agenda of issues requiring subsequent remedial action. In the meta-novel, as in Comedy, it is in the middle part, designated the developmental phase, that these issues are addressed. This central part in Comedy, perhaps particularly Shakespearean Comedy, includes fantasy and a transfer into an imaginary world, where the problems are examined, explained, and resolutions sought.

The return to a changed, indeed enlightened, familiar world is in the meta-novel, as well as the quotation above, concerned with the regeneration of society. The transcendence of problems and emergence into the light after being in the state of darkness depicted at the outset provides, self-evidently, a happy ending and the

---

[68]Alvin Kernan, '"Ducdame": Shakespearean comedy to Twelfth Night', *The Revels: History of Drama in English,* Vol. III 1576 - 1613*,* ed. by J. L. Barrell and others (London: Methuen, 1975), p. 308.

work has thereby earned the right to be defined as Comedy. The fact that this resolution is rather more cerebral than physical in no way alters this conclusion, although it may be found, after a full examination, that the aims achieved in Gunn's output varied from those he originally set himself.

There can be little doubt that the community depicted in chapter one is not a vibrant one; that it is suffering from a malaise, which is encapsulated in a mental attitude, a state of mind. In this sense, the community is sick, an observation which suggests a further avenue of enquiry which could aid an interpretation of the meta-novel. An examination in terms of Carl Gustav Jung's analytical psychology may prove helpful. Reference has already been made to archetypes and the collective unconscious, both major concepts of Jung, and his aims of self-realization seem to follow a similar pattern to Gunn's quest for enlightenment in the meta-novel, particularly as this concentrates on mental states and attitudes.

Chapter one can be regarded as a clinical report on the patient at the commencement of the treatment, the epicyclic journeys as probings back to discover causes and elicit information from the unconscious mind, analogous to seeking 'that which was lost', leading on to the cured patient in chapter five, exhibiting a changed and positive mental attitude.

In his introduction to *Man and his Symbols,* John Freeman says:

> The [. . .] point I wish to make is about a particular characteristic of argumentative method that is common to all the writers of this book - perhaps of all Jungians. Those who have limited themselves to living entirely in the world of the conscious and who reject communication with the unconscious bind themselves by the laws of conscious, formal life. With the infallible (but often meaningless) logic of the algebraic equation, they argue from assumed premises to incontestably deduced conclusions. Jung and his colleagues seem to me (whether they know it or not) to reject the limitations of this method of argument. It is not that they ignore

> logic, but they appear all the time to be arguing to the unconscious as well as to the conscious. Their dialectical method is itself symbolic and often devious. They convince not by means of the narrowly focused spotlight of the syllogism, but by skirting, by repetition, by presenting a recurring view of the same subject seen each time from a slightly different angle - until suddenly the reader who has never been aware of a single, conclusive moment of proof finds that he has unknowingly embraced and taken into himself some wider truth.[69]

Freeman's introduction has been quoted at some length as it seems to impact on Gunn's structure and themes at important points. The description of the recurrent approaches to the same subject with each one being made from a different angle seems to be such a close analogy to Gunn's epicyclic journeys that it is not hard to believe that, when he viewed his work in retrospect, he did so as if he were conducting an exercise in analytical psychology. Those who Freeman regards as dealing solely with the conscious seem to share those features that Gunn associates with the analytical mind, whereas Gunn's preferred intuitive response is in keeping with those who communicate with both the conscious and the unconscious.

These are three very different approaches: Zen, Comedy, and Jungian analytical psychology but all have something in common with Gunn's thought as evidenced by his retrospective. A detailed consideration of each of Gunn's chapters can now commence and, as the meta-novel is considered, these different disciplines can be borne in mind and drawn on as appropriate to aid interpretation.

---

[69]John Freeman, 'Introduction', to *Man and his Symbols*, ed. by Carl G. Jung, U.S.A. paperback edition (New York: Dell Publishing, 1968), p. x

SECTION ONE

The 'locality' of the Highlands as a state of mind

The contributory novels

Chapter one of Gunn's 'Book of the Highlands' is entitled 'The "Locality" of the Highlands as a State of Mind' and comprises the individual novels: *The Grey Coast, The Lost Glen* and *Second Sight*.[1] *The Grey Coast* and *The Lost Glen* were the first two novels Gunn wrote, despite the fact that *Morning Tide* was published between them.[2] According to Hart, the later *Second Sight*, was developed from a three-act play, written in 1938.[3]

The three novels allocated to this chapter were undoubtedly subjected to the greatest textual alteration. This may be pure coincidence but, equally, it could indicate the difficulties experienced by Gunn in the production of what he later perceived as being his 'base' novels.

Of *The Grey Coast,* W. R. Aitken notes:

> Only one novel displays textual variants, although the author made minor revisions in reprinting some of the stories from *Hidden Doors* (1929) in *The White Hour* (1950).[4] When his first novel, *The Grey Coast*, was reissued in April 1931 by The Porpoise Press, following the success of *Morning Tide* and some five years after its first publication by Jonathan Cape, the author carefully revised the text, making alterations throughout the book on more than one hundred and sixty of its three hundred and thirteen pages.[5]

---

[1]Neil M. Gunn, *The Grey Coast* (London: Cape, 1926)
Neil M. Gunn, *The Lost Glen* (Edinburgh: Porpoise, 1932).
Neil M. Gunn, *Second Sight* (London: Faber, 1940).

[2]Richard Price, *The Fabulous Matter of Fact: The Poetics of Neil M. Gunn* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), p. 18, states that:

> *The Poaching at Grianan* was probably the second novel Gunn wrote. Serialized over eight months in *The Scots Magazine*, from 1929 to mid -1930, it was actually written before *The Lost Glen*, which finished its serialization in the same magazine a few months beforehand.

However, as *The Poaching at Grianan* was never published in book form during Gunn's lifetime and as it does not feature in Gunn's retrospect, *The Grey Coast* and *The Lost Glen* can safely be regarded as the first two novels for the purposes of this thesis.

[3]Hart 'Neil Gunn's Drama of the Light', p. 93.

[4]Neil M. Gunn, *Hidden Doors* (Edinburgh: Porpoise, 1929).
Neil M. Gunn, *The White Hour* (London: Faber, 1950).

[5]W. R. Aitken, 'Neil M. Gunn: A Bibliography' in *Neil M. Gunn: The Man and the Writer*, ed. by Alexander Scott and Douglas Gifford, (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1973), p. 390.

The Lost Glen was written in 1926, shortly after *The Grey Coast* but was repeatedly rejected by publishers.[6] It was serialized in *The Scots Magazine* between April and November 1928 and did not appear in book form until 1932, when the Porpoise Press published it in the wake of the successful *Morning Tide*. At this point it is impossible to say what differences existed between the typescript first offered to publishers and the finally accepted text. It is possible to say, however, that important textual differences exist between the serialized version and the final published form, the most important being the addition of the whole of 'Part One' of the novel, comprising sixty-four pages. The effect of this addition is to heighten further the sense of bitterness in this, the darkest of all Gunn's novels, suggesting that Gunn had grown more, rather than less, despondent between 1926 and 1932.

The work which has exhibited the greatest textual transformation of all is *Second Sight.* According to Hart this was written in 1938 as a three-act play which was then shown to James Bridie who dissuaded Gunn from proceeding with it and, rather than waste the material, he turned it into a novel.[7] It is known that the play was offered, unsuccessfully, to the BBC in 1956 and an accompanying letter (11.1.1956) confirms Hart's assertion stating: 'I once wrote a play on second sight, and not knowing what to do with it I turned it into a novel'.[8] The surviving play typescript bears the address 'Kerrow House', a property occupied by Gunn between 1951 and 1959, and so the face sheet at least is contemporaneous with the approach to the BBC and, consequently, there must be some doubt as to whether this text is identical to that produced in 1938, a doubt further increased by a letter

[6]Hart and Pick, pp. 73 and 79.
[7]Hart, 'Neil Gunn's Drama of the Light', p. 93.
[8]Stokoe, p. 99.

to the BBC dated 13th April 1940 which states: 'The only other thing I have is a play based on my novel *Second Sight*, which has just been published'.[9] The wording here is ambiguous and could be read as suggesting that the novel came first although the weight of evidence favours Hart's interpretation. Assuming that the surviving typescript of the play is the same as the 1938 version, then, as with *The Lost Glen,* the final novel version of *Second Sight* is considerably bleaker than the original. Despite the later date of *Second Sight*, Richard Price in his study *The Fabulous Matter of Fact* perceptively states that:

> [It] would seem to have more in common with *The Poaching at Grianan* and *The Lost Glen* than with the novels immediately before or after it.[10]

As will be seen, in *Second Sight* Gunn used the stag, King Brude, to represent the unifying heart of the people. In the play the stag survives but in the novel it is shot, betrayed by the local gillies. Symbolically the heart has been torn from the community, aided and abetted by what Gunn sees as a self-destructive trait in the Celtic peoples. Once again this suggests that, between 1938 and 1940, Gunn found increasing cause for concern in the Highland situation.

The contributory novels to this chapter were selected retrospectively by Gunn to form the base from which his meta-novel would develop. As such, they not only illustrate the negative 'state of mind' of the Highland communities but also reflect the author's own mental state at the time of his physical return to the haunts of his boyhood, when he experienced at first hand the severity of the economic decline which had occurred during his absence, an experience which spurred him to embark seriously on a writing career.

---

[9]Unpublished letter from Gunn to Andrew Stewart.
[10]Price, p.83.

Locating chapter one in space and time

Although it may seem like stating the obvious for a 'Novel of the Highlands' it is none the less worth recording that Gunn's principal focus is on the Scottish Highlands and their peoples. The action of these three novels is firmly located in the Highlands, as is predominantly the case in the rest of Gunn's output.

A.C. O'Dell and K. Walton define the Highlands as occupying an area north of a line between Helensburgh and Aberdeen; a region split by the Great Glen into the Northern and Western Highlands and the Eastern Highlands.[11] However, within this region, anomalies exist, of which O'Dell and Walton state that:

> North of the Highland Line there are to be found not only mountains and glens, swift rivers and placid lochs, but also extensive lowland areas, thickly plastered with the glacial débris from the higher districts.[12]

Two major lowland groupings exist around Buchan and Banffshire in the East and Caithness in the North. Of these only Caithness is important for the purposes of this study, being both Gunn's birthplace and the setting of many of his novels, including at least one in this chapter.[13] Caithness has been described as the 'Lowlands beyond the Highlands'[14] but, in countering an accusation that 'Caithness [. . .] is not Highland at all but rather Norse', Gunn said:

> They [the Norse] were, however, few in numbers, were not of the soil they held, and in time the native folk of Caithness's hinterland, through their women, largely bred them out. That is not to say that Caithness folk are mostly Gaelic, any more than are *other* parts of the *Highlands*.[15]

---

[11] A.C. O'Dell, and K. Walton. *The Highlands & Islands of Scotland* (London: Nelson, 1962), p. 239.
[12] *Ibid.* p. 266.
[13] *The Grey Coast* is undoubtedly set in coastal Caithness. *The Lost Glen* seems, from internal evidence, to be set on the North coast of Scotland (Sutherland probably) whilst *Second Sight* is set in a deer forest within easy striking distance of Dingwall, which is visited by some of the characters.
[14] Donald Omand, ed., *The Caithness Book* (Inverness: Highland Printers, 1972), p. xv.
[15] Neil M. Gunn, 'Caithness and Sutherland' in *Scottish Country*, ed. by G. S. Moncrieff (Wishart Books Ltd., 1935), pp. 59 and 68 - *My emphasis*.

This clearly indicates that, in Gunn's mind, Caithness was an integral part of the Highlands despite its relative lack of high ground. For him the Northland - as described in 'The Outline', the introductory passage of *Sun Circle*, with its epicentre firmly over Dunbeath - and the Highlands were largely synonymous terms.[16] His friend and fellow author Maurice Walsh, to whom *The Lost Glen* is dedicated, based his character Alastair Munro, in *The Key Above the Door*, on Neil Gunn, a character he described as:

> a rascally Hielan'man from the borders of Caithness, and the pools of the Dunbeath River knew him but too well.[17]

Gunn clearly thought of himself as a Highlander and, for the purposes of this study, the Highlands will be regarded as being inclusive of Caithness at all times.

It is also worth considering the temporal location of the three novels allocated to this chapter. As the stage directions for the play version of *Second Sight* state: 'Time is to-day'.[18] Whilst, from a twenty-first century perspective, these novels have a distinctly historical flavour to them - it is a long time since seven shillings and fivepence (37p) could be regarded as a 'sound sum'[19] - Gunn was, nonetheless, addressing the state of the Highlands at around the time he wrote the book. Such depiction of the reality of contemporary Scotland was one of the aims of writers associated with the Scottish Renaissance who were 'utterly opposed to the sentimental dilutions of the Kailyard.'[20] Of Scottish prose writers at this time, Kurt Wittig wrote:

---

[16] *Sun Circle,* pp. 7 - 10.
[17] Maurice Walsh, *The Key Above the Door,* 3/6d edition (London: Chambers, 1928), p. 11. See also, Hart and Pick. p. 47.
[18] *Second Sight.* the three-act play (Unpublished: National Library of Scotland, Deposit 209), p. [2].
[19] *The Lost Glen,* p. 57.
[20] Watson, R. *The Literature of Scotland.* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), p. 326.

> Modern Scottish fiction [. . .] shows a new sense of responsibility, and the contrast with the nineteenth century is manifest. Then, the dominant attitude was one of escape into the vanished (and largely imaginary) Scotland of popular romance. Now, its eyes are open to contemporary life and social conditions. Not however as a backwash of international realism or naturalism: in the best representatives we shall find a style that is peculiarly Scottish and springs from the soil of the Scottish tradition.[21]

This is a view with which Gunn would have agreed. Of the Scottish Renaissance Movement he wrote:

> The Renascent Scot is - must be - intolerant of the Kailyarder, that is, of the parochial, sentimental, local-associative way of treating Scotland and the Scots. He wants to treat Scotland as rock and sea and land - a unique and wonderful rock and sea and land - and he wants to treat of Scotsmen as real projections of homo sapiens (rather than as kirk-elderish grannies), and he wants to complete his picture in a way that will not only make self-satisfied Scotsmen sit up but will make the cultured of the world take notice. [22]

This fiction can be expected to reflect the material realities of contemporary Scottish life, to be hard-hitting, if not shocking.[23] In these three novels this expectation is not disappointed and the economic and human realities Gunn encountered on his return to Caithness in 1922 are graphically depicted.

---

[21]Kurt Wittig, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* (Edinburgh: The Mercat Press, 1978), p. 323.
[22]Neil M. Gunn, 'The Scottish Literary Renaissance Movement', *Wick Mercantile Debating Society Magazine, Vol 1, No. 1,* April 1929, pp. 16 - 17.
[23]It was Grieve's view that Renaissance fiction should be Scotland-based. Speaking of Norman Douglas, F. W. Bain and Kenneth Grahame he said: 'They have not fought out their problems in their proper field (Scotland).' *Contemporary Scottish Studies: First Series,* p. 303.

Themes of chapter one

Since chapter one forms the base on which the meta-novel depends, it follows that its themes are central to the whole work: themes which will be examined, interpreted, debated and worked out as both the meta-novel and this thesis progress.

Gunn depicts an area in economic decline with the impoverished crofts of *The Grey Coast*, occupied by people like Auld Jeems, wringing only a bare subsistence from the tired and infertile land. He also records the demise of the once buoyant fishing industry within the space of a single generation:

> And the fishing, at one time the great industry of the coast, was dying, visibly dying before the eyes of a single generation. Even in Ivor's childhood every little creek or fault in that dark precipitous sea-wall had been a hive of pulsing life.[24]

In this novel, far from there being a hive of activity, only 'three boats, the last of their race in Balriach, rode the slight swell' in readiness for the West Coast fishing; decline indeed.[25] In both *The Lost Glen* and *Second Sight* the same impoverished crofting life is seen with, in the former, a precarious supplement in the form of inshore line fishing. Crofting alone could barely supply the wants of life and, in both novels, supplementary income was derived from acting as servants to incoming 'foreigners'. This took the form of domestic service and hotel work for the girls and acting as gillies for the men.

Despite their contemporaneity there is a strong sense of history in all three novels, demonstrating how the situation then current had been created by historical events. The history of the Highlands forms the subject of another chapter but it is worth noting that, in the novels under discussion here, the occupation of the

---

[24]*The Grey Coast,* p. 38.
[25]*Ibid.* p. 171.

inhospitable coastal land was forced upon the community as a direct result of the Clearances, and the harvesting of the sea, whilst providing a boom economy for a period, was an economic necessity to supplement the output of these poor crofts. Following the Clearances, clan lands were largely made over to sheep farming which proved to be less profitable than had at first been expected and large tracts were subsequently made over to deer forests catering for wealthy sportsmen who came north for the shooting. Further, control of these erstwhile clan lands had passed into the hands of outsiders: American estate owners in *The Lost Glen* and English lessees of the deer forests in *Second Sight*.[26]

Themes of national awareness, which can be expected of a Scottish Renaissance writer, are strongly in evidence. The reality of Highlanders living in subjugation to foreigners, principally English, is recorded, as Gunn had suggested, 'in a way that will not only make self-satisfied Scotsmen sit up but will make the cultured of the world take notice'.[27] This would suggest that his aspirations to, additionally, develop an English readership, and an English language readership (not to mention further readers for work in translation), were intentional. Although he belongs to the United Kingdom, in this clash of two cultures the Highlander is relegated to the position of the colonised. The picture of coloniser and colonised, with all the tensions which this implies, is particularly strong in *The Lost Glen.* Colonel Hicks is repeatedly depicted as having exchanged the India of the British Raj for the contemporary Scottish Highlands, whilst retaining the desire to subjugate as exemplified by the highly symbolic way in which he first decapitated a thistle and then took it apart branch by branch.[28] Of this attitude, Ewan comments:

---

[26]*The Lost Glen,* p. 282.
[27]'The Scottish Literary Renaissance Movement', pp. 16 - 17.
[28]*The Lost Glen.* p. 137, and *Second Sight*, pp. 9 and 209.

> What got him was the Colonel's power and assurance, the natural way he assumed mastery over what he called 'the natives'. Jean to him was like a dancing girl to a Sultan. [. . .] He has here what he was no doubt used to out East: he has command over folk.[29]

For Colonel Hicks, the Orient has been transplanted into the Scottish Highlands, with the natives becoming the 'Other' to the dominant English. The situation Gunn is recording here is similar to Edward Said's assessment:

> The argument [for colonial control], when reduced to its simplest form, was clear, it was precise, it was easy to grasp. There are Westerners, and there are Orientals. The former dominate; the latter must be dominated, which usually means having their land occupied, their internal affairs rigidly controlled, their blood and treasure put at the disposal of one or another Western power.[30]

In a Highland setting, factors which supported English supremacy over their Union partners include the power of money, the administrative structure and the law.

Although Scotland has retained a legal system distinct from that of England, some aspects, such as land tenure, tend to follow the English pattern. Changes in land tenure enabled the clan chieftains, who were previously merely *primus inter pares* occupying hereditary clan lands, to become the legal owners. This had, historically, made the Clearances possible through dealings in clan land, and Gunn shows the legacy of these transactions continuing to impact on twentieth-century communities. In *The Lost Glen*, the Ardbeg crofters, who laid claim to plots of what had previously been clan lands, fell foul of the law which protected the property rights of the successors in title to the lairds.

The administration is seen as being distant and out of touch with the realities which Gunn was seeking to place before his readers. In *The Grey Coast* he records

---

[29] *The Lost Glen*, pp. 98 - 99 and 105.
[30] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western conceptions of the orient* (1978) (London: Penguin, 1995), p.36.

that neither the Fishery Board, the proprietor, nor the County Council would lend support to the inshore fishing industry.[31] In *The Lost Glen* the tone is more accusatory. Ewan, after suggesting that an enlightened government might acquire land currently in private, mainly non-Scottish, hands and pursue a policy of integrated use to the benefit of the local population, turns his attention to the fishing and says:

> Not to mention the only industry we have, the inshore sea fishing, at present handed over by the Government to foreign trawlers.[32]

Of course finance affects all these aspects of life and it is here that the two cultures show their greatest divergence. Traditionally the crofting communities had been largely self sufficient, with trading between themselves being on a barter system; for example in *The Grey Coast* rabbit meat is exchanged for fish. So far as the life of Jeems's croft is concerned, money is only involved in the sale of rabbit skins for 5d, money which would no doubt be utilised for tobacco or possibly some item of clothing. By contrast, modest amounts of money by English standards enabled Colonel Hicks to live like a Sultan amongst the natives.

English supremacy is also seen in *Second Sight* where Highland gillies serve visiting sportsmen who vie with each other in their attempts to shoot the legendary stag 'King Brude'.[33] By making this stag bear the name of the king who unified the Picts, Gunn is symbolically making the herd, as current occupants of clan lands,

---

[31] *The Grey Coast,* p. 175.
[32] *The Lost Glen,* p. 285.
[33] J.D. Mackie, *A History of Scotland,* Second Edition (London: Penguin, 1978), p. 18 states:

> Bede says that they [the Picts] were divided into the Northern Picts, who lived beyond the great mountains, and the Southern Picts. Certainly Columba about 565 found a Pictish king in his fort near Inverness; but later the core of the Pictish monarchy was in Strathmore and Perthshire, and Scone eventually became their ceremonial centre. If indeed there were two separate kingdoms, the southern prevailed. Brude, son of Bile (672-93) brought all the Picts under his sway.

represent the Celtic people with 'King Brude' at its heart. In the novel, but not in the play, the stag is shot and thus the heart is torn from the herd by the English.

In *The Grey Coast*, perhaps surprisingly as it was the first novel, this tension between the Highlanders and the English is not so marked. The wielder of power here is a Scot, Donald Tait, owner of the substantial Tullach farm. Although Tait does not represent England directly, he is seen as being close to the administration. He lobbies for his own interests at the County Council and, because of the size of his operation, employs other 'natives' on a strictly financial basis.

A further potent weapon in support of the 'colonisation' of the Highlands is language. English had become the language of Government and education and the emergent generation were using the language exclusively. Gaelic, although depicted in these novels as having been the language of the ordinary folk and the language of inspiration, was dying. As will be seen when *Highland River* is discussed, the curriculum taught to Highland children was essentially English and, arguably, undermined the pupils' sense of the worth of their own culture, and even their sense of self. As a weapon of the coloniser the effects of this education were both insidious and effective. In a letter to Naomi Mitchison, Gunn records:

> I haven't the Gaelic — only a few remembered words, for my father had it, but then I happened to be of the generation for whom Gaelic was supposed to be a drawback in life. We laughed at it as outlandish. Oh the propaganda was very subtle. God, what crimes have been committed in the name of propaganda. But it's not so easy as all that as I could show . . . To disentangle values here is interesting, and then to translate those values into our age . . . might be exciting.[34]

[34]Naomi Mitchison, 'Living Around with Neil', in *Neil Gunn's Country.* ed. by Dairmid Gunn and Isobel Murray (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1991), p. 118 - quoting from an unpublished letter from Neil Gunn to her dated March 1941.

Later in the same essay Mitchison suggests that she had discussed with Gunn the Danish Folk High Schools, the brainchild of Bishop Nikolai Grundtvig.[35]

> The essence of Grundtvig's teachings was that only the spoken language, the 'living word', could capture the mind and the imagination of the people.[36]

Within these schools, in marked contrast to Highland education, the curriculum focused on 'Danish history, language, and literature, and Danish social conditions', and these subjects were taught in the vernacular.[37] Mitchison's essay suggests that Gunn felt that some of his projects had achieved less for Scotland than Grundtvig's had done for Denmark. However, if a similar venture had been set up for the benefit of the Highlands, the lessons would have had to be conducted in Gaelic, a venture in which Gunn could not participate.

Whether Gunn felt that his lack of Gaelic was detrimental to his aims is a matter for conjecture, but he clearly felt there was a latent self-destructiveness in the Celtic psyche, as is demonstrated in the contributory novels to this chapter. Pursuing the symbolism of 'King Brude' as 'the heart of the people' it is pertinent to note that the stag had 'headed out of the forest' but was turned back by the gillie, Alick.[38] Alick subsequently compounded his action by drawing the attention of his employer to the stag whilst stalking. As Geoffrey Smith's shot only wounded the animal it was left to Alick to follow and finally kill 'King Brude'; a very powerful commentary on the Gaels' predilection for self-destructiveness.[39] Any doubt about

---

[35]Mitchison. p. 125.
[36]Friidlev Skrubbeltrang, *The Danish Folk High Schools* (Copenhagen: Det Danske Selskab, 1947), p. 11.
[37]*Ibid.* p. 12.
[38]*Second Sight.* p. 75.
[39]*Ibid.* pp. 260 - 269.

the symbolism involved is dispelled by Alick's comment to his fellow gillie Angus: 'I feel like a bloody Judas'.[40]

Similarly, in *The Lost Glen*, Ewan finally stands up to Colonel Hicks and strangles him. He is afterwards left with little alternative but to take his own life and he sets out in his boat into a storm similar to the one that killed his father. Ewan's death leaves his mother and two sisters, one expecting an illegitimate child, with no breadwinner; a Pyrrhic victory indeed.

Both the subjugation of the Gael by the English and this self-destructiveness involve violence, violence often depicted in sexual terms. In two of these novels this theme is underlined by the depiction of attempted rape - Donald Tait's attack on Maggie in *The Grey Coast* and Colonel Hicks' attempt on Mary in *The Lost Glen*. Both cases involve attacks on the 'natives' by the powerful who perceived the act as an exercise of prerogative, an attitude, in the first instance, encouraged by Jeems. As he was *in loco parentis* this is another case of self-destructiveness.

As Gunn's biographers have pointed out, Gunn had a love/hate relationship with the works of Fiona Macleod and the 'Celtic Twilight'.[41] This was apparent in the short story 'Half Light' and is strongly in evidence in these novels. In *The Grey Coast,* Fiona Macleod and Yeats are spoken of by the schoolmaster, Moffat, in conversation with Ivor who, at that time, remains non-commital, although later, in Lewis, it is the Gaelic song *Lennan mo chridhe* (the one of my heart) which triggers the 'Atom of Delight' that leads him to an intuitive understanding of his feelings towards Maggie and prompts his return to Balriach.[42] In the serialized version of *The Lost Glen* specific reference is again made to Macleod and Yeats

---

[40]*Ibid.* p. 284.
[41]Hart and Pick, p. 74. Fiona Macleod was the pseudonym of William Sharp.
[42]*The Grey Coast,* pp. 301 - 303.

although the novel version does not name the authors. In the novel Clare quotes from Fiona Macleod and chooses the poem *Mo-Lennav-A-Chree*, surely a close relative to the song which so affected Ivor?[43] The works of Fiona Macleod portray the sense of 'feyness' which is often associated with the Celtic mind, a sense of doom, of being fated. This faculty is most strongly reflected in the phenomenon of second sight which has its fullest depiction in the novel of the same name but also appears in *The Lost Glen* where Ewan foresees his own death by drowning.

If this intuitive tendency was to be seen as a facet of the Celtic mind, it would be tempting to see the clash between the analytical mind and the intuitive mind dividing along national or racial lines. Gunn, perhaps predictably, given his own analytical capability, makes it clear that this is not the case. Instead he uses the very different mental attitudes of two English sportsmen as representatives of the analytical and intuitive minds. Geoffrey Smith, representing the former, demanded incontrovertible evidence as a prerequisite of belief whereas Harry Kingsley had a more open mind and accepted intuitively that the gillie Alick had experienced a vision of a funeral *cortège* which he had not been able to see himself. It is clear where Gunn's convictions lay as, when the plot climax is reached, it is the analytical mind that proves to be self-destructive.

The phenomenon of second sight is further debated after dinner when the shooting party meet at the neighbouring Screesval Lodge. Gunn seeks to make a 'scientific' case for the existence of second sight by having his character Colonel Brown cite the work of J. W. Dunne.[44] Dunne had developed a theory, prompted by his own experience of dreams, which was summarised in 1997 by V. Flieger thus:

---

[43] *The Lost Glen,* pp. 174 - 175.
Fiona Macleod, *Poems and Dramas* (London: Heinemann, 1923), pp. 34 - 35.
[44] J. W. Dunne, *An Experiment with Time* (London: A. and C. Black, 1927).

> Our primary awareness of time [. . .] is bounded by our immediate field of observation. This Dunne calls Field 1, or Time 1. But if we think of ourselves observing that field, we are in a sense outside it, observing our observation. It follows from this that the second observing consciousness, since it encloses the first, must experience a larger field of awareness, thus a larger span of time.[45]

Whether or not this argument convinces is perhaps of lesser import than the real tragedy of the novel which is not the enactment of the death and funeral *cortège* previously 'seen' by Alick but the departure of Alick and Mairi from the Highlands as a result. As Alick says:

> They'll never be able to look at me without remembering [. . .] Pity, for I like this country well enough. It's good enough for me — perhaps because it is my own country.[46]

The Highlander's attachment to his own geographical space, which is reflected in this comment, is seen in *The Grey Coast* in the return of Jeems to his own land after a life at sea, and is also seen in *The Lost Glen*. Ewan draws a clear distinction between the feelings of the native Highlander and the incomers when he says:

> Love, marriage, death - roving, it did not matter *where* to them [the Colonel and Clare]. But love and marriage here to the young and death to the old mattered profoundly because it was the right place. True environment gives to a man's actions an eternal significance. A native's natural movement is part of land and sea and sky; it has in it the history of his race; it is authentic.[47]

This distinction may well be the result of Empire where the English have felt 'at home' in all the places they ruled throughout the world but, having raised the importance of place and the issue of depopulation, it is time to look at the last of the major themes introduced in this chapter, namely the Highlander who goes away and then returns.

---

[45]V. Flieger, *A Question of Time: J. R. R. Tolkien's Road to Faërie* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1997), p. 41.
[46]*Second Sight.* p. 326.
[47]*The Lost Glen,* p. 341.

The 'Man Who Came Back'

Despite the attachment felt by Highlanders for their native land, they have often been forced by economic necessity to emigrate or else move to the main centres of population. In this they have been supported and actively encouraged by family who wish to see their children succeed. Should the emotional desire to return triumph, Gunn suggests that this will be considered a failure and will be stigmatized.

Pick gives a biographical connotation to Gunn's prevalent motif of 'The Man Who Came Back' which he also equates with failure. In the essay he contributed to *Neil Gunn's Country* he comments, speaking of Gunn:

> Story after story reveals his fear of returning home 'a failure', rejected and unable to establish himself in the world outside.[48]

The concept of 'The Man Who Came Back' appeared overtly for the first time in a short story of the same name, subtitled 'Study for a One Act Play', printed in *The Scots Magazine* of March 1928. In this the principal protagonist, Iain Cattanach, having been sent away for education and to learn law, decides not to continue and returns home. There he is regarded as a failure by his father and ultimately leaves again saying, 'when you found that what you came back for, what you were hungry for, was - was . . . and you went away for the second time . . . then you would never come back, *cha till e tuille*, nevermore.'[49] This 'failure' is, of course, a failure to capitalize on the sacrifices made by the parents for their child. They had saved to purchase him an education which could lead to betterment, betterment that did not equate with a return to his native land - a similar motivation to that of Gunn's parents and their encouragement of English. Clearly such an attitude was prevalent

---

[48] J. B. Pick, 'Neil Gunn and the Eternal Landscape', in *Neil Gunn's Country* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1991), p. 51.
[49] 'The Man Who Came Back', p. 172.

in Gunn's time, and equally clearly Gunn wished to draw attention to it, but whether he personally felt rejected as a 'failure' seems less certain. When he finally returned to the Highlands as a fully trained civil servant, carrying out enquiries into pensions, it seems more likely that his mother would have considered he had made something of himself.

In the three novels comprising this chapter this motif is exemplified most obviously in *The Lost Glen.* Here Ewan's return is undoubtedly regarded as a failure by his parents with even more tragic results than had been seen in 'The Man Who Came Back'. However, as in the (marginally) earlier work, Ewan, having been made to feel unwelcome and an outcast, planned to leave again, for ever, but is pre-empted by his father's drowning.

This communal rejection of the returning man incorporates an element of the self-destructiveness noted earlier, because what Gunn does do, time and time again, is show that there are crucial benefits to the community in sending their children away for education or training and then have them return to the fold, bringing their new-found skills with them.

Cultural regeneration was a principal objective of the Scottish Renaissance Movement and, like Yeats, Gunn used Celtic mythology symbolically in his work. One of the most potent of these symbols is that of the salmon, the 'Salmon of Wisdom'. This features in a number of the novels and, relating the myth to real life, what must be remembered is that salmon are spawned in the Highlands and then leave their native rivers to go to sea where they mature. They then feel an irresistible urge to return, as mature fish, to mate and spawn in their turn. The returning salmon, however, is not identical to the one which left, having grown in stature and knowledge in the meantime, but its return brings regeneration and

rebirth. The same process should, Gunn argues, be in evidence in the human community. Examples of this motif will be noted as this study progresses, and as the meta-novel makes its own journey of regeneration. However, as John Burns notes:

> Even in those other dark, early novels [*The Grey Coast* and *The Lost Glen*] there are gleams of light: gleams of light that Gunn would gradually develop into a subtle and marvellous art.[50]

It is certainly true that there are 'gleams of light' in these early novels and these are often linked to the twin themes of 'The Man Who Came Back' and the importance of the intuitive rather than the analytical mind. In *The Grey Coast* the positive ending depends upon two men who have come back, Auld Jeems and Ivor Cormack. Ivor, who had gone away for the fishing and who had intended to stay away to make his fortune, felt compelled by an intuitive experience to return to his native area even if, like Iain Cattanach, he expects this to be temporary. Auld Jeems, it will be remembered, has already gone through a similar exercise and has returned from the sea with a 'nest egg' which still contained £371. On Jeems's death, his croft and money pass to Maggie and, together, these will enable her and Ivor to make a living without leaving the area. Although the reader is aware of Jeems's painfully executed will and its provisions, Maggie and Ivor were not and their life-affirming embrace at the end of the book is a triumph of love and of the intuitive over the analytical mind.

On the other hand, there is little to lighten *The Lost Glen* apart from the attachment of people to place. In the case of Ewan, no practical use has been made of the learning which he has acquired and he makes no effort to effect change within the community. He merely accepts the *status quo* whilst remaining angry

[50]Burns, p. 1.

and bitter. There is, however, in Ewan's argument with Fachie, just a hint of what might have been.[51] Whilst this is a rather pointless exercise, demonstrating the analytical mind in all its destructive glory, it does show that Ewan, thanks to his education away from home, has the ability to think clearly and argue cogently; had this been put to more positive use, great benefits might have ensued.

Second Sight does not have a returning native and, again, contains little which could be regarded as positive, showing the native Highlander in thrall to the wealthy outsiders who have made the Highlands a private playground. It also contains lessons about the destructiveness of the analytical mind and, by contrast, recommends the intuitive. This is especially true of characters under the influence of love, as evidenced by the relationship between Mairi and Alick here, and Ivor and Maggie in *The Grey Coast*. Although Mairi is unable to understand second sight, and Alick's 'gift' frightens her, she nonetheless is prepared to accompany him when he feels obliged to leave.

These novels also recount some positive attributes which affect the incomers, chief amongst which is the restorative power of the landscape itself. Clare Marlowe has gone to stay in the Highlands as the guest of Colonel Hicks because she is convalescing.[52] Whilst it is true to say that she sees only the beauty of the landscape and not the underlying, and unrelenting, hard labour it demands, she nonetheless draws recuperative powers from it, a theme which Gunn returns to more comprehensively in *The Shadow*.

Having considered the novels which form chapter one, and looked at the themes which permeate them, it is time to consider how these inter-relate with the title Gunn allocated.

---

[51] *The Lost Glen,* pp. 282 - 288.
[52] *Ibid.* pp. 77 and 84.

Relating the themes to the title

The chapter title, 'The "locality" of the Highlands as a state of mind', directly associates the physical Highlands with a 'state of mind', one seen as predominantly negative. Repeatedly Gunn highlights Highlanders brought low by economic hardship and lack of opportunity; a people who have lost their traditional way of life, and even some of the newer industries like fishing, and who are reduced to such a pitch that they need to supplement their crofting output by recourse to secondary occupations, there being insufficient croft land available for them to be self sufficient. In *The Grey Coast* this additional income comes, in a small way, from poaching but in *The Lost Glen* and *Second Sight* the supplement comes from acting as maids and gillies to the incoming sportsmen, and from tips, activities which accentuate the subordinate position of the local population. The grinding poverty, the unrelenting toil and the lack of meaningful opportunities all combine to create a defeatist state of mind not unlike the gloom-laden 'Celtic Twilight'. These issues, coupled with the continuing depopulation of the Highlands as the young and active leave, often with the positive encouragement of the older generation, are shown as having caused an almost terminal decline.

These novels were written between 1926 and 1938 and show Gunn's concerns about the prevailing conditions. In a 1937 article, '"Gentlemen - The Tourist!": The New Highland Toast',[53] Gunn reiterates the points he has been making in these three contributory novels, so confirming that his own assessment of the contemporary situation remained bleak and that the later *Second Sight* was not unrepresentative despite the appearance of more optimistic novels in the interim. He argued that tourism would do little to benefit the Highlands in real terms and

[53]Neil M. Gunn, '"Gentlemen - The Tourist": The New Highland Toast' , *Scots Magazine*, Vol. 26, No. 6, March 1937, pp. 410 - 415.

that the introduction of industry in the form of hydro-electric power, a cause he would champion for many years, would create more lasting benefit.

However, the 'state of mind' of the title does not restrict itself to that of the Highlanders only, even if it is clear that they are Gunn's principal concern. In the attitude of the incomers is seen, to a large degree, the other side of the same coin. They represent the controlling power Said spoke of, power associated with ownership, money, and with England and its language. Their state of mind is that of the coloniser, encapsulating a, possibly unconscious, conviction of superiority over the indigenous population, the natives, the colonised. Even Clare Marlowe and Harry Kingsley, who are depicted as being sympathetic to the Highlander and his traditions, are outsiders to the reality of his living conditions. They retain the mind-set of their country and class and are unable to see the land through the same eyes as the locals. As previously noted, they are at home anywhere, confident in their right to rule and their inherent superiority, even if they are not as arrogant as Colonel Hicks and Geoffrey Smith.

But Gunn, in his title, suggests that these attitudes of mind are directly linked to the 'locality' of the Highlands, and his setting of the word within inverted commas suggests a wider range of meaning than just geographical position, although geography does play a part. The area occupies the most northerly part of mainland Britain, is the closest part of mainland Britain to the Arctic circle, and consequently is subject to greater extremes of climate than further south. This, in itself, would make the task of subsistence farming harder than elsewhere within Britain. However, as has been seen, the situation, and therefore the attitude of mind, is aggravated by historical factors which have condemned the population to occupation of the poorest agricultural land as the, largely absentee, landlords made

over the more productive land to sheep. Those of the indigenous population who did not either die or emigrate were left with marginal land and a need to develop secondary occupations. Whilst this situation is not restricted to Scotland alone - there are parallels with the Irish experience for example - the combination of 'English' land laws and the attendance of clan chiefs at the seat of government made the disestablishment of a rural peasant population speaking an incomprehensible and 'backward' tongue considerably easier.

The remoteness from government - parts of Norway are closer than London - also means that there is less direct knowledge of local problems with a consequent dilution of the will to address these issues. The decline of the fishing, to the benefit of foreign powers, and the state of the roads, which are referred to in *The Grey Coast*, are cases in point.

Reference has just been made to the predominant language of the native Highlander and it would be true to say that the 'locality' of the Highlands, along with the Western Isles, was home to the principal remnants of the Gaelic-speaking Celt in Gunn's time. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the local population should be steeped in Celtic traditions and culture, and exhibit the mental attitude of their race. There is a strong thread of pathos which runs through these traditions, a factor which was evident from the description of the *ceilidh* in *The Lost Glen.*[54] Of course, many of the Highlanders' traditions and myths are shared with their fellow Celts in Ireland but, unlike Ireland which is strongly Roman Catholic, Calvinism has a strong hold on the Highlands. Later sections will explore how this life-denying sect has contributed to the creation of the negative mind-set of Gunn's contemporary Highlander.

---

[54]*The Lost Glen.* pp. 209 - 222.

The opening up of the Highlands to sportsmen and tourists, coupled with the crofter's need to supplement income, has accentuated their feelings of subservience. By contrast, the incomers, faced with a servile and poverty-stricken population, are encouraged thereby in their feelings of superiority. With the strangeness and grandeur of the landscape, coupled with this quasi-colonial position of power which can be exercised without fear of losing caste, it is not surprising that the Highlands appeared to them as exotic, the Orient in their own backyard, giving rise to the state of mind exhibited by these characters.[55] The ingrained courtesy and hospitality of the Highlander is also a trait which is used by the incomers to support their own dominant position. One example of this is the unhesitating way Colonel Hicks sought refuge from the rain in Colin McKinnon's cottage and effectively invited himself to a drink.[56]

The combination of influences, as described above, which have shaped the contemporary Highlands also provide the direct causation of the negative 'state of mind' Gunn describes. As Scots who have emigrated have tended to thrive, these negative impulses cannot be attributed solely to the Celtic psyche. Rather it is the predilection of the Highlander to remain in his native land, and to be subject to these influences, that has militated against him. The task of the meta-novel as it builds on this base is to show how this 'state of mind' can be changed whether by making changes to the Highlands as a locality, which must be regarded as a political enterprise, or by changes to the prevailing state of mind, or both.

---

[55]*The Lost Glen.* p. 105.
[56]*Ibid.* pp. 132 - 133.

Re-appraisal

The contributory novels appear to have been selected by Gunn for this introductory chapter for two reasons. Firstly, they are all set in the Highlands of his own time and could, as a result, be used as a vehicle for highlighting the plight of his homeland to a wide audience. As he wrote in English, this audience would potentially embrace both his fellow Highlanders, and the incomers who exercised power over them as well as a broad readership who would have no vested interest but be caught up by the pathos of the circumstances and the moral tensions of the stories. Secondly, they are all dark works which can be seen as realistic illustrations of the difficulties experienced by the Highlander rather than romanticized depictions, as had been the case with the Kailyard school.

Two of the three novels allocated to this chapter have been shown to be the earliest, in terms of writing, of all the published novels. It has been noted that the shock of returning to his homeland after the lapse of eighteen years, and seeing the dramatic decline that had occurred, had been one of the *stimuli* for Gunn to embark on a writing career. It is not surprising, therefore, that these should be amongst the darkest of his works. As Richard Price noted, *Second Sight* shares the darkness of the earlier two novels and, as such, forms a suitable third novel for this chapter. What is surprising, however, is the fact that, even allowing for the fact that *Second Sight* may have been adapted from a three-act play, its publication was more than ten years later than *The Lost Glen*. During the intervening years, several other novels appeared that did not exhibit the same sense of darkness and despair. This suggests that either the work appeared in some form at a much earlier time than was currently thought, and that it owes its gestation to the same period as the other

two novels, or that something happened around the time the book was written that caused Gunn to become disheartened. The latter seems the most probable.

It is certainly possible that the perceived shift in Gunn's thinking away from a direct political answer to the needs of the community occurred during war time, and in the years immediately prior to its outbreak. In *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* (1944), Gunn examines the horrors of the totalitarian state, and makes a case for the primacy of the individual over the needs of the state. In *Wild Geese Overhead* (1939), Gunn's hero argues that the individual is more important than the needs of the party. His opponent in these arguments is sensitively drawn and is clearly motivated by altruistic principles. As a result, Gunn's case is partially undermined, even though the positioning of these novels within the meta-novel leaves no doubt as to what policy Gunn favoured. These matters will be discussed in more detail at the appropriate point in the thesis but, as a hypothesis, it can be suggested that the catalyst for the shift in Gunn's thinking may have been the reports of the brainwashing techniques that feature at the beginning of *The Green Isle of the Great Deep.* That novel shows how the ruling ideologies are driven by the analytical mind and it is, perhaps, no coincidence that *Second Sight*, which was written at the same period, introduced the conflict between the intuitive and analytical mind. By moving this novel into the first chapter of his meta-novel, Gunn seems to be emphasising this conflict, and suggesting that it contributes to the negative state of mind in evidence.

The positive endings that Gunn gives to many of his novels have received criticism for being unrealistic or flawed. As will be seen as the thesis progresses, in many cases the message of the 'happy ending' in these novels, technically flawed though they may be, is vital to advancing the argument of the meta-novel. By

contrast, in the meta-novel, Gunn seems to need to play down the fact that, in *The Grey Coast* he again has a positive ending. In this he must be adjudged to be successful as commentators tend to agree that this is a realistic novel, truthfully setting out the problems of the Highlander in the early twentieth century. Yet, at the end of the novel, as has been seen, Ivor and Maggie come together in a life-affirming embrace, despite being unaware that financial security has been achieved through Jeems' death. This is an intuitive response; the corollary being that, had their decision been taken on a rational level, it would have been very different. Assuming that most people do take a rational approach to their problems, it can be seen why Gunn may have considered that the analytical aspect was dominant in the prevalent state of mind and that the dominance of the 'analytical' in the 'state of mind' that was the locality of the Highlands, was, at this time, overwhelmingly destructive. The effort of the meta-novel, therefore, would be to chart a way out from such a storm of mental destructiveness, a way to follow those 'gleams of light'.

SECTION TWO

PART ONE

The wisdom of boyhood

The contributory novels

Gunn's second chapter comprises two parts entitled respectively 'The wisdom of boyhood' and 'The Biographical extension' which, together, begin the developmental phase of the meta-novel. These will be considered separately and in turn.

As with Gunn's first chapter, part one has three novels allocated to it drawn from his early and middle periods. These are *Morning Tide* (1931), *Highland River* (1937) and *Young Art and Old Hector* (1942). There are no surprises in this selection, as these novels contain Gunn's principal evocations of Highland boyhood.

Morning Tide was the novel that established Gunn as a major novelist. It was selected as the Book Society's 'Book of the Month' for January 1931, with publication delayed until then to accommodate an extended print run.[1] Financially the novel was a success and Gunn's royalties proved sufficient to pay off the mortgage on *Larachan*, the house built for him in Inverness in 1926.[2] *Highland River* was another highly successful novel, winning the 1937 James Tait Black Memorial Prize for fiction. Following this, Gunn resigned from the Civil Service to become a full-time writer, a major decision. *Larachan* was sold and the Gunns moved to *Braefarm House* where much of his best work was written.

Although parts of *Highland River* are set in Glasgow and on the battlefields of the First World War, these relate to the hero as adult. Boyhood experience in all three novels is specifically Highland. *Morning Tide* and *Highland River* are centred on Dunbeath, whilst *Young Art and Old Hector* appears to be set on the west coast.[3]

The inclusion of *Highland River* so early in the plot structure of the meta-novel is

---

[1]Publication was planned for 1930 (and a few books show that date) but was amended in the press to allow for a larger print run following the novel's selection as 'The Book Society' choice for January 1931 - See, C. J. L. Stokoe, *A Bibliography of the Works of Neil M. Gunn* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), pp. 25 - 26

[2]Hart and Pick, p. 63.

[3]*Young Art and Old Hector*, p. 229. In 'The Little Red Cow', a cattleman, speaking of the cow states it was 'from the West'.

significant for a number of reasons. It tells the story of Kenn, his childhood and early education, his growing up and departure in the interests of 'getting on', his service in the First World War, and his later return as a successful and educated adult to be confronted by the economic decline described in Gunn's first chapter. He sees that 'the old home is now occupied by strangers. He looked at it over his shoulder. Already he had seen the harbour deserted of fishing craft.'[4] Following this return, the adult Kenn makes a pilgrimage to the source of his boyhood river, a journey of greater significance than the purely geographic. John Burns states:

> Due to the close relationship between man and environment in this community, Kenn's setting out to discover the source of the river is also a quest to discover the source of his own identity, and that of the community which shaped him.[5]

This novel is undoubtedly one of Gunn's finest. With its broad canvas, and the above-mentioned quest for enlightenment within community, it reflects and reinforces the aims of the meta-novel itself and comes the closest of any individual novel to expressing the search for light and self-knowledge with which it is concerned. In comparative terms it can be seen to have parallels with the Jungian achievement of a balanced, healthy, psyche, as well as the quest for Zen enlightenment.

Apart from the comments about economic decline, *Highland River* serves to reinforce the themes of Gunn's first chapter by giving a *resumé* of the historical influences identified as having contributed to the contemporary problems of the Highlands. This is couched in similar terms to 'The Outline'[6] but limits its focus to the Highlands, suggesting that Gunn's concern for the Northland and its people takes precedence over his concern for Scotland as a whole. Coming at this point in the

---

[4]*Highland River*. p. 317
[5]Burns, p. 39
[6]*Highland River*, pp. 150 - 151. 'The Outline' is the introductory passage to *Sun Circle* but, by placing *Highland River* before *Sun Circle* within the structure of the meta-novel this passage, whilst written and published later, ceases to be a restatement.

overall structure of the meta-novel, this *resumé* also acts as an introduction to the more detailed assessment of Highland history contained in Gunn's third chapter. This novel also makes a first reference to the tensions between rural and urban, a subject Gunn examines in the greatest detail in his fourth chapter.[7] As *Highland River* reflects the meta-novel's overall aims, it is of pivotal importance within the overall plot structure, which it also serves to strengthen. Placing this key work, which could plausibly have been located elsewhere within the meta-novel's chapter framework, in this part of the second chapter emphasises the crucial importance of its subject matter, that of boyhood /childhood within Gunn's overall schema.

According to Hart and Pick, following the launch of *The Silver Darlings* in April 1941, Gunn was invited by the editor of *Chambers's Journal* to write some stories for them and to that happy accident can be ascribed the genesis of *Young Art and Old Hector.*[8] This series was supplemented by a further one in *The Scots Magazine*, where nine stories were published between February 1941 and March 1942. Both series, along with eight new episodes, form the published novel. However, two anomalies exist. Firstly, the story entitled 'The Little Red Cow' was published in *The Scots Magazine* in February 1941 prior to the publication of *The Silver Darlings*, and the subsequent meeting with the editor of *Chambers's Journal*. The story features neither Art nor Hector and needed further stories to pave the way for its appearance in the novel. Secondly, all the previously published stories retained their original titles in the novel except 'The Birdbeast and the Twelve Puppies' which was re-titled 'Machinery'. As with some other stories in *Young Art and Old Hector*, 'Machinery' incorporates a traditional fable. This one, 'The Girl and the Dead Man', recounted by old Martha at a *ceilidh* in a watermill, includes references to the mythological beasts 'The Birdbeast and the Twelve Puppies', from which the story took its original title.

---

[7]*Highland River,* p. 166
[8]Hart and Pick, p. 183.

Art 'was afraid to go to the mill and therefore wanted to go desperately'.[9] He is both afraid, and in awe, of the mill machinery, the subject matter of two pieces of narrative flanking the central story. In changing the title, Gunn shifts the emphasis from the traditional story to the machinery which, as a result, is imbued with greater import. Within the world portrayed in this novel the watermill contains the only real machinery known to the rural community which, in itself, would have created the sense of awe that Art felt; however, as the mill-race was a potential hazard, there is evidence within the story that young children were deliberately discouraged from going near.[10] There is also a hint that the mill may have played some part in the production of illicit whisky as, when the boys joined the *ceilidh*, the adults were discussing their treatment of one of the gaugers who had failed to discover anything connected with their still and, at the end of the story, as Martha leaves she pronounces 'My blessing on you, and on this mill, and may its best doings be ever hid from the eye of destruction'.[11] If this conjecture is correct it provides a further, potent, reason for dissuading the young from visiting.

A striking image in Gunn's retitled story describes the the eponymous machinery in these terms:

> For there was a thing in the mill called machinery and it went round and round, with teeth on the edges of its wheels, and though one wheel was standing up and the next one lying down, their teeth would bite into one another like Art's own teeth, and woe and betide anything that came between them then. Donul had said they would bite your whole hand off and hardly notice it; your whole hand, right off. And if the iron teeth caught your sleeve they would 'drag you in'.[12]

This imagery seems totally alien to this rural community, and the propensity for dragging people in perhaps has its parallel in that more usual home of machinery, the

---

[9] *Young Art and Old Hector*, p. 42.
[10] *Ibid.* p. 43.
[11] *Ibid.* p.48.
[12] *Ibid.* p. 42.

city, which is the focus of 'The Little Red Cow', the early story Gunn clearly sought to include. This concerns Donul (now known to be Art's brother) taking a Highland cow to market in a Lowland city. To pave the way for this story's inclusion, new material had to be written which concerned Donul leaving home to take up employment in town as a stockman. So far as Art is concerned there is once again a sense of menace described in similar terms to those of the personified machinery:

> The path Donul had gone over the moor became the path of the man from the outside world. The path not only went away to the outside world, it also came in from the outside world. And as Art lay, unable to sleep, with no Donul beside him any more, the path changed into a long, dark, menacing arm.[13]

There is here the same sense of being dragged in as was seen in 'Machinery'. 'The Little Red Cow' shows Donul, well liked and respected in his circle and a source of pride to his younger brother, feeling very strange in his new environment. It is not just that he is now a small fish in a large pond but rather that he is operating in an alien community with different, and largely financial, standards, more worldly wisdom, all expressed in a different language. Whilst being treated kindly, even if he has his leg pulled, he is perceived as being something of a country bumpkin. The little cow, used also to a different language, mirrors Donul's emotions exactly. It wants to go home, as does Donul, but as he contemplates releasing her:

> Suddenly in an involuntary but clear vision, he saw the cow nearing home, stumbling a little on her weak legs because she was now in such a hurry, mooing softly through her nostrils, her wild eyes shining, a slaver at her mouth.
> His body was trembling, his forehead cold. Those on the croft did not want the cow back. They needed the money. Dismay stood in their staring faces.[14]

This passage re-introduces the issue of a monetary economy and also, on the

---

[13] *Young Art and Old Hector.* p. 227.
[14] *Ibid.* p. 235.

assumption that there is a parallel between the cow and Donul, the psychological pressure brought to bear on favoured sons, to stay away for their own benefit rather than return to their native land, an issue which will be returned to in greater detail in the second part of Gunn's chapter two. In speculating on Gunn's motivation for the inclusion of this story, it seems probable that he was inviting a consideration of how to handle the relationship between the town and the country, a relationship which may be difficult but does incorporate potential benefit to both parties. This has already been noted as being referred to within *Highland River* and, as the themes of this chapter, especially the second part, are considered this aspect will be revisited.

Before leaving a consideration of *Young Art and Old Hector* it is worth recording that, in Gunn's placement of his works within the meta-novel's chapter structure, this novel has been separated from *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* which, as the reference work *Sequels* affirms, is its direct sequel.[15] Much has been written about Gunn's motivation in writing the latter novel; Hart and Pick suggesting that the idea developed in 1943 possibly in response to Mitchison's accusations that *Young Art and Old Hector* was overly sentimental. Although Hart and Pick support this view, Gunn, perhaps to deflate Mitchison, claimed to have been prompted by Walsh.[16] However, although the detail of the plot may have been worked out in 1943, internal evidence suggests that Gunn had been planning a sequel to *Young Art and Old Hector* while that novel was being written. Towards the end of the book Gunn writes:

> Now between these two worlds [his own and the one beyond] the boundary line was a circle vague as what lay beyond the horizon - except in one place, and that place was the River. Many times Art had tried to reach this River, but he had never succeeded, yet so much had

[15]Frank M. Gardner, compiler, *Sequels*, Fifth edition (London: Assoc. of Assistant Librarians, 1967) p. 95. This publication lists *Young Art and Old Hector* and *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* as Gunn's only linked novels, a misconception which this thesis seeks to redress.
[16]Hart and Pick, pp. 194 - 195.

> he thought about it that it ran clearly through his own mind. It had indeed the clearness of a stream in a story, but with more body to it. A brightness was on its dark waters, and the ground that bordered it was green. Hazel trees hung over it where it formed the Hazel Pool. There were rocky points, and smooth still sweeps, and rushing shallows up which the salmon flashed, knocking spindrift off their bows - to rest in the quiet of the Hazel Pool. Once Old Hector had talked at a ceilidh about 'The Green Isle of the Great Deep', and though that paradisaical [*sic*] isle had haunted Art for a time, it was readily drowned in the flow of the River.[17]

This quotation, linked to Hector's comment that the planned expedition to the river could be his last, suggests that a sequel was already in Gunn's mind.[18] Not only does it contain a reference to 'The Green Isle of the Great Deep', which became the title of the sequel, but it also describes the point of entry, the Hazel Pool, in terms of drowning.

More important than a consideration of the genesis of these particular novels is the fact that commentators and critics have consistently seen them as a pair. McCulloch states: 'Although these books are satisfactory separate entities, their philosophical depths are most fully plumbed when they are read in relation to each other';[19] Richard Price deals with the two books, along with *The Serpent*, under the heading 'The War at Home: Innocence and Experience';[20] whilst Douglas Gifford, in his essay in *Neil Gunn's Country*, refers to them as forming an 'epic duality'.[21] Even Burns, whose study does not draw on these novels specifically, sees them, jointly, as recounting a master/pupil relationship.[22] Without necessarily invalidating the conclusions the above commentators have arrived at in their respective studies it can now be asserted that, retrospectively, Gunn saw the two novels as fulfilling different functions, and

---

[17] *Young Art and Old Hector,* p. 219.
[18] *Ibid.* p. 249.
[19] Margery McCulloch, *The Novels of Neil M. Gunn: a critical survey* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987) p. [97].
[20] Price, pp. [103] - 133.
[21] Douglas Gifford, 'Neil Gunn and the Mythic Regeneration of Scotland: The two great epic cycles', in *Neil Gunn's Country*, ed. by Dairmid Gunn and Isobel Murray (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1991), pp. 75 - 111.
[22] Burns, p. 150.

illustrating different aspects of Highland life, within his meta-novel. The special contribution of each to the overall meta-novel will be discussed at the appropriate stage of the thesis but, as an over-simplification, it is fair to say that *Young Art and Old Hector* in this part of chapter two is concerned with the nature of wisdom, especially that of boyhood, and its acquisition, whereas in *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* (allocated to the first part of chapter four), this wisdom, as opposed to knowledge, is deployed to combat the dystopia that The Green Isle has become. This seems entirely in keeping with the principal aim of the meta-novel, that of redressing the problems of the contemporary world, epitomized by The Green Isle, by recovering and re-utilising lost wisdom in order to achieve regeneration.

The first epicyclic journey

Gunn's first chapter, set in the Highlands of his own time, identifies the problems besetting the area, problems which need to be addressed if the meta-novel is to achieve its planned transition from darkness to light.

Whilst the setting of the novels comprising part one of Gunn's second chapter is Highland, the sense of time is more problematic. *Highland River*, which incorporates the First World War and its aftermath, is contemporary and *Morning Tide* could also be. The latter describes three days in the life of the boy Hugh, one of which sees his father sailing a fishing boat back to harbour through a storm. Only three boats actively fish from the village, so it could relate to the same period as *The Grey Coast* where a similar situation obtained, although references to emigration and girls in service do suggest an earlier date. However, *Young Art and Old Hector* is totally inconsistent in terms of time. Hector was evicted from the Clash as a child during the Highland Clearances[23] and yet, when he and Art reappear in *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*, the setting is the early 1940s.[24] As this latter book is a direct sequel, the time frame is incompatible with a strict historical sequence.

This ambivalence with regard to time underlines the fact that this second chapter fulfils a very different function from that of the first. Whereas the first chapter identified the contemporary problems of the Highlands, the purpose of this, the first of a series of exploratory and explanatory exercises, is to suggest causes and remedies rather than to be slavishly factual. In this, the parallels that have been drawn between the structure of the meta-novel and Comedy, where the central developmental phase often transcends temporal and spatial constraints, continue to be in evidence.

---

[23] *Young Art and Old Hector,* p. 61.
[24] *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*, pp. 10 - 14. This passage features a discussion on prison camps and brainwashing techniques of the period.

In Gunn's first chapter the central issue being addressed was a 'state of mind', an essentially individual thing. It follows that, even though political and community issues will be involved, the solutions will in the final analysis also be individual. Returning to a comparison with Jung's analytical psychology, at the end of chapter one Gunn's subject, if not 'a patient etherised upon a table',[25] was certainly on the psychiatrist's couch awaiting analysis. What better place to commence such an analysis than by returning, in memory, to childhood, the focus of this first epicyclic journey entitled 'The wisdom of boyhood'?

Gunn's chosen chapter title 'The wisdom of boyhood' is gender specific and some commentators have seen his work as propounding a 'myth of masculinity'.[26] However, in his portrayal of differing male and female roles, Gunn is merely reflecting the actualities of communal living in early twentieth-century Caithness, rather than making a gender-based value judgement. It is quite clear from the contributory novels to this part of chapter two that Gunn does not regard wisdom as being a peculiarly masculine preserve and the choice of the term boyhood in preference to childhood can be regarded as being merely an acknowledgement of the gender of the principal protagonists in the novels under review here, protagonists who themselves embody traits shared by Gunn himself. They are not directly autobiographical but represent rather an amalgam based on his own experience and that of his brothers and close relatives.[27]

---

[25]T. S. Eliot, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', in *Collected Poems 1909 -1962* (1963) (London: Faber, 1974), p. 13.

[26]Christopher Whyte, 'Fishy Masculinities: *Neil Gunn's* The Silver Darlings', in *Gendering the Nation: Studies in Modern Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), pp. [49] - 68.

[27]The incident of the landing of the giant salmon by Kenn in *Highland River* is supposedly based on his brother John's exploits (although George Bethune, in conversation with Christopher Stokoe, challenged this, claiming that it was caught by a relative of his and that the pool in question was not the 'Well Pool' at all but one near the footbridge, situated closer to the harbour).
Young Art is based on Gunn's nephew, Hamish - see Hart and Pick, pp. 141 and 183.

The state of childhood

The term 'Childhood', which can often be an emotive one, can have very different connotations dependent upon the viewpoint of different ages. In his study, *Poor Monkey: The Child in Literature*, Peter Coveney asserts that:

> until the last decades of the eighteenth century the child did not exist as an important and continuous theme in English literature. Childhood as a major theme came with the generation of Blake and Wordsworth.[28]

Coveney associates the emergence of the child, and childhood, as a literary theme with the shift from an age of reason to one of feeling, of sensibility, and believes that Rousseau 'more than any other created the climate in which Blake, Wordsworth, Lamb, Southey and Coleridge wrote'.[29] Previous literary treatment of children, aping the real world of their time, saw them merely as a smaller version of adults, whereas Coveney writes:

> But for Rousseau: 'Nature wants children to be children before they are men. If we deliberately pervert this order, we shall get premature fruits which are neither ripe nor well-flavoured, and which soon decay . . . . Childhood has ways of seeing, thinking, and feeling peculiar to itself'.[30]

Turning the received wisdom of the time on its head, Rousseau argued that true education merely developed the original nature of the child, and 'the original nature of the child was innocence';[31] to grow and prosper a child needed only loving, caring parents and the benevolent influence of nature.

Gunn's own childhood was clearly a happy one and his treatment of childhood in his novels shows him to be heir to much of Rousseau's thinking. In these three novels, Gunn's depiction of parents conforms to Rousseau's view and his assertion that 'there was the village school, but his real education was absorbed as a matter of joy from his

---

[28]Peter Coveney, *Poor Monkey: The Child in Literature* (London: Rockliff, 1957), p. ix.
[29]*Ibid.* p. 5.
[30]*Ibid.* p. 7.
[31]*Ibid.* p. 7.

environment, its long hours of independence and freedom, its fishing and hunting, its legends and traditions' also reflects Rousseau's thinking.[32] However, Gunn's views differ in important ways. For example, he ascribes great importance to 'legends and traditions', and those he refers to belong specifically to his own Celtic community which cannot be learned from 'Mother Nature' but rely on human intervention.

Comparisons with Wordsworth were overtly suggested in Gunn's supplementary biographical entry and there are valid similarities, particularly in so far as childhood is concerned.[33] Wordsworth's *Prelude* and Gunn's novels of Highland boyhood converge at various points. In both cases there is an autobiographical or semi-autobiographical element and Wordsworth, like Kenn in *Highland River*, is drawn back to a river - in his case the Derwent.[34] In *The Prelude* the educative properties of a personified nature have a more direct role to play than in Gunn's work although Gunn's naked 'young savage of the strath'[35] seems a close relative of Wordsworth's 'five year's child':

> A naked boy, in one delightful rill,
> A little mill-race severed from his stream,
> Made one long bathing of a summer's day,
> Basked in the sun, and plunged and basked again
> Alternate, all a summer's day, or coursed
> Over the sandy fields. [36]

Wordsworth sees childhood as a golden age but believes that from that fresh and innocent source there follows a steady degradation as the adult state is entered. In his 'Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood', he writes:

> There was a time when meadow, grove,

---

[32]'Biographical entry', p. 588.
[33]'Biographical entry', First Supplement, p. 396 reads:
> 'The method is Wordsworthian,' the *Times Literary Supplement* wrote of his *Highland Pack*, a travel memoir of the region which Gunn knows and loves so well.

[34]William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: The four texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), pp. 50 - 51.
[35]Such references in Gunn are legion. The expression 'young savage of the strath' for example appears in *The Atom of Delight*, p. 83, whilst pages 37 - 48 of that book depict the battle between the naked boy and a salmon. See also *Highland River*, pp. 324 - 325 for references to bathing naked.
[36]*The Prelude*, p. 52.

and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore; -
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can
see no more.[37]

By contrast, Gunn, like Blake, sees the childhood vision as being recoverable, hence the quest undertaken in this part of chapter two. In his autobiographical work *The Atom of Delight* for example, after making specific reference to Wordsworth and his 'Intimations of Immortality', he gives his own thoughts which are worthy of being quoted at length. He writes:

> In his 'Ode on the Intimations of Immortality', Wordsworth drew a picture of the child at which distinguished critics, like Coleridge, have scoffed. To say that a child can read the eternal deep, be a mighty prophet, a blessed seer, is no doubt absurd, but so absurd that surely something less absurd was intended by so great a poet. I have tried to isolate a child's moment of joy in its purity, and I suggest it can be so pure that literally it is ineffable. One can only say it *is*. Being of this unalloyed nature it is innocent of any qualification, and it is with this innocence, 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 'intimation' of why man has in his time been haunted by, and hankered back towards, a Golden Age. But it is in the nature of man's psychic stuff [. . .] to hanker forward as well as back, and when he hankers forward in terms of innocence and pure joy he is given the name of prophet or seer and finds his Golden Age in an immortal realm or, if his seerdom is very advanced, in an eternal Now.[38]

On the evidence of the meta-novel and its aims, it can be assumed Gunn saw himself in terms of just such a seer and his interest in Zen at the time this passage was written would suggest that he sought to reclaim his Golden Age in an eternal Now.

---

[37]William Wordsworth, 'Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood', in *The Works of William Wordsworth* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1994), p. 587.
[38]*The Atom of Delight*, p. 91.

Mention has already been made of the intense moments of intuitive revelation which Gunn calls 'Atoms of Delight' and these invite comparison with Wordsworth's 'spots of time'.[39] In Wordsworth's case these are moments of heightened awareness, often prompted by incidents of an unhappy or shocking nature, which, in memory, bring nourishment to 'especially the imaginative power'.[40] The quality of light involved 'must be the ordinary light, though it is the memory of these "spots of time", and the strength that memory gives one to pursue everyday tasks, cultivate everyday affections, that makes "the light of common day" beautiful'.[41] In contrast, Gunn writes of his 'Atoms of Delight', that 'my variety of light is a light of wonder, of gaiety, of laughter, that is so marvellous that all ordinary things are born afresh, both on the face of the earth and inside the human noddle'.[42] In his article he compares the intensity of these revelatory moments to the blinding light experienced by Saul on the road to Damascus and to the experience of Zen novices as they attain enlightenment. As the latter comment suggests, Gunn believes that, although his experience of 'Atoms of Delight' commenced, like Wordsworth's, in childhood, they can be fostered and continued into adulthood as a route towards enlightenment.

From his own writing it is apparent that, for Gunn, childhood was a very special time and its experiences and memories not only introduced him to these inspirational moments but also were destined to inform much of his literary output. As has already been noted, the boy protagonists in the novels allocated to this part of chapter two are based on the collective experiences of Gunn himself and his friends and relatives. In *Highland River*, the adult Kenn, in imagination, conducts an aerial survey of the Highlands before homing in on a vision of himself as a child on the river bank.[43] This

---

[39]*The Prelude*, pp. 115 - 18.
[40]*Ibid.* p.16.
[41]G. S. Fraser, 'Comments' in *Point*, No. 3 (Summer 1968), p. 13.
[42]Neil M. Gunn, 'Light' in *Point*, No. 3, (Summer 1968), p. 4.
[43]*Highland River*, p. 152.

is a fictionalized version of the real life event recounted in the autobiographical *The Atom of Delight* which describes probably the first of these moments of inspirational enlightenment when, as a boy, he was cracking hazel nuts on a stone in the river when, as he says, 'I came upon myself sitting there'.[44]

Gunn's preoccupation with his own childhood, and the clear impact that this had on his adult thinking bears similarities with the work of Dostoevsky. William Woodlin Rowe, drawing on *The Brothers Karamazov*, writes:

> Father Zosima [. . .] stresses the subsequent importance of childhood memories. 'From the house where I lived as a child,' he writes, 'I carried away nothing but precious memories, for a man has no memories more precious than those of early childhood. . .' [45]
> It is his disciple, Alyosha, however, who explains this importance. Near the novel's end, he instructs a group of children as follows; 'Know that you can have no greater and stronger force for the life ahead of you, nothing more useful and healthy than a pleasant memory, especially one preserved from childhood, from the house where you were born. They tell you a lot about your education, but such a wonderful, holy memory, cherished from childhood, is perhaps the very best education there is. A person who collects many such memories and keeps them with him is saved for his entire life.' [46]
> The implications of this passage are [. . .] vast. The tenet that happy childhood memories are a force capable of mitigating life's vicissitudes and its obverse, viz., that an unhappy childhood pursues one long thereafter, are continually and tendentiously propounded in Dostoevsky's works.[47]

Gunn's happy childhood memories may well have assisted in creating the positive attitude of mind necessary to undertake the project which the meta-novel represents.

Similarities between Gunn and Blake have already been mentioned. Alexander Reid claimed that Gunn was 'a prophetic writer in the sense that William Blake (with whom Gunn has much in common) used these words', and goes on to submit that '*The*

---

[44]*The Atom of Delight*, p. 29.
[45]F. M. Dostoevsky, *Collected Works, Vol IX* (Moscow: 1956 - 1958), pp. 363 - 364.
[46]*Ibid. Vol. X*, pp. 335 - 336.
[47]William Woodin Rowe, *Dostoevsky: Child and man in his works* (New York: New York University Press, 1968), pp. 75 - 76.

Grey Coast and *The Lost Glen* [. . .] are together the anti-thesis of which *Morning Tide* is the thesis. They have the same relationship to *Morning Tide* as Blake's *Songs of Experience* to his *Songs of Innocence*'.[48] Ian Grimble supported this view in his 'Neil M. Gunn Memorial Lecture'[49] and Richard Price, who also links Blake with Gunn, uses the same analogy as Reid but contrasts the 'innocence' of *Young Art and Old Hector* to the 'experience' of *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*, as does Margery McCulloch.[50] The concept of the meta-novel dictates that these views must be modified. Whilst the novels in this part of chapter two are clearly set in opposition to those allocated to chapter one, which could reasonably be described as novels of 'experience', they do not form a complete antithesis being merely the first of a number of enquiries that need to be considered before reaching the true synthesis in the concluding chapter.

As suggested previously, Blake, unlike Wordsworth, believed that innocence and experience are not mutually exclusive. As Richard Holmes states:

> Yet they [Blake's poems] also suggest strange possibilities of delight and transcendence in Eternity. ' The Tyger', for all its fire and dread, its relentless hammering out of fearful questions, also conjures up a vision of sublime creative power, an incandescent workshop in the artist's own brain, which can somehow 'frame' an entire universe, and dares to do so.[51]

On the other hand, John Rowe Townsend emphasises the loss of brightness in the later collection:

> The movement of the *Songs of Innocence* out of accepted children's literature probably has much to do with their natural pairing with the *Songs of Experience*. These came five years later and contained less of the joy of childhood; brightness had fallen from the air.[52]

---

[48]'Neil Gunn's Mysticism', in *Neil M. Gunn: The Man and the Writer*, pp. [344] and p. 349.
[49]Ian Grimble, *Neil M. Gunn Memorial Lecture* (Ampthill: Peglet Press, 1992), p. [6].
[50]Price, p. 104 and McCulloch, p. 116.
[51]Richard Holmes, 'Introduction' to, William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and Experience: shewing the two contrary states of the human soul* (London: The Folio Society, 1992), p. xiv.
[52]John Rowe Townsend, *Written for Children* (London: The Bodley Head, 1990), p. 106.

As will be seen as the discussion of this part of chapter two develops, this loss of brightness reflects Gunn's thinking and yet he believes that the brightness can be reclaimed. Within the meta-novel structure this recovery of 'that which was lost' will assist in the achievement of a positive conclusion.

The 'wisdom of boyhood'

The grammatical structure of the title suggests that wisdom belongs inherently to boyhood and the boy protagonists in these novels often display a delight and joy in life and a brightness of vision that can perhaps be defined as 'innocence'. Clearly, in the adult world of chapter one, 'brightness had fallen from the air'.[53] Consequently, the innocent brightness of childhood can be regarded as a casualty, the essence of 'that which was lost', the focus of the quest in this first epicyclic journey from childhood's perspective.

However, apart from any inherent or pre-existing wisdom, the texts allocated to this part of chapter two are also concerned with the boy's acquisition of knowledge and wisdom - not synonymous terms in Gunn's mind - as necessary learning as he moves towards 'man's estate',[54] suggesting that at least some wisdom needs to be taught. The core of this wisdom, comprising either inherent or learned qualities, or both, will be identified from the contributory novels to this part of chapter two. The chapter's second part is concerned with the implementation of the recovered wisdom and will be considered later.

Knowledge is shown as being acquired by the boy protagonists in a number of ways. Gunn's biographical entry, it will be recalled, claimed:

> There was the village school, but his real education was absorbed as a matter of joy from his environment, its long hours of independence and freedom, its fishing and hunting, its legends and traditions.[55]

Whilst Gunn gives precedence to 'environmental' learning he also acknowledges the influence of formal schooling, including probably the tutor with an interest in the Romantics, and both clearly play their part in the development of the Highland boy.

---

[53]John Rowe Townsend, *Written for Children* (London: The Bodley Head, 1990), p. 106.
[54]William Shakespeare, 'Twelfth Night', in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. by W. J. Craig (London: Leopard Books, 1995), v. 1. 405.
[55]'Biographical entry', p. 588

It is clear that the community Gunn describes in these novels was either Gaelic speaking or one that, like that of his own childhood, had recently adopted the English tongue. This is apparent from comments in *Young Art and Old Hector*. When Art's new brother, Henry James is born it was reported that this was how he would write his name, in English, 'one day at school', and when Art's father wrote home from the fishing he used formal English, a language 'lacking the merry warmth of life'.[56] The Gaelic accent of those newly adopting English is parodied in *Morning Tide* by Alan's mimicking of the keeper's speech, 'You wass after the Saamons you puggers!'[57]

The corollary of the above is that the school operated in English. Not only did all the teaching take place in English but also there was active repression of Gaelic and it is this, probably above all else, that prompted the wholesale abandoning of Gaelic as an outworn language, in favour of English, the language of opportunity, as happened in Gunn's own case. Despite the fact that the majority of the schoolmasters would have been Scottish themselves, the suppression of the native language has much about it of the British Colonial enterprise.

The Scots' love of learning and also this neglect of the native language is referred to in T. M. Devine's recent work, *The Scottish Nation: 1700 - 2000.* Devine writes:

> Education in Scotland did not play this role [creating a symbol of Scottishness] by promoting the study of the native literature and the national history. On the contrary, the schools were often criticized for their neglect of these aspects of the Scottish heritage.[58]

In *Highland River* there is ample corroboration of Devine's point. In contrast to the wonders of nature with its migrating salmon, one of which Kenn has just landed with his bare hands, school is seen as a 'narrow prison',[59] of which the narrator records:

---

[56]*Young Art and Old Hector.* pp. 93 and 159.
[57]*Morning Tide.* p. 179.
[58]T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Nation* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1999), p.389
[59]*Highland River.* p. 41

> Nor had any of the things the master taught any joy in them. History and geography were both taken that day. The history was concerned with English kings and queens and the dates of battles. There had been the Plantagenets. Now there were the Tudors. That Henry VIII had six wives did not really interest the children. They would have gaped in the same way if he had had six hundred. What was important was the exact number six. A near shot, such as seven or eight, would have made the lion [schoolmaster] roar.
>
> The geography was an even worse ordeal because, as it happened, they were dealing with that portion of the British Isles that contains great numbers of towns, each with its 'most important industry'. Some of the towns, like Birmingham or Nottingham, had several industries. Kenn's memory was his weakest part and he was capable of transposing small arms and lace with an air of innocent calm.[60]

Despite Devine's belief that education itself had become a symbol of Scottishness, Gunn clearly sees the curriculum adopted at Kenn's school - the teaching of English history and geography - as a way of reinforcing the colonial message, an incorporation of the pupils into the greater family of the 'English' to the detriment of their own history, geography and traditions. It also creates and perpetuates a powerful myth of the superiority of the English. When the narratives of the contributory novels to chapter one were discussed, this attitude was noted in the English visitors' unconscious assumption of superiority over the indigenous population. Gunn's identification of the Scottish educational system as being a means of indoctrination and control seems entirely valid.

By contrast the education gained from the environment was untainted and, more to the point, pertinent. Hugh describes a visit to the guard chamber in the nearby Broch where it is almost as if he is learning from the stones themselves. He says:

> A person was alone here, was cut off from the living world. Yet this ancient world was anything but dead. Even the stones were too quiet for that, too knowing. And the unknown passages and rooms under the ruins were — well, they were there. *There.* Everything round one's body, under one's feet, was *there.*[61]

---

[60] *Highland River,* p. 37
[61] *Morning Tide.* pp. 211 - 212.

This was the history and geography of his own race, acquired in a non-verbal way of which Rousseau and Wordsworth would have approved. A similar acquisition of knowledge without direct human intervention is *via* a Jungian 'collective unconscious'. This is most clearly depicted when Kenn encounters the salmon at the beginning of *Highland River*. Gunn, however, is not *naïve* enough to suggest that knowledge acquired from the environment can all be gained so directly. The learning from the environment he speaks of includes the enduring community, the human environment with its 'legends and traditions'. Such legends and traditions need language for both their existence and their transference and, in the Gaelic communities Gunn describes, depend upon oral tradition. In a sense the 'environmental' aspect of education is inseparable from the community's accumulated wisdom.

The oral transference of knowledge is seen at its simplest in *Young Art and Old Hector*, where Hector conveys homespun wisdom to Art in an easily digestible form, in many cases utilising traditional Celtic myths and legends in a similar way to Yeats, whose work was well known to Gunn.[62] Yeats made great use of the Cuchulain legends, suitably amended, in his work; the great warrior being appropriated and pressed into active service in support of a nationalist project. Gunn, *via* Hector, prefers the legend of Finn MacCoul, leader of the Feinn, because of the wisdom that made him a great captain. Finn gains his mythical wisdom by eating the 'Salmon of Wisdom' that fed on the 'hazel nuts of knowledge'.[63] The symbolism of the 'Salmon of Wisdom' runs through much of Gunn's fiction, and is never far removed from the living salmon of Dunbeath Water.

Hector, unlike many, never left his home area and had become the repository of a wealth of knowledge. He tells Art:

---

[62]Hart and Pick, pp. 142 - 143.
[63]*Young Art and Old Hector.* pp. 17 - 18.

> I know every corner of this land, every little burn and stream, and even the boulders in the stream. And I know the moors and every lochan on them. And I know the hills, and the passes, and the ruins, and I know of things that happened here on our land long long ago, and men who are long dead I knew, and women. I knew them all. They are part of me. And more than that I can never know now.[64]

Hector's knowledge, as the quotation makes clear, is nothing less than the history and geography of the race for Hector refers to 'our' land, an inheritance he shared with Art. However, this knowledge is intimately linked to the Gaelic language for 'every littl [*sic*] place, every hillock, every hill and slope, has its own name'.[65] Hector argues that, as he is the only one who knows many of these names, knowledge of them will die with him. To prevent this, Art asks to be taught the names, an exercise which Hector is delighted to undertake. However, the 'colonial' impact of the English language on formal education means that what has been described as 'environmental' knowledge is endangered for as people lose the language in which it is couched the knowledge itself will be lost. Gunn clearly sees the importance of Gaelic to the survival of the community's ancient traditions and a logical extension would suggest that a regeneration of these Highland communities needs to go hand in hand with a language revival. Gunn's ambivalence towards Gaelic, and his lack of fluency in the tongue, prevented his active involvement in such a project.

A different view was taken by Fionn MacColla (T. D. MacDonald) whose first novel *The Albannach* (1932)[66] was hailed by Edwin Muir as 'a brilliant performance', the work of a writer of 'first-rate powers'.[67] Hugh MacDiarmid said MacColla was 'a definite literary genius intellectually equipped far beyond any of them [the new Scottish writers] and with a breadth of experience they almost all completely and

---

[64]*Young Art and Old Hector,* p. 250.
[65]*Ibid.* p. 250.
[66]Fionn MacColla, *The Albannach*, (London: John Heritage, 1932).
[67]J. B. Caird, 'Fionn MacColla - The Twofold Heritage', in *Essays on Fionn MacColla*, ed. by David Morrison (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1973), p. 31.

irredeemably lack.'[68] MacDiarmid's switch of allegiance from Gunn to MacColla was a major cause of the rift between MacDiarmid and Gunn, who felt betrayed, and to whom betrayal was the most heinous of crimes.[69] Although not a Highlander by birth MacColla became known as a Highland novelist. He learned Gaelic - coming from a non-Gaelic background, he was probably spared the emotional pressures with which Gunn had to contend - and served as a teacher in the Gaedhealtachd. However, despite his undoubted enthusiasm for Gaelic culture, he was frustrated by the education authorities requiring him to teach a curriculum that did not nourish Highland traditions.[70]

By contrast the Danish Folk High Schools of Bishop Grundtvig, alluded to in correspondence between Gunn and Mitchison, acted as a powerful supporter of indigenous Danish culture.[71] The High Schools were founded on the basis that the curriculum would be 'Danish history, language, and literature, and Danish social conditions'.[72] All teaching was in the vernacular and the schools drew their pupils principally from rural areas. Perhaps most important of all was the fact that these schools, nationalist in concept, were run as non-state establishments. Had Gunn been equipped to promote such a movement in the Highlands it would have helped to revive both language and culture, and may also have advanced his nationalist aims. For example, the reuniting of South Jutland, then ruled by Germany, with Denmark owed much to the Folk High Schools. Many who voted positively on the reunification question 'felt' Danish due to the knowledge of Danish history and culture they acquired

---

[68]David Morrison, 'Introduction', in *Essays on Fionn MacColla*, ed. by David Morrison, (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1973), p. 7. Morrison quotes from Hugh MacDiarmid's, 'Book Review of *The Albannach*' in the *Free Man* (1932).
[69]*Selected Letters*, pp. 19 - 22.
[70]Fionn MacColla, 'Mein Bumpf', in *Essays on Fionn MacColla*, ed. by David Morrison, (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1973), pp 27 - 28.
[71]Mitchison, 'Living Around with Neil', p. 125.
[72]F. Skrubbeltrang, *The Danish Folk High Schools* (Copenhagen: Det Danske Selskab, 1947) p. 12.

as young people at the High Schools and, especially, because of the fluency in the Danish language they gained there. Notably, as with the Highlands, all official transactions were in the language of the coloniser.[73]

At the beginning of this thesis it was asserted that, in a similar way to the structure of Comedy, the meta-novel followed a tripartite form. In the novels allocated to this part of chapter two, other examples of trinities occur. There are the three divisions of his 'Highland River' which Gunn describes thus:

> The first part was from the sea to the Broch, it belonged to man and was populous with his affairs. From the Broch to the falls was the second part or the strath. [. . .] Out of that second part boyhood rose up and faced the moors [. . .] the desert place into which the prophets went to find their gods.[74]

The tripartite motif re-appears in *Young Art and Old Hector* related to the three ages of whisky, of which Gunn considered himself an expert. After the first tasting of whisky destined for Duncan's wedding, Hector tells his young apprentices:

> 'It's young [. . .] 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 the wild flowers in sheltered hollows. It has not yet begun to get 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'.[75]

Both the above quotations express their subject matter in terms of human life with the latter in particular relating to specific ages of man. Old Hector tells Art:

> You have taught me today [. . .] that all life is divided into three parts. The first is the period of childhood and it extends up to the courting

---

[73] *The Danish Folk High Schools,* pp. 37 - 41.
[74] *Highland River*, p. 287.
[75] *Young Art and Old Hector.* p. 188.

> age; then there is that age itself in the middle; and then there is the third age, beyond the courting, where I am myself.[76]

This part of chapter two is concerned with wisdom and, in the quotation about whisky, innocence resides in the first and third ages. In this final quotation these two ages equate to childhood and old age where, by inference, wisdom as well as innocence coexist. In 'The First and Second Childhood',[77] Gunn demonstrates that, in age, one's thinking becomes more like that of a child with 'something added besides', namely experience.[78] *Young Art and Old Hector* as a whole is concerned with the transference of knowledge from the old to the young, from the third to the first age. It is pertinent to note that Edwin Muir (1887 - 1959), another contemporary of Gunn, also wrote of three ages of man in his poem *The Myth.*[79] In this poem, childhood is seen as a mythical time of joyous play within a rural environment, as is the case in Gunn's work.

In these 'wisdom of boyhood' novels, knowledge is also shown as being acquired *via* a kind of apprenticeship, an apprenticeship both in poaching and in the formal requirements of the adult world. In *Highland River*, Kenn, denied the opportunity of joining his brothers in setting rabbit snares, copies their design and makes one from thick fencing wire, surreptitiously sets it, and is rewarded by being the only one to catch a rabbit that day.[80] A later lesson comes from brother Angus when Kenn learns the trick of seeing a salmon in a pool.[81] The opening of *Morning Tide* finds Hugh, undertaking a more legitimate duty, collecting mussels on the foreshore to bait his father's fishing line.[82] Even young Art found that, when his father was away at the fishing, he had to work on the croft with his siblings.[83]

---

[76] *Ibid.* p. 30.
[77] *Young Art and Old Hector,* pp 72 - 92.
[78] *Ibid.* p. 188.
[79] Edwin Muir, *The Complete Poems of Edwin Muir*, ed. by Peter Butter (Aberdeen: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1991), p. 141.
[80] *Highland River*, pp. 117 - 131.
[81] *Ibid.* pp. 191 - 194.
[82] *Morning Tide*, pp. 7 - 22.
[83] *Young Art and Old Hector*, p. 154.

Mention has been made earlier of Gunn's use of symbolism and this is very much in evidence in this chapter. There can be little doubt that Gunn gave his characters symbolic names In the three novels under discussion the hero Hector occurs, in this incarnation as hero of the Celtic community, as do Art, Henry James, Hugh, who it was speculated may be a tribute to Hugh MacDiarmid, and, of course, Kenn. For a chapter concerned with the acquisition of wisdom what better name could there be than Kenn (ken)?

However, more important than the symbolism of the names, is that of the salmon. Salmon feature significantly in each of the novels under discussion but it is in *Young Art and Old Hector* that the salmon is located firmly within Celtic mythology, and associated equally firmly with wisdom, when Hector tells Art the story of Finn MacCoul's attainment of wisdom through eating the 'Salmon of Wisdom' which had fed on the 'hazel nuts of knowledge'.

Gunn uses the salmon motif in each of the contributory novels to herald the coming of wisdom to his boy protagonists. In *Young Art and Old Hector*, Art has to rely on tales told by Hector, as it is not until the last story that he sets off in earnest for the fabled river and the living salmon, but the legend of Finn is relayed in the first story to mark his symbolic commencement on the trail of wisdom.[84] Art thereafter learns, often covertly, about issues belonging to the second age of man, issues such as economics, unrelenting toil, the law, childbirth, courting and death, the latter through his anxieties over the health of his new brother, Henry James, of whom he was jealous.

For Kenn in *Highland River* the salmon is, like the original one in the legend, a very real one and is also met with at the beginning of the book, marking the

[84]The opening of the sequel, *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*, which completes the story of Art, also features a meeting with 'The Salmon of Wisdom' at the hazel pool.

commencement of his search for wisdom. It is clear that, in Gunn's vision, such wisdom is deeply embedded within heritage and community. It will be recalled that when Kenn is confronted with this huge salmon, he receives an influx of knowledge from the 'collective unconscious' of his race. The narrator describes Kenn's experiences in the following terms:

> 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 his 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. [. . .] A thousand influences had his young body taut as a bow, when at last, bending over a boulder of the old red sandstone, he saw again the salmon.[85]

Following Kenn's landing of the salmon, a detailed, if fictionalized, account is given of the life of the salmon, 'whose pilgrimage is ever between light and darkness', and it is possible to see Kenn's life, and his search for wisdom, in similar terms until, returning like the salmon to his home river, he achieves the ultimate wisdom, a knowledge of himself.[86] This takes us well beyond 'boyhood wisdom' into the realms of 'Biographical extension', and indeed of Zen, which will be discussed in more detail shortly. Throughout the course of the novel Kenn grows in wisdom but, because of its shifting time frames, these are not compartmentalized into boyhood and adult experience. It is true to say, however, that Kenn, like Art, was introduced to adult concerns during his boyhood years.

In *Morning Tide*, Hugh's salmon are, again, real ones which he encountered for the first time in the second part of the novel when he was allowed to accompany his brother Alan on the poaching expedition he undertook the night before he emigrated to Australia, immediately following a *ceilidh* at Hector the Roadman's house. Although

---

[85]*Highland River*, p. 11.
[86]*Ibid.* p. 50.

Hugh was a member of the party he was not actively involved in the actual catching of the fish. This does not occur until the beginning of the third part of the book where Hugh gaffs a grilse in a pool. Gunn leaves the reader in no doubt that he intends his description of a physical fishing expedition to be taken, symbolically, as indicating the commencement of the attainment of wisdom, as in the Finn MacCoul myth. When he describes Hugh's secreting of the fish, he writes:

> But the silver sheen was still on his fish when Hugh, slipping into a thicket of young hazel, brought it to the light, his hands bearing it like an offering as he slid to his knees and laid it, with fastidious care, on unsoiled grass. [. . .] The salmon of knowledge under the nuts of the hazel of wisdom.[87]

In *Morning Tide*, the reader sees Hugh, as with Art and Kenn, acquiring knowledge of the adult state. Again, this incorporates insights into adult responsibility and economic necessity as well as conveying basic knowledge of the human condition of birth, marriage and death. Through the emigration of his brother and the departure of his sister to the city where she is in service, Hugh becomes aware of the depopulation of the Highlands, a major cause of the problems described in chapter one.

---

[87] *Morning Tide*. pp. 221 - 222. Here the terms have been reversed and it is the Salmon of Knowledge and the Hazel Nuts of Wisdom. During the course of this thesis reference will be made to the 'Salmon of Wisdom', which is the form Gunn usually adopts, and is the more logical as wisdom only comes after knowledge has been thoroughly digested.

That which was lost

In Gunn's first chapter it was established that the prevailing 'state of mind' of the contemporary Highlander was gloomy and negative. In undertaking a series of epicyclic journeys in chapters two to four, Gunn seeks for lost wisdom with which to address this situation and aid regeneration. In the quest represented by the first part of chapter two, the focus is on the child. So far, in this section, the various ways in which Gunn's boy heroes gain knowledge and wisdom have been considered and it remains only to distil from this review the specifics of the lost wisdom.

The physical setting of the three contributory novels is substantially the same as in chapter one, and all the major issues identified there, with the exception of 'The Man Who Came Back', have been revisited and re-viewed through the innocent and ingenuous eyes of the child, and the difference is profound. The landscape is no longer 'grey' but is full of colour, excitement and joy. *Highland River* records that:

> Looking back on his childhood, Kenn finds, is looking back on a small figure in a sunny valley. The birch and hazel trees that clothe the sides of the valley are in full leaf; the green river-flats, widening and narrowing and disappearing round bends, are moss-soft to noiseless feet. The white scuts of the rabbits disappear in bracken clumps or sandy burrows or up under the foliage of trees. A hawk sails from one side of the valley to the other; inland, a buzzard circles high up over a gulch where rock faces stare.[88]

This idyllic vision is a far cry from 'The Grey Coast' with its worn-out land on the margins of the sea and yet it is the same land, only the viewpoint has changed. Consideration can now be given as to how this innocent viewpoint changed so dramatically with the ageing process with its associated accumulation of 'green humours'.[89]

---

[88] *Highland River*. p. 149.
[89] *Young Art and Old Hector*, p. 188.

Partly this is to do with responsibility and undertaking the toil associated with 'man's estate'. In *Young Art and Old Hector* this is shown graphically. When his father and eldest brother go to the fishing, Art looked forward to days of fun and adventure with Donul, including a trip to the fabled 'Hazel Pool'. When he expresses his hopes to Donul, he replies 'Seeing Father and Duncan are away, surely it stands to reason that there will be more work to do?' At these words:

> Art did not answer. The thought of work was dull. A brightness went out of the landscape, and he saw his home and the coloured fields around it go still and lonely as if they were aware that Father and Duncan had been withdrawn from them. Where there should have been an overflowing there was, instead, a draining away.[90]

This mirrors exactly the loss of brightness which John Rowe Townsend argued as being the difference between Blake's *Songs of Innocence* and his *Songs of Experience.* However, in Gunn's project this brightness, this joy and innocence of vision, this 'Youth itself, as yet unspoiled', must somehow be recaptured.[91]

Whilst evidence is seen in the contributory novels of the young taking a more positive attitude towards life than their elders, the challenge is to retain this youthful vision into adulthood. In this, the composite figure of Hector, the archetypal embodiment of Gaelic culture, provides us with the clue. In *Morning Tide*, Hector's home was 'the happy place to come into', a place of piping and storytelling about which the narrator asks:

> Wasn't this the house of the young men's ceilidh? of any man who hadn't lost his youth?[92]

---

[90] *Young Art and Old Hector.* p. 154.
[91] *Ibid.* p. 188.
[92] *Morning Tide.* pp. 163 - 166.

This could be paraphrased as any man who had not lost 'the wisdom of boyhood' on attaining manhood. It is also valid to see this continuity of wisdom as being within a tradition, within a living culture, of which people like Hector are the custodians.

Despite the youthful and positive attitude of Hector, one issue remains problematic, that of depopulation. The reader is told that he often thought of leaving the area but never, in fact, did so and it is as a result of his continued domicile in his homeland that he has become an authority on such things as place names.[93]

At the *ceilidh* in Hector's house prior to Alan's emigration, Hector summarises the situation quite baldly, and without undue emotion. He tells Alan:

> Everyone knows how your mother dislikes the sea. She has great cause, and that's true. You see, she would rather lose you to Australia, where you will live, even though she should never see you again - rather than that you should follow your father [. . .] But from your father's side it's different. You see, a man likes someone to come after him. It's a queer thing that. And no man understands it until he has passed his prime. Then it begins to gnaw at him. A man founds himself, and his race. It's not a bad old race. It's all we've known. You see what I mean?[94]

The poignancy and finality of this occasion being underlined by the choice of *pibroch* played by Hector as Alan sets off on his valedictory poaching expedition. This was *Cha till mi tuille*, 'I shall never more return'.[95] This episode also hints at the way the community's culture is being damaged when it is reported that, 'When old Hector's gone, there won't be a piper left in the place'.[96] This loss to the community as a result of the departure of the young men is encapsulated in the comments made by those left behind when Alan and his friends finally leave:

---

[93] *Young Art and Old Hector*, p. 250.
[94] *Morning Tide*, pp. 166 - 167.
[95] *Ibid.* p. 171
[96] *Ibid.* p. 185

> 'Oh, they'll get on all right, the same lads! [. . .] Trust them for that!' But their smiles were weary, as though there was a final element in them of defeat. The grass had grown greyer, the trees barer. Virtue had been drawn out of the place, out of themselves.[97]

But the loss is not all one sided, the departing men also felt a deep sense of loss, despite the brave face displayed on their departure, and on their final poaching expedition, in a moment of 'profound reflectiveness', they knew that 'this was their world. This was the old place, old, far back.'[98] This is what they 'shall never more return' to, their old, familiar, locale. Even though the separation is not so final, a similar situation exists in *Young Art and Old Hector* when Donul leaves home to become a stockman. Art, left behind, feels the loss acutely, as does the rest of the family:

> Donul was gone. The house knew it. The land outside was aware of it. The mouth of the night was darker with it, and a small wind, issuing forth, whispered it round the edge of the thatch.[99]

The resigned acceptance of these pressures, and Gunn's response to them will be tackled in the second part of this section, 'The Biographical extension', when the theme of 'The Man Who Came Back' is considered.

'That which was lost' in this quest, as in chapter one, concerns a mental attitude; it is the child's purity of vision, the ability to see reality clearly, unaffected by other pressures - a bright, joyous and innocent vision.

---

[97] *Ibid.* pp. 203 - 204.
[98] *Morning Tide.* p. 183.
[99] *Young Art and Old Hector.* p. 227.

SECTION TWO

PART TWO

The Biographical extension

The contributory novels

In his retrospect, Gunn allocates two novels to the second part of chapter two, namely *The Serpent* and *The Drinking Well.* The former was published in 1943 and the latter, which bears the imprint 1946, was officially published, according to Faber, on the 21st February 1947.[1] The choice of these novels emphasises the non-chronological nature of Gunn's retrospect as they appear in the meta-novel prior to four individual novels that were written before them both,[2] with two further ones predating *The Drinking Well*.[3]

In view of Gunn's previously noted ambivalence towards Gaelic, and his lack of facility in that language, it is noteworthy that *The Serpent* was selected as the first publication of Club Leabhar, the Inverness based 'Highland Book Club', which had a strong Gaelic bias and published many Gaelic and dual-language texts. Their choice reinforces the view that, in Gunn, the Gaelic speaking Highlands has found a voice and that he could be regarded as the 'novelist of Gaelic Scotland'; a view challenged by Christopher Whyte who claims that 'the critics who gave him this accolade knew no more Gaelic than Gunn himself'.[4] Pertinently, Francis Thompson, Club Leabhar's editor and a fluent Gaelic speaker, wrote in 'Neil M. Gunn: Recorder and Interpreter':

> Gunn [. . .] possessed the ability to take a firm hold on the Celtic tradition to which he fell heir and shape it so that it became a recognisable part of his writing. One would say that Gunn is in the true line of the great Gaelic bards, in that, through the medium of the English language, he has carried on what they themselves fell heir to in their turn and in their time. Gunn is at his best when describing the natural scene, and one has no hesitation in comparing him to Duncan Ban MacIntyre.[5]

---

[1]Stokoe, pp. 66 - 67.
[2]*Sun Circle* (1933), *Butcher's Broom* (1934), *Wild Geese Overhead* (1939) and *The Silver Darlings* (1941).
[3]*The Green Isle of the Great Deep* (1944) and *The Key of the Chest* (1945).
[4]Whyte, p. 51.
[5]Francis Thompson, 'Neil M. Gunn: Recorder and Interpreter', in *Essays on Neil M. Gunn*, ed. by David Morrison (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1971), p. 32.

Another fluent Gaelic speaker, Ian Grimble, said in a 1991 lecture:

> Eric Linklater said of Neil Gunn, intending it as a very high compliment, that Neil's greatest achievement was to have left a full, and graphic delineation of the old Gaelic life of the Highlands before it disintegrated, and that but for Neil Gunn it might have passed without any proper record. Well of course the proper language for life in the Gaelic Highlands is Gaelic and it is also recorded in that language, though obviously not with the same consummate art Neil Gunn brought to the same task.[6]

So, whilst Gunn's linguistic shortcomings are not in doubt, there is every reason to believe that, being deeply empathetic to Gaelic values and traditions, he can be regarded as a reliable recorder and interpreter of that culture in the English language.

Hart and Pick state that Gunn regarded *The Serpent* and *The Shadow* as being the most personal of his novels and, from this fact, intimate that 'his secret life is indirectly revealed' in these novels.[7] In particular they suggest that the secrecy surrounding Tom's relationship with Janet in *The Serpent* mirrors the long-standing affair between Gunn and Margaret MacEwen they record in their biography. The suggestion of a strong autobiographical content may be an overstatement, as Gunn's title for this part of chapter two, is 'the Biographical extension'. This will be fully discussed when the title itself is considered later.

The Serpent in many ways mirrors *Highland River* from the first part of chapter two; both novels involve a quest for self-knowledge, one using the device of climbing a mountain, the other an expedition to the source of a river. Both recount the life of their main protagonist *via* a series of flashbacks - rather more chronological in the case of *The Serpent*. The contrast between the serenity of the older Tom and his troubled younger self in *The Serpent* is greater than that of Kenn in *Highland River*, largely

---

[6]*Neil M. Gunn Memorial Lecture*, p. [4]
[7]Hart and Pick, p. 129.

because, in the former, the hero is not recalling incidents of happy boyhood but rather young adulthood, a period more analogous to Kenn's First World War experiences. Despite their similarities these two novels were allocated to separate sections and possible reasons for this will be discussed later, along with a comparison of the quest for self-knowledge depicted in these novels and the Zen quest for enlightenment.

Thus far only *The Serpent*, generally regarded as being one of Gunn's more successful novels, has been considered.[8] By contrast *The Drinking Well*, despite the fact that Francis Thompson found it absorbing,[9] is seen as being flawed, principally as a result of its positive ending.[10] The book follows the tripartite form already noted as being a recurring feature in Gunn's work, this time with an added coda. Without the coda the novel would have ended, like *The Lost Glen*, bleakly and in tragedy, but structurally stronger. However, this thesis will show that the coda, with its positive ending, is crucial in advancing the meta-novel's narrative. Similarly, critics consider Hugh's mother's recovery from illness, at the end of *Morning Tide*, as contrived.[11] However, Price seems to interpret the scene as Gunn intended when he says:

> The fact that Kirsty uses the past tense when her mother is still alive seems at first another kind of Twilight gloom, but Gunn twists this, too, by adding that 'to speak of her mother, almost as of someone gone, was the beginning of an assurance that her mother would not die' (251). Mrs MacBeth recovers and the novel concludes with Hugh's undisguised ecstasy. Free now to think of his father and brother, both so far away, proposals for hunting exploits, and even a pagan-like 'offering' in the trees (256), Hugh ends the novel in emergent light, 'his bare legs twinkling across the fields of the dawn'. In the inventiveness of his prose style, his remolding of form, and in the bright poetics which underline these things, Gunn had sent the Twilight packing.[12]

---

[8]For example, McCulloch, p. 138, states: '*The Serpent* is the most successful of these six novels' (*Wild Geese Overhead, Second Sight, The Serpent, The Key of the Chest, The Shadow* and *The Lost Chart*).
[9]Francis Thompson, p. 37.
[10]For perceived flaws see McCulloch, p. [119] and Price, p.143.
[11]John L. Broom, 'The Novels of Neil M. Gunn', in *Essays on Neil M. Gunn*, ed. by David Morrison (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1971), pp. 11 - 12.
[12]Price, p. 41.

This sentiment approximates to Gunn's intention for *The Drinking Well* as, in the meta-novel, Gunn's aim is to engender a positive state of mind to combat the mind set of the contemporary Highlander and, thereby, to aid regeneration.

Not surprisingly, given that they are placed together in this part of chapter two, *The Serpent* and *The Drinking Well*, whilst displaying major differences, do share affinities. They also have clear parallels with *The Lost Glen*, and the play *Back Home* which, together with its prose forerunner 'The Man Who Came Back', shares the same principal character as *The Drinking Well*, Iain Cattenach. Comparisons will be made with these earlier works as the examination of this part of the chapter continues and reference will also be made to other, non-novelistic, works of Gunn which illuminate the themes under discussion.

The Biographical extension

The degree to which *The Serpent* is autobiographical must be considered as must the claim that it was a cathartic exercise on Gunn's part to assuage the guilt of his alleged affair with Margaret MacEwen.

From reports in the biography, and from *The Atom of Delight*, there is little doubt that the novels contain reworkings of real-life episodes in Gunn's earlier life. It is not the purpose of this thesis to explore such matters in detail but it may be helpful to give a few examples. For instance it is known that Gunn himself played the fiddle and that, consequently, the episode in *The Drinking Well* where Iain Cattenach plays in the old part of Edinburgh may be based on fact. Daisy Gunn wrote:

> When he describes an Irishman dancing a jig on the causey stones of the Old Town to a Highland youth playing a fiddle, there may have been more to it than imagination. For as a youth he certainly played jigs and reels on the fiddle himself and even much later surprised his friends by borrowing on the spot a boy's mouth-organ and playing an Irish jig with such verve and precision that he brought Maurice Walsh to his feet, who added to the surprise by dancing a jig with the verve and precision of an Irishman who knew the classic steps.[13]

Hart and Pick also record that when Gunn was in London as a youth a person he shared digs with recited Tennyson's 'Airy Fairy Lilian' in circumstances which are identical to those described in *The Serpent.*[14] There can also be little doubt that the various intellectual enquiries of Iain Cattenach and Tom Mathieson into politics, nationalism and philosophy reflect Gunn's interest in, and exposure to, similar thinking in his formative years, supplemented by extensive subsequent reading.

The suggested links between *The Serpent* and the Margaret MacEwen affair are, however, by no means so clear cut. There is undoubtedly a veil of secrecy drawn over

---

[13]Hart and Pick, p. 34.
[14]*Ibid.* p. 40, and *The Serpent*, p. 16.

the relationship between Tom and Janet but this is replicated in the relationships of other characters in *The Serpent*, notably Jimmy and Flora Macdonald, and indeed elsewhere in Gunn's *œuvre*, and cannot be regarded as being exclusively a feature of the relationship between Tom and Janet.[15] Objectively, there are few points of contact between their relationship and that of Gunn and MacEwen, as described by Hart and Pick. In the latter case there seems to have been a mutual attraction but, as Gunn was not prepared to jeopardise his marriage, MacEwen remained single, resigned to a relationship which would, consequently, be furtive and haphazard.[16] By contrast, in *The Serpent*, only Tom feels a lasting love, as Janet switches her affection to Donald Munro, the Minister's son. Interestingly, Tom Mathieson distinguishes between sexual instinct and romantic notions of love, which he calls a man-made mystery. He suggests, by implication, that his relationship with Janet may have been more successful had he been more like Donald Munro and Jimmy Macdonald and not sacrificed sexual instincts to the conventions of romantic love - which again seems to have little in common with Gunn's relationship with Margaret MacEwen.[17] After Janet's death it is Tom who remains single with only memories to comfort him. If there is a connection between the real world and Gunn's fictionalized version then it is in mirror image. In *The Serpent*, the story of Tom and Winnie seems to have more in common with the reality of the Gunn and MacEwen relationship; Tom could not tell Winnie that he loved her, because he did not. Gunn never told Margaret MacEwen that he loved her, possibly for similar reasons.[18]

---

[15]*The Serpent,* p. 74
[16]Hart and Pick, p. 128.
[17]*The Serpent*, p. 56 See also p. 163 for the extension of these ideas to Tom's relationship with Janet.
[18]*Ibid.* pp. 29 - 30, and Hart and Pick, p 134.

Margery McCulloch does not find the depiction of Gunn's 'love theme or of his young women characters satisfactory'.[19] However, in *The Serpent*, Tom and Janet's relationship is seen exclusively through the eyes of Tom who, despite being 'The Atheist', the daring freethinker, seems peculiarly ill at ease with women. Holding court in his shop, Tom repeatedly told his audience about Glasgow prostitutes, a subject which seems to have held great fascination for him, and yet he fled from the 'Scarlet Woman' in Glasgow, as the youthful Gunn did in London.[20] Perhaps the reason for Gunn's silence about *The Serpent* has less to do with his affair with Margaret and more with the fact that it reveals, through its hero, his own shortcomings in matters of the heart. A direct link between his writing and his hidden affair also seems unlikely as all Gunn's novels were produced in typescripts prepared from manuscript drafts by his wife, who would surely have been suspicious.

Another suggestion of Gunn's biographers is that Gunn seeks to work out the tragedy of his wife's miscarriage in his writings. This seems altogether more probable as, although he also kept this whole affair secret, it was at least a secret shared with his wife and one which could, therefore, be referred to obliquely in his prose without causing 'the typist' too many problems. The nature of this tragedy remains unknown other than that it had a domestic setting. Jess Campbell, Gunn's second cousin, in a conversation with the author of this thesis, expressed the view that the firearm accident that caused Gunn, progressively, to lose the sight of one eye, was the shock which brought on Daisy's early labour and miscarriage. In *The Serpent*, it is significant that Tom's brother died at birth as a result of a domestic accident; an accident at home also caused Janet's child to abort, leading to her own death.[21] It can perhaps be speculated

---

[19]McCulloch, p. 141.
[20]*The Serpent*, pp. 18 - 20, and Hart and Pick, p. 40.
[21]*Ibid.* p. 8 and pp. 208 - 218.

that, by allowing Janet to die along with the child, Gunn avoided the need to deal with Tom and Janet's continuing relationship, a task that, given the shortcomings mentioned above, he may have lacked the confidence to attempt. The miscarriage theme reappears in the other 'private' novel, *The Shadow*, and will be discussed further later.

Thus far it is apparent that, whilst there are undoubtedly autobiographical elements embedded within these novels, and possibly also an element of cathartic writing, they cannot be regarded as directly autobiographical. The view already expressed, that Gunn's novels represent an amalgam based on his own experience and that of his brothers and close relatives, remains valid.

Having discounted a predominantly autobiographical theme, the significance of the title, 'The Biographical extension', can be further considered. Unlike chapter four, which is also in two parts, there is no overarching chapter title to impose unity on the chapter as a whole. Consequently, the title of this part can only be viewed in relation to the title of the first part, 'the wisdom of boyhood'.

Highland River, which featured in this chapter's first part, depicts its hero's growth from boy to adult equally as strongly as the novels allocated to this part of the chapter, and yet it does not appear alongside them. It must be concluded that the 'Biographical extension' cannot relate to the generic growth of specific boys introduced in part one, and a deeper significance must be sought for Gunn's choice. The first part of the chapter is concerned with boyhood wisdom and its attainment, and demonstrates that this wisdom is principally concerned with vision, the ability to see one's surroundings clearly and to take delight in them. These surroundings were specifically Highland, and the wisdom firmly rooted in the tradition of the people, from whom some of the learning was derived. The novels in this part each show their protagonists having a Highland boyhood, leaving for the city, and then returning to their homeland. On their

return they need to be able to recover, or to have retained, boyhood wisdom as adults. This cycle of learning and subsequent return provides a plausible definition of 'the Biographical extension'.

This still leaves the problem of the exclusion of *Highland River* as the above criteria apply to it as well as to *The Serpent* and *The Drinking Well*. The thing that differentiates *Highland River* from the other two is that there is no evidence that Kenn actually stayed in his homeland to commence the process of regeneration. In the case of *The Serpent* and *The Drinking Well*, the protagonists do return, with differing degrees of willingness and against all the odds - but then the salmon in its regenerative journey also swims against the stream - and did stay. In doing so benefits accrued to the community as will become clear. Regenerative return of this sort is the key and makes the concept of 'The Man Who Came Back' so important to Gunn's vision.

In this vision of 'The Man Who Came Back', a movement between the city and the country is a major feature and, apart from a physical movement, there is also the matter of the transfer of skills and ideas between the two sites. Such issues will be considered in the following parts of this study under the general headings of religious and urban influences, before considering 'The Man Who Came Back' motif in greater detail.

The religious dimension

The Serpent contains the strongest critique of organised religion to be found in any of Gunn's novels and, as religion impacted greatly on community life, it is appropriate that it is considered. Gunn depicted: the coming of Christianity in *Sun Circle*; the priests lending support to the landlords rather than their flock in *Butcher's Broom* (a subject tackled more ferociously by Fionn MacColla in his novel *And the Cock Crew*);[22] and God himself in *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*, but these come later in the meta-novel's structure. Thus far in the plot there has been little comment about organised religion apart from the opening part of *The Lost Glen* which, because of its similarities to the two novels under consideration, will also be touched on here.

The criticism of religion, as disclosed in *The Serpent* in particular, is only partially Biblical, being reserved mainly for the Calvinist Church and its hold over the people. Fionn MacColla, a contemporary of Gunn. shared this view and his dramatic dialogue *Ane Tryall of Heretiks* argued that the Calvinist concept of the Elect was heretical.[23] Tom Mathieson, 'The Atheist', is a freethinker and, following Gunn's assertion that this was a 'personal' novel, it is tempting to see Gunn in this role. He was neither a churchgoer nor a church member but whether he had no belief in God is not so certain. In *The Serpent* Tom Mathieson 'had never had any interest in God, [. . .] he had always dodged Him'.[24] This is very reminiscent of a comment in 'Trees in Church', a chapter in *The Atom of Delight*, where Gunn says:

> That God did a lot of haunting at times there is no doubt, but when this happened, say in church, the boy drew his circle so closely around him

[22]Fionn MacColla, *And the Cock Crew* (Glasgow: William MacLellan, 1945).
[23]Fionn MacColla, *Ane Tryall of Heretiks* (Collieston, Aberdeenshire: Slains, 1962). The argument is extended in his later works *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* (Edinburgh: Macdonald, 1967) and *Move up John*, ed. by John Herdman (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1994).
[24]*The Serpent*, p. 103.

> that he could feel it. God wasn't going to get past that circle if he could help it. No fear![25]

It is at least possible that Gunn went to these lengths to preserve his essential self - what he talks of as his second self - because he retained a belief in God. However, it is not Gunn as an individual that is of concern but rather Gunn in his role as observer and recorder of Highland life. In this context Gunn distinguishes between a basic faith and the observances of the Church. As early as 1928 Gunn had identified such observances as a stultifying factor to the growth of the Scottish character. He assumed, for the very first time, the pseudonym Dane M'Neil (later to become Dane McNeil), the name he adopted, principally, for the writing of journalism, often of a political nature, and wrote:

> The Scots character, the distinctive Scottish mind, has merely been denied self-expression, has been inhibited and contorted, by ascertainable factors, such as, *inter alia*, the loss of government of her own affairs and the acquisition of a too rigid Calvinism.[26]

In a 1930 symposium Gunn again accuses the Church of not having stood up for the people against the excesses of 'market forces' which, as was obvious from chapter one, he saw as being the principal cause of the near-terminal decline of Highland communities. On this crucial subject he asks:

> What is the Church doing at this most crucial moment in Scotland's history, when it looks as if not only the true culture of our race were passing, but the very race itself? What fight is the Church putting up, not for itself as an organised body, but for that far greater thing, the traditional distinction and freedom of the Scottish spirit? One cannot read of the 'clearances' and think kindly of a Church that largely found in them a temporal benefit. What about this more hidden but possibly more deadly because final 'clearance'?[27]

---

[25] *Atom of Delight*, p. 92.
[26] Dane M'Neil, "Defensio Scotorum: a reply to W. S. Morrison', in *The Scots Magazine*, Vol. 9, No. 1, April 1928, p. 57.
[27] Dane M'Neil, 'Sea and Land - and Finance: The Church's great silence', in *The Healing of the Nation: The Scottish Church and a waiting people.* A Symposium ed. by Rev. J. W. Stevenson (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1930), p. 91.

The answers to the questions posed, as recorded in *The Serpent* (and *Butcher's Broom*, which will be considered in section three), are neither positive nor complimentary.

His attacks are, however, aimed at the observances of Calvinism rather than belief itself. Towards the end of *The Serpent* Tom Mathieson comforts his dying mother by reading to her from the Bible. This may seem unusual for an atheist - and is certainly in marked contrast to Joyce's Stephen Dedalus who refused to pray with his dying mother - and perhaps serves to highlight the distinctions between Biblical faith and the trappings of organised religion.[28] Tom seems to voice Gunn's beliefs when he says:

> I know you often wondered why I wouldn't go to church. But the trouble with a lot of these men, like William Bulbreac, is that they're so full of themselves and so sure they're right. They're only happy when they make you feel like a sinner. Is it St. Paul who says that joy is next to godliness? But to them joy is a sin. And if you dare question them, they grow angry and threaten you with the bad place. They're solemn because to be solemn makes them feel important. The last thing they would do is turn the other cheek. No fear! They want to have the power of the lash. And the only real sin is to question their belief and their authority.[29]

Elsewhere in Gunn's work these observations on authority are extended to holders of power generally but are here attributed to organised religion, specifically the human element within Church organisation, for example Tom Mathieson claims the 'mystery' surrounding religion is man-made.[30] The negative effect of Calvinism, and the Elect, on the community is also graphically referred to in *The Drinking Well* when a street-corner orator refers to a football match between capitalists and landlords, using the earth as a ball, where 'there was no hope for those knocked off [the earth]. For standing in each goal was a parson, guarding the only way to the eternal net'.[31]

---

[28]James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 14.
[29]*The Serpent*, p. 243.
[30]*Ibid.* p. 56.
[31]*The Drinking Well*, p. 146.

By seeing Gunn's individual novels as contributory volumes to a meta-novel, it has already been noted how names re-occur, often with symbolic meaning, attached to characters with the same archetypal essence. William Bulbreac, the Church elder Tom spoke of to his mother, was equated by Ian Grimble with 'Holy Willie'.[32] If that view seems extravagant, some corroboration can be obtained from *The Lost Glen***.** In that novel, although not in the earlier serialized version, the cause of Ewan's disgrace is told. He was at college in Edinburgh reading theology and was being funded by his uncle William, 'an admirable man not only in the eyes of the world but in the eyes of the Church. Out of "nothing", he had "worked himself up" - "from the lowest rung" into a "pillar of the Church"';[33] another Elder, another William, another 'Holy Willie'! Despite the fact that he was a publican (and a sinner?)[34] he used Ewan's end of term party as an excuse to cut off all financial support, leaving Ewan with no alternative but to return home a failure.[35] Symbolism exists, then, in the choice of the name William but symbolism is at its strongest and most subtle in the name 'Holy Willie' gives to Tom, 'The Serpent'. This occurs during a confrontation between William Bulbreac, Calvinist Church Elder, and Tom, the sceptic. The argument, which follows exactly the kind of power struggle referred to in the earlier quotation, is couched in analytical and totally destructive terms, with William suggesting that Tom would be struck down for his blasphemy. William, associating the devil with the Edenic serpent, tells Tom:

> For I see the serpent within you, I see its evil coils twisting in your body and in your brain, and I see that you have delivered yourself to the serpent, and I say unto you that if you do not repent, and cast yourself down into the ashes of abasement and humility, and pray to the Almighty to be delivered of the slime and horror of the serpent, I say unto you, *and it will come to pass*, that you will be devoured of the

[32]*Neil M. Gunn Memorial Lecture*, p. [12].
[33]*The Lost Glen*, p. 23.
[34]*Ibid.* p. 23.
[35]*Ibid.* pp. 39 - 40.

> serpent and your final end will be the eternal torment and punishment of the damned.[36]

The scene culminates in Tom's father, Adam, entering the shop, raising his stick to strike his son for his perceived blasphemy, and being struck dead with a heart attack - another 'fall of Adam' involving a serpent.[37] Although Adam's heart is known to be weak, given the symbolism, Gunn here seems to be depicting God and Calvinism as being in opposition. When Tom does die he is a serene and contented old man and, whilst he is accompanied in his final moments by a serpent, it joins him for his human warmth rather than to devour him.[38] The ending of the novel is ambiguous but there is nothing in the text to suggest that Tom died from a snake bite rather than a heart attack and Hart and Pick claim the ambiguity was unintentional.[39]

Although the symbolism principally associated with the serpent is that of the Biblical Edenic despoiler, Gunn does invite consideration of other ways the serpent can be interpreted symbolically in his eponymous novel. In his conversation with the shepherd during his last hours Tom recounts other, and essentially Celtic, attributes of the serpent. It was, at one and the same time, earth-spirit, symbol of wisdom and symbol of healing.[40] These are all positive values, unlike those attributed to the serpent by William Bulbreac, and are well attested to by F. Marian McNeill who writes of the serpent:

> The Serpent, which symbolises wisdom, is probably a form of earth spirit. There are no snakes in Ireland, and there the place of the Serpent is taken by the Salmon. (This is in accordance with the recognised folk-practice of substituting some object that is locally feasible for one that is not.) In Scotland, where both snakes (adders) and salmon are plentiful, we find both symbols.[41]

---

[36]*The Serpent*, p. 151.
[37]*The Serpent,* pp. 148 - 152.
[38]*Ibid.* p. 255.
[39]Hart and Pick, p. 192.
[40]*The Serpent*. pp. 177 - 178.
[41]F. Marian McNeill, *The Silver Bough, Vol. 1: Scottish Folklore and Folk-belief* (1957) (Glasgow:

The similarities between *Highland River* and *The Serpent* have already been commented upon but it is interesting that the symbolism central to each work relates, in its own way, to an earth-spirit. This is of more than passing interest because Gunn, through Tom, says that the earth 'is pretty nearly my philosophy, my religion, and everything now. But she has taken a lot of knowing'.[42]

Gunn's account of the serpent's healing qualities relates to 'serpent stones', round flat stones with holes in them which, when placed in water, impart to it a healing virtue; a remedy, it is suggested, still resorted to by local people. Of these McNeill says:

> Special virtue attached to the Serpent Stone [. . .] which is occasionally found among the heather. According to a Lewis isleman, 'A number of serpents (adders) congregating at certain times form themselves into a knot and move round and round on the stone until a hole is worn. They pass and re-pass after each other through the hole, which by-and-by becomes hard. It is this slime which gives the stone the healing properties it is supposed to possess.'[43]

Gunn gives a further attribute of the serpent when he says, 'The old Gaelic image of eternity was the wheel made by the serpent when it put its tail in its mouth'.[44] Outside the Celtic tradition, the serpent also has strong links with healing, being usually depicted wound around the rod of Æsculapius. Grimble has suggested that, in antiquity, the snake was revered, amongst other things, for the healing quality of its saliva, which he claims to be an accepted fact, and not dissimilar from the alleged source of the virtue of 'Serpent Stones'.[45]

This takes the argument a little bit away from the religious dimension but it does suggest lines of enquiry which must be followed up as the themes of this part of

---

William MacLellan, 1977), p. 76.
[42]*The Serpent*, p. 178.
[43]McNeill, p. 91.
[44]*The Serpent*, p. 169.
[45]*Neil M. Gunn Memorial Lecture*, p. [12].

chapter two are considered. If Tom is really 'The Serpent', consideration must be given not only to the free-thinking and atheism which caused the epithet but also to the Celtic attributes of the same symbol which Gunn has plainly set out. The thesis, as it progresses, will show how Tom Mathieson represents the earth, wisdom and healing. This will be discussed in the core part of this section relating to the theme of 'The Man Who Came Back', an expression capable of a secondary, religious, interpretation. When Tom was being sought by his mother on the hillside he sees her 'while he was yet a little way off', the phraseology used in the Biblical story of the Prodigal Son, a symbolical welcoming back into the fold of the returning son this time, appropriately, by the mother who Gunn depicts as being central to community life.[46]

[46] *The Serpent*, pp. 223 - 224. For the centrality of Tom's mother see also p. 7.

The urban influence

When the contributory novels to the first part of chapter two were considered it was suggested that Gunn's inclusion of 'The Little Red Cow' and 'Machinery' in *Young Art and Old Hector* may point to the way in which the urban and the rural can be of mutual benefit one to the other; that theirs is a symbiotic relationship. In his vision of Highland regeneration, Gunn places great importance on 'The Man Who Came Back', the returning native who brings with him new knowledge and new skills learned in the city. In this part of the chapter we begin to see the benefits that the city can bring, although not without pain and conflict, but we will need to wait until chapter four is discussed before the other half of the equation is fully seen.

In *The Serpent*, Tom, learning his trade in Glasgow, is exposed to Darwinism and becomes a freethinking atheist who questions the teaching of the Elders. Later, he challenges the Calvinist Church's rigid doctrine that is accepted unquestioningly by those in the rural community, especially those of his parents' generation. Darwinism and atheism, as described in that novel, go hand in hand with the equally new concept of socialism. Iain Cattenach is also exposed to socialism in *The Drinking Well* but, in his case, there is a greater exposure to the embryonic Scottish Nationalist movement.

Gunn's personal interest in socialism and nationalism is amply evidenced by his many contributions to a wide range of publications during his career. These articles were often published under the pseudonym of Dane McNeil, especially prior to his resignation from the Civil Service, so as to preserve a degree of anonymity and to distance himself from what might be considered anti-establishment views. Many of the issues aired in these articles are explored in some detail in the two contributory novels to this part of his second chapter. The city is, again, the place where these ideas are formulated and disseminated.

Tom Mathieson and Iain Cattenach, in Glasgow and Edinburgh respectively, are exposed to different new ideologies. In the earlier book, *The Serpent* (1943), the new ideology is that of socialism whilst, in *The Drinking Well* (1947), it is Scottish Nationalism. Taking the two books chronologically there seems to be a development from socialism to nationalism which may reflect the way that Gunn himself assimilated the new thinking. He was a life-long socialist but the majority of his direct political involvement was with Scottish Nationalism. In *The Serpent*, Tom's acceptance of the new thinking changed him and alienated him, not only from his friends at home, but also those in the city. He is:

> Like one converted to a new religion who sees no more his friends as they have been, nor the streets, nor the habitual things that men do, nor all the ways of life.[47]

It is, of course, precisely because of this change that he is, in turn, able to effect change on his return to the Highlands. The concept of socialism as a 'new' religion is an interesting one and is reinforced by Gunn's choice of words. At a Keir Hardie meeting the conversation turns to Robert Owen and, in a parody of the opening of the Gospel of St. John, Gunn has Hardie say 'The idea was in the beginning, but the word was with Robert Owen'.[48] The point is reinforced later in the book where Tom says:

> You have got 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'.[49]

Iain Cattenach is also introduced to socialism as he listens to the street orators on Castle Mound in Edinburgh but, in *The Drinking Well*, the ideology which is given the highest profile is that of Nationalism. Gunn's personal concern for Scotland's loss of self-government and, thereby, true self-determination is here given full expression.

---

[47] *The Serpent*, p. 28
[48] *Ibid.* p.23.
[49] *Ibid.* p. 67.

The subject is introduced not through the medium of past glories but rather in terms of economics, Gunn's principal concern. Listening to one speaker, Iain muses on the fact that he talks proudly of 'Scotland' rather than:

> 'The country' or 'this country', a place that wandered away down to the English Channel, and across to a bit of Ireland, and vaguely faded into distant parts of the globe. Where the English talked of England quite naturally, the Scots referred vaguely to 'this country'.[50]

Earlier comments about England's quasi-colonial rule of Scotland, implemented through language, law and education, might suggest this loss of identity results from English policy, whether deliberate or not. However, to concentrate his listeners' minds on the positives rather than to cast the Scots in the role of victims, the speaker lays the blame for the secondary status of Scotland firmly with the Scots themselves for:

> If the people of Scotland wanted to take their derelict country in hand, to govern and rebuild it, no power on earth could stop them from doing so - and certainly not the English! Scotland had the resources, she had the wealth, she was capable of developing one of the most perfectly balanced and richest economies in Europe. Yet what did we find everywhere? - unemployed, stagnant yards, derelict areas, slums, depopulation, with the young men and the young women leaving the crofts, leaving the farms, leaving the sea, to emigrate or to come to a city like this.[51]

The condition of Scotland, exemplified by this quotation, exactly relates to the state of the Highlands Gunn had identified in his opening chapter. The causes are later identified as being the loss of national roots and self-respect. The orator says:

> If you want to talk of the mighty things of the mind, we will. Let me start like this. When the normal man is down and out, he not only loses respect for the existing economic dispensation, he loses respect for himself. Once get him into that condition and his creative faculties are affected. Others must do things for him now. He has lost initiative

---

[50] *The Drinking Well*, pp. 147- 148.
[51] *Ibid.* p. 148.

> for he has lost two fundamental things: first, belief in himself; second, belief in that traditional pattern of life which being his could alone help him. If that is true of the individual, it is true of the group, and so finally of the nation.[52]

If the cause of the problem at regional and national levels lies, ultimately, with the individual's loss of faith and roots, then the remedy also lies with the individual. If a recovery of his faith, and a reconnection with his roots takes place, the negative trend will be reversed, and will progressively bring benefit to the community and the nation. Here Gunn's vision for the regeneration of the country, especially the Highlands, becomes clearer, showing how his apparently conflicting concerns for national regeneration and for the individual and his 'state of mind' can be reconciled.

These arguments make a great impression on Iain Cattenach, the agent of Gunn's regenerative vision in *The Drinking Well*, but, to further personalise the message, Gunn deliberately turns the focus onto the Highlands by having his speaker give a *resumé* of the agricultural position incorporating a positive message:

> Then, after shortly tracing the history of crofting and hill farming, from the old economy through the evictions, to sheep, and then to deer, he got down to what might be done for hill farming, particularly hill sheep-and-cattle farming, to-day. He referred to the latest results by experts carrying out experiments on such land, whereby the grazings were enriched, the winter feed increased, and generally the stock doubled.[53]

This is quite specific to Iain's position and defines his potential sphere of influence.

The city, apart from being where new ideas and ideologies are encountered and assimilated, was a place of employment and training. It was the desire to see their children 'get on' in the world that had prompted mothers like Iain's to try and secure opportunities for them in the city. In the majority of cases these opportunities had the additional result of continuing the depopulation and decline of the Highlands. This is

---

[52] *The Drinking Well*, p. 179.
[53] *Ibid.* p. 149.

something Gunn sought to reverse, but he did see benefits accruing from time spent learning new skills in the city. In the two novels under consideration the skills learned are very different, yet both yield benefits back home. Tom learns the very practical skills of clock making and repairing whilst Iain trains for the legal profession, with particular reference to estate management. Iain is also able to develop his interest in modern agrarian methods and theory, as well as learning about ailments and infections affecting sheep. In return, he makes a positive contribution to his employer's practice from his own practical knowledge of sheep farming in the Grampians.

Mention has been made earlier about the non-monetary economy of the traditional Gaelic-speaking Highland communities. Even if barter was no longer practised as a total system, because subsistence farming had previously made up the bulk of the Highland economy the old ways lingered on and a cash-based economy was still in its infancy. By being exposed to life in a city Tom, in particular, became familiar with the workings of a monetary system, which proved beneficial as he developed his own business later. He was also able to make use of city contacts when purchasing goods.

In Gunn's vision, the medium for bringing these new skills and new ideas into the consciousness of the Highland communities, thereby initiating change through their interaction with pre-existing ideas, is closely associated with the concept of the returning native, 'The Man Who Came Back'.

The Man Who Came Back

'The wisdom of boyhood' equates to a child's vision, an ability to see surroundings untrammelled by the cares and pressures of adult life. The pervading greyness of the adult 'state of mind' in Gunn's first chapter is transformed into a colourful and joyous vision of the boys' Highland surroundings. 'The Biographical Extension' continues to depict a deep love of homeland.

When gender issues were considered earlier, it was argued that, whilst Gunn recorded the established, and different, roles of men and women, he made no gender-based value judgements. Consequently, the appearance of a female archetype to balance the male one is unsurprising. In *The Drinking Well* this is Maraig, who lives 'where things are bright and [. . .] happy',[54] equivalent to Old Hector and 'his house of the young men's *ceilidh*'.[55] Maraig is mirrored by Margad in *The Serpent* and this archetype will return as Grannybeg in *Sun Circle* and, in its most developed form, as Mairi in *Butcher's Broom*. There is a tendency for the female archetype to be darker and more elemental than the male, with something of the spae-wife in her make up. She is described as being unworldly, different, or just plain mad, but the girls find her approachable, as the boys did Hector. However, these commentators, whether author, narrator or character, are invariably male and consequently the female archetype's air of mystery may just reflect Gunn's shortcomings in his relationships with, and his lack of knowledge of, women, which were alluded to earlier. Conversely these attributes of the female archetype may reflect the relative longevity of matriarchal traditions. According to Grimble, Gunn was well aware from his study of comparative religion and mythology that 'the Goddesses came before the Gods. Every time!'[56]

'The wisdom of boyhood', once retained, needs to be taken forward into adulthood to challenge the prevailing 'state of mind' encountered in chapter one. Gunn's male

---

[54]*The Drinking Well,* p. 102.
[55]*Morning Tide,* p. 166.
[56]*Neil M. Gunn Memorial Lecture*, p. [11].

and female archetypes have both retained this youthful wisdom into adulthood, linked to a deep love of their homeland, and are clearly intended as role models. They are also channels for the transference of communal wisdom, history and lore to the young.

As neither archetype ever left their home area, departure cannot be regarded as a necessity in Gunn's schema, although his concentration on those who left and returned makes it clear that he sees them fulfilling a key role in Highland regeneration, his vision for which is encapsulated in a film script he wrote in 1943, the year *The Serpent* was published, appropriately entitled *Blue Print for the Highlands*.[57] The problems of the Highlands, as identified in chapter one, appear again here but in this work, like the meta-novel itself, Gunn seeks to suggest remedies. *Blue Print for the Highlands* describes four Highland servicemen, who in civilian life had worked in the core Highland industries of fishing, crofting and gamekeeping, returning home on leave and discussing with Cameron, an engineer, the state of the contemporary Highlands. Cameron asks 'What do you expect to come back to?' Their replies are illuminating.

Dave: Back to? There's nothing to come back to in the Highlands. When this show's over - I'm for the Colonies.

Jimmy: Well, I don't know. I used to be on a drifter - but years before the war the drifters were up to the gunnels in debt. Unless we get back the export markets, it's going to be a poor lookout for fishermen.

Colin: That's the trouble. No one has done anything for the Highlands, except destroy them. I'm a crofter; well, you know how the land in the glens was cleared to make room for sheep. [. . .] Then the sheep didn't pay, so in place of the sheep they got deer. [. . .] Now the deer don't pay - we want the land back for farming.

Andrew: And take away our jobs on the estates? Since I was a boy [he is about 50] the only sure jobs in the Highlands have been as gamekeepers and estate workers. I've been on the hill all my life - you can't expect me to give that up for nothing, for just fancies.[58]

---

[57]Neil M. Gunn, *Blue Print for the Highlands* (Unpublished: National Library of Scotland, Deposit 209).

[58]*Ibid.* p. 2

Even Andrew's more positive response is tempered later in the work when he concedes that, even in his trade, things are not what they used to be:

> The old days won't come back. There won't be much more gillying now for people who come up once a year for their pleasure.[59]

In Gunn's 'Blue Print', the suggested answer lies with hydro-electric power. Cameron, himself a Highlander, 'left twenty years ago - like thousands of other lads. It was either that or poverty, with no chance of a decent job'.[60] Cameron, however, epitomizes Gunn's 'Man Who Came Back' for he learned to be an engineer 'down south' and was now returning to use this skill to revitalise his homeland through the creation of hydro-electric schemes.[61] Not only would this provide short-term benefit by employing ten thousand men for ten years on the construction project but also would, in the longer term, provide continuing benefits to the community - for the crofter, the prospect of electric light, electric milking machines and electric powered sawmills; for the fisherman, electrically powered canning factories, as in Nova Scotia, would prevent waste, and refrigeration plants would enable smaller ports to remain viable. Gunn even suggests, although not directly linked to the hydro-electric project, that the gamekeeper could have a role in wildlife conservation for the benefit of future generations, an ecologically friendly development.

Gunn was a great advocate of hydro-electricity, as his journalism attests, but the point he makes here is not the development of hydro-electric power *per se*, important though that was, but that, given adequate training, it could be introduced into the Highlands by Highlanders themselves. Once again, Gunn seeks to put the onus for regeneration on the Scots themselves. Cameron needed to go south to train as an engineer but, by choosing to come back to the Highlands to make use of his new skills,

---

[59] *Blue Print for the Highlands,* p. 10
[60] *Ibid.* p. 3
[61] *Ibid.* p. 3

he could begin the process of regeneration, making the concept of the 'Man Who Came Back' central to Gunn's vision.

Gunn's vision is also worked out in the contributory novels to this part of chapter two, especially *The Drinking Well.* It is clear from a conversation between Iain and Angus that not all Highlanders feel the pull of the homeland after they have departed. After Angus returns to Edinburgh after a brief holiday at home, Iain asks:

> 'Had a good time?'
> 'Not bad. Sort of dull a bit. And the weather wasn't up to much.'
> 'Wasn't it?'
> 'No.' Angus stretched his legs. 'Not much doing.'
> Iain looked at him, the smile in his eyes. 'Glad to get back here, in fact?'
> 'Well, I was so looking forward to going home, and then - I don't know - there was so little to do. You weren't there and - now and then time hung a bit heavy.'
> 'You wouldn't like to live there all your life?'
> 'Honestly, I don't think I could stand it.' Angus smiled, as if amused. 'The whole place seemed changed. Queer wasn't it?'[62]

Gunn's salmon symbolism also extends to this behaviour. In *Highland River*, when Kenn is musing on the life of the salmon in his daydream at school, the salmon in its Atlantic phase is described as having 'a sultan's life' feeding on the 'red shrimps that he loved' which were 'about him like manna'. These 'had got over their restlessness and would never more return to the streams where new salmon are conceived. Not only had their desire faded, but their potency. They were in the abyss for ever'.[63] In human terms, some who left the Highlands remained away, prospering and growing fat like the salmon. These, if not physically impotent, are unable to effect a regeneration of their own land and have no place in Gunn's vision, In this, as in Celtic mythology, the salmon, symbolising both earth-spirit and wisdom, do return.

Iain Cattenach, mirroring the experience of Kenn's salmon, feels the call of his

---

[62]*The Drinking Well*, p. 209.
[63]*Highland River*, pp. 43 - 46.

homeland strongly and actively seeks to return. In truth he had not wanted to depart but Gunn makes it clear that his sojourn in the city made him a better catalyst for change, as was Cameron in *Blue Print for the Highlands*. Prior to Iain's departure to take up his position in an Edinburgh lawyer's office, his return was foretold by Maraig who told him 'You're going now, but you will come back.'[64] In their conversation, return and a love of the land are, once again, explicitly linked. She asks:

> 'Do you want to go?'
> 'Well — what is there for a young fellow here?'
> She kept her eyes on him. 'There's the land, the bonny land of your country.'
> 'Much good you get out of the land nowadays!'
> 'All life comes up out of the land.'
> 'Maybe. But it doesn't give you a decent living.'
> 'It will give you everything, but on one condition.'
> 'What's that?'
> 'That you love the land'.[65]

Tom Mathieson, 'The Serpent', masquerading as the Celtic earth-spirit in its other manifestation, also returns home but with considerably less alacrity than Iain. In his case the call had a very human voice, that of his mother, rather than a deep emotional need but, having returned he also became a catalyst for change. His transition from youth to old age and serenity is traumatic but, at the end when he had earned the title of 'The Philosopher', he describes his feelings for the land in terms similar to those used by Maraig, saying:

> She [the earth] is pretty nearly my philosophy, my religion, and everything now. But she has taken a lot of knowing. [. . .] For at the end of the day, what's all the bother about? Simply about human relations, about how we are to live one with another on the old earth. That's all, ultimately. To understand one another, and to understand what we can about the earth, and in the process gather some peace of mind and, with luck, a little delight.[66]

---

[64]*The Drinking Well*, p. 99.
[65]*Ibid.* p. 96.
[66]*The Serpent*, p. 178.

The regenerative effects achieved as a result of the return of both Iain and Tom will be considered in turn. Iain's motivation bears a similarity to that of Cameron in *Blue Print for the Highlands* except that Iain's skills are agrarian and his sphere of influence restricted to sheep farming. Gunn's vision, first introduced *via* the political and philosophical debates of Iain's Edinburgh days, is given greater and more specific substance when Iain's own fever-induced vision is described. This sees Highland agriculture being revitalised by a combination of the community's existing knowledge and practice and scientific knowledge gained by Iain in the city. The execution of this scheme of regeneration, importantly, involves young Highland men. This vision within a vision is recorded thus:

> Iain's thought was spreading from his father all over the valley. Gradually it became a complete and exciting fantasy. All that he had learned, the new facts about soil and growth, varieties of grasses, the scourge of bracken not merely as a destroyer of pasture but as a breeding place of greenbottles, of the flies that 'struck' the sheep, infesting them with the deadly maggot, all began to fit into actual places, actual farms and crofts.
>
> But, of course, the older folk - he thought of them individually, saw each characteristic reaction - would smile. They knew the unchanging nature of hills and landlords. And though he could smile with their country humour, in his mind he knew he was right and would have to go beyond them. And 'beyond them' meant going, as for a discussion of a poaching foray, to fellows like Hamish and Hughie. These and others like them were the lads who would do it, once he got them roused up, once he got the knowledge in their minds and the light in their eyes.
>
> He was leading them now. It was exciting, for by heavens, there were intricate questions of land tenure, of market prices, of capital loans for stock, for hardy cattle that would enrich the ground, which the sheep exhausted, and tread down the young bracken, of fencing, of scarifying the heath and broadcasting seed, of all the things before which they were surely impotent.
>
> But why? Had the crofters who fought for their Act of 1886 been impotent? And what they, their forefathers, had done - couldn't we, the men of this generation do?

> Are we as sheep in a snowstorm waiting to be smothered? It would be worth it for the fun, if nothing else! It would bring back life.[67]

Although Gunn here, through Iain, talks of fantasy and impotence, this is just as much a 'Blue Print' for the Highlands as his earlier talk of hydro-electricity.

When Iain returns home, far from leading his peers, he is seen as both a failure and a source of shame to the community, especially once the circumstances surrounding his departure from Edinburgh become partially known.[68] This attitude is caused by a combination of pride and economics, and incorporates the propensity towards self-destructiveness Gunn identified in the Gael. A stubborn pride, a sense of morality and an element of face-saving coupled with inadequate communication, largely caused by the same reasons, means that faulty judgments are made but, once made, these are adhered to stoically without further debate. The economic argument runs: the Highlands are finished; there is no future there; and family sacrifices must be made to enable children to go to the city for education and better job prospects. This action accelerates the depopulation and decline, thus making the economic argument a self-fulfilling prophecy. Against this background any subsequent return is viewed as an act of gross ingratitude, a wilful squandering of opportunity purchased so dearly, in short, failure. The desire to return through a love of the land was largely incomprehensible, except, of course, to the archetypes.

Ewan's return in *The Lost Glen* runs parallel to that of Iain in that he was also seen as a failure and, rather than stay with this largely unjustified stigma, Ewan decided to leave again, an intention that was postponed because of his father's death. Ultimately Ewan was lost just as permanently to the sea. Iain's case is similar and, in *The*

---

[67] *The Drinking Well*, pp. 206 - 207.

[68] He left the office after an altercation with a senior colleague. His father, wrongly, assumed he was dismissed.

Drinking Well, he decides to leave home permanently rather than live with his proud, intransigent father as a failure.[69] At the end of the third part of the novel Iain leaves home, dashes out into the dark and, crossing a road, is knocked over by a car. The coda that follows employs a *deus ex machina* device to allow of a positive ending that, structurally, the novel does not support. It is clear, however, that this coda is crucial for conveying Gunn's message and to the development of the meta-novel.

The coda's positive ending is generally perceived as pure fantasy, landlords do not act like Henderson in this novel. His uncharacteristic view is that, if people leave the land, emigrate and prosper, his land is left denuded and of limited value whereas, if he provides the investment to effect change, the same people would have the chance to prosper in their own land, to the benefit of both landlord and community. He decides to take the risk, give Iain the tenancy of a tract of land and make financial assistance available, thereby enabling Iain's feverish vision to become reality. While Iain is in bed convalescing, Henderson calls a meeting of key members of the community and disseminates information which, partly through pride, they have not accumulated themselves. He makes it clear that Iain could return to his office job if he wished and that, far from being a failure, Iain is a son, a friend, and a neighbour of whom all can be proud. While this exercise in communication is continuing, Iain slips from his sick bed and leaves again but this time, living out another scene from his feverish vision, he goes to the Drinking Well, equated with the traditions of his people. It becomes clear that he has regained both faith in himself and links to his cultural roots, through his symbolic return to the well. Having regained the two things the loss of which the nationalist orator identified as causes of decline, regeneration can commence. Iain is found first by Maraig and then by Mary, his girl friend, as the 'happy ever after' ending

[69]In 'The Man Who Came Back' and *Back Home*, Iain does leave home, never more to return.

is invoked. As Maraig says to Mary 'be going with him - and watch his feet in the darkness'.[70] The movement from darkness to light has begun.

The coda points to the way in which Gunn sees regeneration being possible. It involves the retention of boyhood wisdom, with its love of the land and the ability to see clearly and positively. It involves the retention of the best traditional practices, supported by new skills learned in the city, and it involves a reforging of links between landlords and people severed during the Clearances. One reason for supposing that this section, for all its apparent improbability, is intended to be taken seriously is the reference to *The Grampians Desolate*. This is, as Iain describes, 'a poem - with long notes'[71] written by Alexander Campbell (1764 - 1824) and published in 1804. Campbell wrote about the Gael in the Grampians and the Western Isles and his work was triggered by a concern for the plight of the resident communities in the face of absentee and uninterested landlords; the clearance of the population to allow the maximum advantage to be obtained from the sheep-store system; and the resultant depopulation through emigration - all concerns which, a hundred and forty years later, were troubling Gunn. Of the less than satisfactory landlords, Campbell writes:

> Where now the guardian Chiefs, humane and just?
> Dispersed some wander - many sleep in dust -
> While some, to honour lost, mind naught save gain:-
> But few, alas! of sterling worth, remain! -
> Ah! how unlike the Chiefs, in times of old,
> Who, mindful of their kindred, not for gold,
> Nor sordid gain, nor selfish narrow views
> The bonds of sacred friendship would unloose:-[72]

---

[70] *The Drinking Well*, p. 464.
[71] *The Drinking Well,* p. 438.
Alexander Campbell, *The Grampians Desolate* (Edinburgh: Manners and Miller, 1804).
[72] *The Grampians Desolate*, p. 7.

This question, which is equally pertinent to Gunn's novel of the Clearances, *Butcher's Broom*, is appropriate in the context of *The Drinking Well*, because Campbell, like Gunn, was seeking solutions. The profits of his book were to be contributed to a 'Fund of Aid for Waste Land Cultivation' which would seek to place dispossessed crofters on uncultivated land both in Scotland and England as an alternative to losing population to emigration. More important for the present study is that Campbell records the results of an experiment that took place on the estates of the Earl of Breadalbane in Perthshire. He was clearly one of the old style of landlord and he actively promoted improvements on his own land. Campbell records that:

> His Lordship had for years viewed with regret the erroneous mode of management followed by his small tenants, a mode prevalent in almost all the districts of the highlands. But the great population, the small size of the farms, and the prejudices of the people, all seemed to combine as insurmountable bars to any innovation. By enlarging the farms, a very considerable increase of revenue might have been obtained, but the immediate consequence would have been emigration to a great extent. His Lordship's object, however, was to retain the people, and, at the same time, to make them instrumental in the improvement of the country. With this patriotic view, a new arrangement was made of the farms. [. . .] Moderate rents were put on these: Leases of a reasonable length (generally 15 years) were given, and a proper mode of cultivation applicable to such possessions, prescribed.[73]

In *The Drinking Well*, Henderson is cast by Gunn in the role of a latter-day Earl of Breadalbane. Of the result of the actions of landlords in general he says 'it's been damned selfish. It's drained the land. "Extractive farming". [. . .] The whole thing has been a scandal'.[74] Henderson himself is a 'Man Who Came Back', having spent time in the Colonies, where he met many other Highlanders who had emigrated and, like him, had made good. He now wishes to invest in, and institute experimental improvements

---

[73]*The Grampians Desolate*, pp. 308 - 309.
[74]*The Drinking Well*, p. 441.

on, his own land using local labour. This creates a working link between landlords, in their earlier guise of being 'mindful of their kindred', and those working the land. The other 'Man Who Came Back', Iain, is expected to be the leading light in the practical aspects of the experiment and, through his own enthusiasm and knowledge, to involve his peers. Iain's feverish fantasy has come true. Gunn, legitimately, seeks to justify his very positive vision by linking his narrative to that of *The Grampians Desolate* and its record of a successful exercise carried out by an enlightened landlord. Campbell reports:

> Though the change only took place 6 or 7 years ago, the barren spots they have already brought into cultivation (carrying on at the same time the triple operation of clearing, draining, and inclosing) is astonishing. The valuation of the expense of the improvements made amounts to £9000, about the third of which sum has been paid to them in premiums.[75]

A clear indication that, by instigating land improvement schemes, even acquisitive landlords could improve the lot of their dependant tenants without financial detriment.

Tom Mathieson, the more reluctant returner, is, nevertheless, able to effect change in his community by virtue of the skills he brought back with him from the city. His manual dexterity enabled him to develop a business to supplement his crofting, the making and repairing of domestic furniture. This led in time to the setting up of a retail outlet in the village, supplying clocks and other domestic articles sourced through his contacts in Glasgow. This may seem mundane but it brought opportunities to the village that did not exist before. More innovative was his introduction of bicycles to the village. They had never been seen there before but, of course, were commonplace in the city. Starting with bicycles, Tom's garage eventually became geared to the motor vehicle, epitomized by 'the red petrol pump' which appears

---

[75] *The Grampians Desolate*, p. 309.

periodically in the course of the narrative as it is viewed by Tom during his laborious ascent to the heights of Taruv.[76] Figuratively speaking, the very appearance of the land has been changed as a result of Tom's direct involvement.

Tom's most lasting legacy to the community, enshrined in his various nicknames, lies with the world of ideas even more than with practical skills but, even so, these ideas were very much a product of the city. When he first returned he was full of an evangelizing zeal and held court in his workshop talking with the other young men. This inevitably brought him into conflict with the older generation, the most obvious example being over his challenge to organised religion. His argument with William Bulbreac, couched in destructive analytical terms, showed Tom to be as bigoted as his adversary. However, afterwards, both sides tempered their positions, as will be seen.

It has been postulated that the stories 'The Little Red Cow' and 'Machinery' in *Young Art and Old Hector* are important because they emphasise the links between town and country, a symbiotic relationship bringing benefit to both. It is probably no coincidence that change, both physical and intellectual, is referred to in *The Serpent* in terms of machinery. As Tom, now 'The Philosopher', nears the end of his climb he reminisces with a shepherd about the old communal spirit that used to be in evidence at harvest, when everybody used to be involved. The shepherd says to Tom:

> 'And now not a single woman coming down at all. [. . .] What an extraordinary change there has been in less than a lifetime.'
> 'Machinery.' said the Philosopher. 'First the reaping hook, then the scythe, and now the binder.'
> 'Ay and the land is not cultivated as it was. It's cattle and sheep now, stock-rearing, and you don't need the same hands for that.'
> 'Machinery again,' said the Philosopher. 'The Clyde builds great steamships; the ships take grain across the seas; and you look at the ruins on the Heights of Taruv.'[77]

---

[76]*The Serpent*, p. 5 as an example.
[77]*The Serpent*, p. 172.

But Tom refuses to see Machinery solely in negative terms. When the shepherd expresses doubts as to whether the land has the resources to allow of regeneration, Tom replies, in terms reminiscent of Cameron in *Blue Print for the Highlands*:

> We have hardly touched them yet. What do you think all these big fellows are trying to get hold of Highland hydro-electric power for? The machine is finding out our land. The machine has taken away, the machine will give, blessed be the machine![78]

But it is the world of ideas that is now the focus of enquiry and it is interesting that the imagery of the machine is extended into this area as well. At the end of his life Tom, acknowledging that the argument he deployed against William Bulbreac was analytical and destructive, had this to say about that confrontation, a statement couched partly in Marxist terminology:

> And it's more than economics, in the sense that we are more than economics. [. . .] There is the superstructure of thought, especially, say, of religion. Just as the economic life ebbed, so did the religious. Science, with freethought, was the machine there. When William Bulbreac called me the Serpent he wasn't so far wrong. In my own small way, I was Antichrist. And the awful thing about the Antichrist is that he has nothing to put in the place of that which he destroys. For every personal problem is more than a personal problem: it is a communal one.[79]

Before considering the political beliefs Tom brought back from the city, it is worth stating that these new concepts were not brought back into a vacuum but came to challenge a pre-existing ideology, the nature of which should be first established.

The subjugation of the Highlands and its Gaelic culture and language through the medium of an officially imposed English language, law, and school curriculum has already been noted, as has the ambivalence displayed by certain characters towards the law. Old Hector makes a clear distinction between wrong-doing and law-breaking,

---

[78] *Ibid.* p. 173.
[79] *The Serpent,* p. 173

particularly in matters relating to the distillation of whisky. He says 'a law can be wrong [. . .] [and] it remains for me to judge for myself the outcome of all the elements and to come to a decision on the matter'.[80] The main elements were that whisky had been distilled from time immemorial on their own land, using their own ingredients, and that the taxation on spirits had effectively put their traditional drink beyond reach. Hector's attitude reflects the historic traditions and essential self-sufficiency of his people prior to the establishment of English laws, educational policies, and cash-based economy, and the rise of the restrictive Calvinist Church. Gunn argues that these communities operated without formal laws and that the political ideology that best reflects this reality is anarchy; anarchy not in the sense of chaos, rather 'a harmonious condition of society in which law is abolished as unnecessary'.[81] This claim is made in *The Serpent* where Gunn has Tom say to the shepherd:

> When I try to work out how it is that always, at the back of everything, I have been a natural anarchist, do you know to what I am inclined to attribute it? [. . .] Precisely to the old days in the crofting world on the Heights of Taruv as I knew it when a boy. Then - and back for centuries and centuries - they were all anarchists. Anarchism was the working basis of their lives, both their economic and mental lives. Think it out and you'll see it for yourself. In my boyhood, I never actually remember seeing the laird in person, the owner of the land. He was an absentee, as you know. Once a year the men put on their Sunday suits and went to the place where the Factor was having his sitting for the collection of rents. They paid their pound or two, got their dram, and came away. After that each man was his own master, worked his own land, having no boss or bureaucrat over him to drive or direct him. Accordingly in the community as a working or going concern, all were equal in social status, or rather the idea of class distinction amongst themselves could not arise, simply because it did not exist. The farther back you go the clearer that becomes because you recede more from the power of money.[82]

---

[80] *Young Art and Old Hector*, p. 190 - 191.
[81] *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*, ed. by A. Macdonald (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1972) p. 44.
[82] *The Serpent*, pp. 175 - 176.

The concept of a community working collectively for the common good without the need for legal enforcement can be seen in microcosm in the isolated Gaelic speaking community of St. Kilda. Writing of a visit made in 1896, Richard Kearton states:

> The St. Kildans meet every morning [. . .] and discuss how they shall go about the business of the day. One or two of the debates, at which I was present, became so animated and the din so prodigious that I thought the matter must inevitably end in blows and bloodshed; but I was greatly mistaken, for after awhile some satisfactory understanding was arrived at, and they all went forth harmoniously to share the toil and danger of the day.[83]

Against a background of hardship and decline, and with uninterested landlords of the sort referred to by Alexander Campbell, it might be expected that the community would embrace the new socialism enthusiastically. Experience of the voting tendency of the Scottish people would suggest that this is precisely what happened but in *The Serpent* the impact of Tom's Marxism/Socialism causes less upheaval than his freethinking. The reason for this may well be that the previous anarchical system was so deeply entrenched in their thinking, and indeed in much of their practice, that they saw themselves as effectively controlling the means of production anyway and, as has been seen from the above quotation, they did not consider themselves to be 'working class' but rather as equals. However, to carry through some of the projects described in *Blue Print for the Highlands* would certainly need the involvement of government, perhaps by way of compulsory purchase of land, and this would be more of a socialist project. Using the imagery of the machine, Tom suggests a way in which the two ideologies, anarchism and socialism, can come together. Speaking of the old communal way of life, he tells the shepherd:

---

[83]Richard Kearton, *With Nature and a Camera* (London: Cassell, 1897), p. 53.

> We are dealing with what anthropologists would call a primitive society. What I am trying to show you is that the society worked. You and I *know* that. When we use the word communism or anarchism, we have something real to go on. Our minds quite naturally take the next step and say: if we could get our society to-day, *with* the machine, working after the old pattern - if we could evolve the old into the new - then once more the life of the folk would be warm and rich and thick. For remember, they were primitive in the old days only in so far as the absence of the machine was concerned. They had their way of life, their religious attitude to life, their arts.[84]

In a similar way to the more practical example of Iain and sheep farming, Gunn here argues for the retention of the best of the traditional ways with new ideas being grafted on to them. Gunn saw the loss of one's roots as a major cause of decline and, by acting in this way, a recovery was possible and, with it, the possibility of regeneration.

It only remains to comment briefly on the Celtic associations of the serpent, represented by Tom Mathieson, which have not already been touched upon, namely those of eternity and healing. The serpent, as symbol of eternity, may be suggested by the link between the physical snake and Tom at the moment of death when 'the circle of his life is closed.'[85] The serpent as symbol of healing may not immediately spring to mind when considering Tom's life, other than in the sense of self-healing, but closer investigation suggests ways in which Tom himself had conveyed a healing balm. He comforts Janet after her fright over the Halloween prank at Margad's cottage and also understands and supports her in her difficulties with her violent, alcoholic, mother. His silence about the Minister's son's affair with Janet also assists the healing process within the community. However, his most prominent healing role is his relationship with his mother. Throughout her life she had been the healer in the family. She was the one who understood both her husband and her son, seeing goodness in both, and had tried to keep the peace between them. After Adam's death she had welcomed Tom

---

[84] *The Serpent*, p. 177.
[85] *Burns*, p. 88.

back into the house as the returning prodigal son, had continued to support him in the community and had also nursed him back to health during his illness. In his mother's final illness, Tom takes over her mantle and nurses and comforts her physically. He also comforts her spiritually through his reading to her from the Bible.

In the light of Gunn's symbolism, it can be seen that the ways in which 'The Man Who Came Back' can impact on the community and aid regeneration are extremely complex and it is understandable that this concept is so central to his vision as disclosed in this chapter.

Re-appraisal

The three novels allocated to 'The Wisdom of Boyhood' section contain powerfully drawn examples of Highland boys and are entirely appropriate for the subject matter required of them by the plot of the meta-novel. The inclusion of *Highland River* in the first part of chapter two is worthy of comment as, whilst the other two novels in the grouping concentrate upon Highland boyhood and the accumulation of knowledge, this novel features Kenn as an adult seeking the source of his very being. The vivid evocations of boyhood in this novel are, effectively, adult memories. As such, they may be edited by the adult mind to represent an idealized version of boyhood, a factor that strengthens their value in the meta-novel. As has been noted, from its position within the meta-novel, Gunn's focus is on these representations of boyhood rather than Kenn's 'biographical extension'. The reason postulated for this is that, although Kenn 'came back', unlike the protagonists in the novels allocated to part two of chapter two, the regeneration he achieved was a personal rather than a Highland one.

In the second part of chapter two, it is *The Drinking Well* that deserves the greater consideration. It would appear that between 1928 and 1947, Gunn had progressed from his bleak vision, as exemplified in chapter one, to a situation where he was actively looking for ways to work for Highland regeneration. In 1928 he published his prose study 'The Man Who Came Back' which, like the ensuing play *Back Home*, was totally negative. In writing *The Drinking Well*, he returns to the same theme, intent on re-writing the material to achieve a positive outcome. In artistic terms, this failed; the *dénoument* is flawed and he had to use a *deus ex machina* device to achieve his ends. However, although the individual novel may have been structurally stronger had the final coda been omitted and the ending left negative, it is clear from the supporting information for his ending that this is the core of his message in meta-novel terms. In

other words, to read *The Drinking Well* in the context of the meta-novel is to see the ending, not as an aesthetic structural flaw in a solitary work but rather as a structural indication of an overarching trajectory, noticeable but necessary.

SECTION THREE

The Highlands as History

The contributory novels

Given the focus suggested by the title, 'The Highlands as History', the novels allocated to this chapter, *Sun Circle* (1933), *Butcher's Broom* (1934) and *The Silver Darlings* (1941), cause no surprises. They are Gunn's only ones to specifically explore Highland history and their order of appearance mirrors the chronology of that history.

Of the three novels allocated to this chapter, *The Silver Darlings* was the most commercially successful and ranks alongside *Morning Tide* and *Highland River* in terms of overall financial success. In all three cases, prior to publication, a 'trailer' appeared in the Scots Magazine. The opening passage of *Sun Circle*, 'The Outline', appeared in March 1933,[1] a story entitled 'Dark Mairi', which was to become the opening chapter of *Butcher's Broom*, appeared in July 1934,[2] and a story entitled 'The Boat' appeared in December 1937, some four years before it became the opening of *The Silver Darlings*.[3] *Sun Circle* is dedicated to J B Salmond, a supporter of Gunn's work and editor of the Scots Magazine. *The Silver Darlings* is dedicated to 'The Memory of My Father', who had been the skipper of a fishing vessel active in the Moray Firth. Gunn had been reluctant to embark on this novel as:

> he knew well the huge labour of thought, research and organisation which would be entailed, and it was natural to want to put it off as long as possible. More than this, the history of fishing in the Moray Firth was the story of his own family, and closely identified in his mind with the lives of his father and mother. He would be writing into the tale emotions which ran deep and would be tortuous and exhausting to unravel.[4]

Gunn's home area, especially Dunbeath and the strath of Dunbeath Water, forms a loose connecting device for the three novels as is hinted at in 'The Outline', which

---

[1]Neil M. Gunn, 'The Outline', in *Scots Magazine*, Vol. 18, No. 6 (March 1933), pp 424 - 426.
[2]Neil M. Gunn, 'Dark Mairi', in *Scots Magazine,* Vol. 21, No. 4 (July 1934), pp. 264 - 274. Dark Mairi was the original working title of *Butcher's Broom* - see Hart and Pick, p. 102.
[3]Neil M. Gunn, 'The Boat', in *Scots Magazine*, Vol 28, No. 3 (December 1937), pp 186 - 194.
[4]Hart and Pick, p. 172.

provides an aerial view of Scotland commencing in the north, moving down the west coast to Iona before crossing to Lindisfarne and moving up the east coast to stop over, and focus on, Dunbeath strath. *Sun Circle* is set at a time when the native inhabitants were suffering a double invasion; the ideological one of Christianity *via* missionaries from Iona, and a physical and pagan one from Norse adventurers. The inclusion of Lindisfarne in 'The Outline' probably reflects the fact that it was there that Augustinian and Columban versions of Christianity met, with the Augustinian version becoming dominant. *Butcher's Broom* is set in the neighbouring area of Kildonan in Sutherland but at the end of the novel, after the clearances that form the central theme of the narrative, the inhabitants are resettled in an inhospitable coastal area which is probably on the southern part of the east coast of Caithness. One could imagine the now deserted village of Badbea being the one Gunn had in mind. 'The Boat', which is subtitled 'Being the Story of a True Happening' but without giving provenance for the comment, is set on the coast near to Helmsdale, and could easily relate to Badbea. Specific reference is made to its having been settled following the Kildonan clearances. *The Silver Darlings*, of which 'The Boat' became the opening part, commences in this area before moving north to centre again on Dunbeath.

Views of Highland history

It is clear from the chapter title, 'The Highlands as History', that Gunn is primarily concerned with the Highlands rather than with Scotland as a whole, however much the state of contemporary Scotland may have occupied him in his political and journalistic endeavours. The historical influences explored in the novels are 'turning points' for the Highlands, and are likely to have had a great impact on the 'state of mind' of successive generations of Highlanders.

However, Gunn's historical narratives need to be seen in context and will here be compared and contrasted with studies by the writers Gordon Donaldson, T. M. Devine and Cairns Craig, who have all published historical or quasi-historical books over the last decade and who have adopted a variety of approaches to, and advanced differing views on, Scottish history, with Craig claiming that Scotland has been 'bypassed by history' and is 'historyless'.[5]

Donaldson and Devine differ in their approaches, not least on what constitutes the 'Highlands' geographically. Devine takes a similar view to the one adopted in this thesis whilst Donaldson regards the Lowlands as extending up the eastern seaboard from the Clyde/Forth plain, taking in the whole of Caithness.[6] Despite the differences in definition, there is general agreement that the Highlands and Lowlands are different - and usually in conflict - and that these differences include language.[7]

The differences between the Highlands and Lowlands in Donaldson's assessment extend to the type of husbandry their respective terrains permit, 'a predominantly pastoral economy based on cattle, in the Highlands, and in the Lowlands a greater proportion of arable farming, though with extensive pasturage for sheep as well as for

---

[5]Cairns Craig, *Out of History* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996). p. 39.
[6]Gordon Donaldson, *Scotland: The shaping of a nation (Revised edition)* (Nairn: David St John Thomas Publisher, 1993), p. 153.
[7]*Ibid.* p.153.

cattle. [. . .] In later times a new distinction arose, for it was in the Lowlands that industries principally developed'.[8] The geographical differences which dictated the types of agriculture pursued were reinforced by climatic ones and led, Donaldson argues, to psychological distinctions between the character of the two groups. When the further variant of language was added, Donaldson noted, 'everything seemed to conspire to differentiate Highlander from Lowlander, and to breed mutual suspicion.' [9] The radical differences between Lowlander and Highlander referred to above were, in Donaldson's view, the subject of value judgements favouring the Lowlander. In support of the view that the lowlands of the eastern seaboard and Caithness should be treated as 'Highlands', T C Smout, records in his *A Century of the Scottish People*:

> The economy of the northern Lowland zone that runs along the east coast from Kincardine to Caithness had much in common with that of the Highlands, in that both shared the overwhelming importance of farming and fishing, both endured landlord domination, and both experienced the disadvantages of distance from the largest urban markets, though that was not so seriously felt around Aberdeen.[10]

The 'turning points' of history covered by *Sun Circle* are the dual invasions of Christianity and the Norsemen. Donaldson records the coming of Christianity through the work of Ninian, with Columba establishing his church at Iona in 563. He reports on the subsequent clash between the Columban and Augustinian versions of Christianity that were resolved in favour of the Augustinian by the Synod of Whitby, probably in 663, with the Irish monks leaving the abbey in Lindisfarne at that point.[11]

The linking of Iona and Lindisfarne in 'The Outline' almost certainly is intended to place the evangelising efforts in Dunbeath strath of an Irish monk, known as Molrua in the novel (Maol Rubha), within a wider context. In 1996 a piece of local sandstone,

---

[8]Donaldson, p. 153.
[9]*Ibid.* p. 154.
[10]T. C. Smout, *A Century of the Scottish People 1830 - 1950* London: Fontana, 1987), p. 13.
[11]Donaldson, p. 175

carved with a cross, was found at Ballachly in Dunbeath Strath. The stone and its incised cross are both incomplete but some believe the style of carving to be Irish. The stone is still being evaluated but, if this is proven, it will lend credence both to Gunn's belief, as recorded in *Sun Circle*, that the region was evangelised by Irish missionaries and that there once existed a monastery called the Chapel or Church of Peace on Chapel Hill at the entrance to the Dunbeath strath - Gunn refers to it as the House of Peace.[12]

Donaldson dates the Norse incursions to between the eighth and eleventh centuries culminating in the establishment of an Earldom based on Orkney, that also controlled Caithness. He believes that the '170 or so miles of sea' which separated Norway and the Northern Isles posed no problem to their expert seamanship.[13] A study, *Scandinavian Settlement in Northern Britain,*[14] shows that place names in Caithness confirm the extensive nature of Scandinavian settlements. The name Dunbeath is not of Norse derivation, probably reflecting the influx of Gaelic-speakers following the clearances, although the nearby villages of Lybster and Ulbster are, and it follows that Gunn's descriptions of an early raid are likely to be broadly correct. The placing of Molrua and the Norse invaders at the same historical time could, however, owe something to artistic licence as the Viking incursions are generally thought to be later.

Devine's recent study *The Scottish Nation 1700 - 2000* is concerned with post-union history and has nothing to add to the previous comments on the Viking raids and settlements. He has, however, valuable comments on the fishing industry, the clearances and the Highlands as a concept. On the clearances, the 'turning point' covered by *Butcher's Broom*, there are again major differences in interpretation.

---

[12]Tim Blackie and Colin Macaulay, *The Sculptured Stones of Caithness* (Balgavies, Angus: The Pinkfoot Press, 1998). See p. 9 for a detailed description, plus the cover illustration.
[13]Donaldson, pp. 15 - 16.
[14]*Scandinavian Settlement in Northern Britain: Thirteen studies of Place-Names in their Historical Context*, ed. by Barbara E. Crawford (London: Leicester University Press, 1995)

Donaldson regards the principal cause to have been the over-population of the glens and, especially, the Western Isles, and the inability of the subsistence farming methods to keep pace with demand, so creating the need for temporary migrations in search of work. The landlords encouraged these temporary migrations to become more permanent. In this interpretation of events Donaldson is supported by Ian Donnachie and George Hewitt.[15] Whilst highlighting the economic causes of the clearances Donaldson, as well as Donnachie and Hewitt, acknowledges that some later clearances, notably in Sutherland, were carried out with needless brutality.[16]

Devine is more sympathetic to the dispossessed than Donaldson, although he argues that these were not only a Highland phenomenon as the Lowlands had been affected earlier by improvers.[17] He further suggests that these earlier 'improvements' may have affected the economy of other regions as growing numbers of sheep were introduced alongside traditional farming methods, for:

> [Sheep] could not easily survive the Highland climate without access to low ground for wintering, and this posed a potent threat to the arable lands of the traditional townships. At the same time, the sheep competed for grazing with the small tenants' black cattle. The sheiling grounds, where stock were taken into the hill country during the summer months while crops were growing on the arable land, were especially at risk. Sheep farming therefore weakened the basis of the old economy by means other than direct clearance.[18]

The detrimental effect on routine farming practices did, of course, hasten the onset of the crisis making the need for migration almost inevitable.

The Sutherland clearances, the focus of much of the literary writing on the subject, are seen as being different, and more brutal, than most. Devine writes:

> The most notorious removals took place on the Sutherland estate where, between 1807 and 1821, the factors of the Countess of

---

[15]Ian Donnachie and George Hewitt, *A Companion to Scottish History: From the Reformation to the Present* (London: Batsford, 1989).
[16]Donaldson, pp. 169 - 170.
[17]Devine, p. 147.
[18]*Ibid.* p. 176.

> Sutherland and her husband Lord Stafford removed between 6,000 and 10,000 people from the inner parishes to new crofting settlements on the coast in the most remarkable example of social engineering undertaken in early nineteenth-century Britain.[19]

The fact that this particularly harsh example of clearance, involving the previous Clan Gunn land of Kildonan strath,[20] was literally on Gunn's own doorstep must have made it inevitable that in his historically informed work he should have attempted to review the facts and issues of that dark time. It is known that he did not enjoy the experience; his biographers report him as saying 'I'd always felt the need to write about the clearances. I hated doing it. Most Highlanders hate bringing back that awful recollection'.[21]

Devine also believes that the social relationship of the Gael with his clan and clan chief was very different from that obtaining in the Lowlands. Whilst in the Lowlands it was quite common for holdings to change hands at the end of a tenancy:

> This was not at all the pattern in Gaelic society. Even if the clan élites had developed new commercial assumptions and priorities, the people still clung to the principals of *duthchas*, in which the landlord had a basic duty as protector and the guarantor of land possession. Not only, therefore, was the scale of the removal greater and faster in the Highlands, but the cultural trauma of dispossession by 'landlord-protectors' was likely to be much more devastating for the people. It is hardly surprising that the relentless violation of the values of clanship caused enormous collective disorientation throughout the Gaelic world and hence a basic difficulty in resisting landlord action in any effective fashion.[22]

This lack of effective response by the people in defence of their families, their homes and their land could be suggestive of a cowed and timid people were it not for the outstanding military record of Highland regiments drawn from these same areas.

---

[19]Devine, p. 177.
[20]Hart and Pick, p.16.
[21]*Ibid.* p. 103.
[22]Devine, p. 182.

In the post-1745 period it was only the Highland regiments who escaped the ban on the wearing of the tartan. 'But it was in the years 1757 - 1760 that the elder Pitt for the first time on a systematic basis diverted the martial spirit of the Highlanders to the service of the imperial state.'[23] Iain Fraser Grigor, in *Highland Resistance*, accuses the English of cynical treatment of the Highlanders following the 1745 rising, writing:

> The following year [1746] saw an end to the nonsense, however, and the Highlands were subject to first a military and then a commercial (and shortly recreational) colonial occupation. The chief features of this were, or would become, clearance and emigration; [...] exploitation of population resources through military recruitment; the smashing asunder of the traditional society and its established class relations; the divorce by force of the common people from the occupancy of a land they looked upon as their own; and the invention of a tradition today identified as the cult of Balmorality. [. . .] If they [the commoners] would not join the services of the Crown (in which, to quote Wolfe's celebrated phrase, it would be 'no great mischief if they fall'), they could be emigrated, that their hardy characteristics and imaginative minds might otherwise contribute to the construction of the Empire.[24]

Strong words, ascribing to the English a sustained Machiavellian design which is probably unjustified, but his basic assertions have already been mirrored in Gunn's meta-novel. What seems beyond dispute is that the enlistment of Highlanders into the forces was actively encouraged by their clan chiefs and linked to promises of land tenure on their return. Ironically these soldiers found that 'clan values and structures lived on within the army'[25] at a time when clanship at home was being destroyed. This encapsulates the background to *Butcher's Broom* but omits to mention that Lowland tenants and factors were often involved in the sheep-farming enterprises, a potentially explosive ingredient given the mutual suspicion between the groups; suspicion highlighted by the inability of the two groups to communicate due to the

---

[23]Devine, p. 239.
[24]Iain Fraser Grigor, *Highland Resistance: The Radical Tradition in the Scottish North* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing Company (Edinburgh) Ltd, 2000), pp. 24 - 25.
[25]Devine, p. 239.

very real language barrier.

Within the various works of literature, including *Butcher's Broom*, spawned by the clearances there is a religious dimension, with ministers of religion depicted as failing to support their flocks at the time of the clearances. These collective failures led to 'The greatest single collective act of defiance of landlordism [. . .] the emergence of the Free Church in 1843, which drew many communities in the western Highlands and Islands from the established Church of Scotland.'[26]

Although the clearances caused great distress, and broke the link with the land that was important to the Gael, they were instrumental in developing new enterprises, especially that of fishing. Devine writes:

> Pivotal to the whole system of increased trade, credit and money transactions was a vast expansion in seasonal employment opportunities, and the indigenous white and herring fisheries of the Outer Hebrides achieved a new level of activity and prosperity.[27]

The Silver Darlings recounts the story of the development of the herring fisheries of the Moray Firth, as well as the continuation of those in the Hebrides, giving rise to the great boom time for the coastal lands of Caithness and Sutherland.

Ironically, as these enforced changes were occurring in the Highlands, destroying the relationship between chief and people and the whole fabric of Gaelic life and culture, the concept of the Highlands (or Highlandism as Devine calls it) was becoming synonymous with Scotland as a whole. Devine is undoubtedly correct when he says that 'to the rest of the world in the late twentieth century Scotland seems a Highland country'; that 'an urban society had adopted a rural face.'[28]

---

[26]Devine, p. 426.
[27]*Ibid.* p. 423.
[28]*Ibid.* p. 231

Given the mutual distrust between Lowlander and Highlander this could not have been seen as a likely occurrence and it is worth looking at the background in more detail. 'Highlandism was quite literally the invention of a tradition'[29] and various threads came together in its making. At the behest of The Highland Society (founded 1778) the Marquis of Graham in 1782 was successful in having parliament repeal the law forbidding the wearing of the tartan. 'The tartan was not only quickly rehabilitated but it also swiftly became extraordinarily fashionable.'[30] It was taken up at court and in society generally where 'some of the main protagonists of this new and fashionable traditionalism were themselves Highland proprietors who had long ceased to be clan chiefs and were now becoming rapacious improving landowners'.[31] Amongst the latter none were more ostentatious than the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland. Ian Grimble reports a visit by Harriet Beecher-Stowe to the Duke's London house where the guests 'were received at the door by two stately Highlanders in full costume'.[32] who also appear in *Butcher's Broom*. These developments were taking place at the same time as Highland regiments were forging a reputation for bravery and military prowess, especially during the Napoleonic wars, which lent 'a new prestige and glamour to the wearing of tartan',[33] as Highland regiments were exempt from the ban on the wearing of the kilt. Devine claims that, 'by the end of 1803, more than 52,000 Scots were serving in [volunteer corps and fencible regiments], in addition to the even greater numbers enlisted in the regular army.'[34] These regiments adopted Highland dress, which thereby became associated with the whole Scottish nation, a misappropriation of Highland identity. The fortnight's visit of George IV to Edinburgh in 1822, the first monarch to visit Scotland since 1651, put a final stamp of approval on the

---

[29]*Ibid.* p. 233.
[30]Devine, p.234.
[31]*Ibid.* p. 233.
[32]Ian Grimble, *The Trial of Patrick Sellar* (Edinburgh: The Saltire Society, 1993), p. 100.
[33]Devine, p. 234.
[34]*Ibid.* p. 234.

transformation. The visit was stage-managed by Sir Walter Scott and the many pageants the King attended during the visit had a Celtic and Highland flavour with the King, himself wearing the tartan, being toasted at Parliament Hall as 'The Chief of Chiefs - the King'. Devine argues that 'Scott had wished the royal visit to be "a gathering of the Gael", but what his Celtic fantasy had in fact produced was a distortion of the Highland past and present and the projection of a national image in which the Lowlands had no part'.[35] Later Queen Victoria continued the love affair with the tartan and things Highland with the development of Balmoral and the production by Albert of a new tartan.

Both Donaldson and Devine take a traditional view of history as a continuous process moving inexorably from one major event to another, the 'turning points' reflected in Gunn's work. That Devine sees history as a continuous and teleological process can be seen from his comment on his own work: 'The purpose of this book is to present a coherent account of the last 300 years of Scotland's past with the hope of developing a better understanding of the Scottish present.'[36] Cairns Craig, however, questions this teleology and sense of continuity in Scottish history and claims Scotland to be 'historyless'.

In the chapter entitled 'The Body in the Kit Bag' in *Out of History*, Craig, whose deliberations on history are closely linked to literary narrative, argues that Scotland has been 'bypassed by history'.[37] Put simplistically the argument he advances runs that history has long been the central mode of our understanding of humanity. However, because of the predominance of England within the Union, Scotland has been brought 'into a history whose shape no longer derives from the particularities of its own experience; rather, the past of its present is the evolution of English experience and

---

[35]Devine, p.235.
[36]*Ibid.* p. ix.
[37]Craig, p. 39.

Scotland's own past becomes the arena of local narrative no longer teleologically connected to its future'.[38] In other words the continuity of Scotland's own history has been ruptured. The linear, and supposedly progressive, march of history no longer applies with the result that 'nothing in it [Scotland] changes, moves, [or] is touched by the dynamism of history',[39] so there is nothing to imagine or narrate. Craig argues that, as 'the writing of history and the writing of novels grew up side by side, learning from each other the power of narrative structure',[40] Scottish novelists have needed to place characters within history to give them some semblance of reality and that this history is necessarily external to Scotland. The binary opposition here is between the domestic, or 'historyless', and the historic, defined as important events in an assumed progression.[41]

This state of being bypassed by history, other than that intruded from without, is, according to Craig, directly connected with Scotland's loss of self-determination, about which Gunn was himself greatly concerned.

In the above dichotomy the Highlands falls very definitely into the 'historyless' category where, instead of an historical progression, time exhibits a cyclical pattern. Even though much that is vital to human life follows such a cyclical pattern - birth and death, seed-time and harvest, and the passage of the seasons generally - because it cannot be defined in terms of a positive progression, it is seen as being 'historyless'. Craig argues that, in literary terms, such aspects of the Highlands are:

> characteristics usually associated in Scottish writing with the Celtic world of the Highlands before the 1745 Rising and the Clearances. That world, from Macpherson's *Ossian* through the Celtic Twilight and its modern imitations in films like *Brigadoon*, is represented as a world entirely divorced from historical process, as yet untouched by narrative; a world whose existence has to be defined in terms of cycles and

[38] *Ibid*. pp. 38 -39.
[39] Craig, p. 32.
[40] *Ibid.* p. 33.
[41] *Ibid.* p. 34.

> repetitions rather than in terms of beginnings, middles and ends; a world in which narrative has a very different significance from the significance it has to History, since its purpose is to reveal the present as a *repetition* of the past rather than an outcome of it.[42]

To combat this tendency Scottish novelists tended to include references to outside events, notably the First World War, as a way of engaging with the forces of history, even though in the case of *Highland River* this was less of a device than merely a necessary background to the period covered by the novel. Craig extends this thinking, specifically, to two of the novels in this section when he says 'history intrudes destructively upon its historyless world in novels like Gunn's *Butcher's Broom* and *The Silver Darlings*'.[43] Before specifically considering these novels in the light of this definition of history, it may be useful to consider Craig's further thoughts on the positive contribution which can be made by Scottish novelists because they are able to view narratives from a 'historyless' perspective.

The first thing to note is that, as with the other historians considered, Craig views the Lowlands and the Highlands as being different. He claims:

> The nineteenth century in Scotland leaves to the twentieth two forms of the historyless; those who have never entered the world of historical narrative - the primitive in their world of magic - and those who are becalmed in a world that has moved so far into history and then lost its narrative dynamic. The First World War is the focus of so many of Scottish narratives because it is the moment when the historical is reintroduced into the historyless Scottish environment, but the historical in a terrifying and alienating form.[44]

Clearly the first form of being 'historyless' relates to the Highland experience and the second to the Lowlands. Craig goes on to say of these two approaches that there is 'the world of history with its destructive memory; and the world of the historyless, with its endless forgetting'.[45] Here Craig chooses to allocate to the 'historyless' Scots a

---

[42] *Ibid.* p. 36.
[43] Craig, p. 37
[44] *Ibid.* p. 48.
[45] *Ibid.* p. 50.

negative rather than a positive construction. He talks of endless forgetting when he could have talked of endless regeneration. Elsewhere the same trait can be observed, for example he claims that Greenock in Alan Sharp's *A Green Tree in Gedde*[46] has a graveyard at its centre which is unlike the graveyard in Orwell's *Coming up for Air.*[47] He says 'English graveyards are the focus of a historical remembering; the Scottish one [Sharp] is the denial that there is any history'.[48] Whilst this may well be true, at the end of the day both Greenock and Orwell's English town had graveyards at the centre. The difference, if there is one, can only lie in the state of mind, the attitude, of the people and, as has been seen in the first chapter of Gunn's meta-novel, it is attitudes of mind that he seeks to alter.

Perhaps surprisingly, there are quite a number of points at which Craig's arguments and Gunn's meta-novel concept come together. Nowhere is this stronger than in his debate on transcendence. Craig talks of:

> Paradigms that earlier Scottish novelists [than Alasdair Gray] had made the particular escape route for the Scottish imagination, an escape which involved acceptance of the historyless by its transformation into a higher, transcendent form. The historyless in this context is no longer the primitive (though it has the cyclic qualities of the primitive) and it is no longer simply a suspension of narrative (though it is beyond narration): it is a condition in which the historical, with its determined trajectory towards the future, is seen as a deformation; it is a consciousness in which the cyclic is no longer an oppressive repetition but a revelation of a fundamental pattern that releases the individual from the constraints of temporality.[49]

This approach is associated by Craig with the writers of the Scottish Renaissance movement in the 1920s and '30s as their answer to the problem of suspended history. This would, of course, make the point particularly relevant to a study of Gunn.

---

[46]Alan Sharp, *A Green Tree in Gedde* (London: Michael Joseph, 1965), p. 27.
[47]George Orwell, *Coming up for Air* (London: Gollanz, 1939), p. 178.
[48]Craig, p. 32.
[49]*Ibid.* pp. 51 - 52.

There are, equally, points of variance between Craig's position and Gunn's as suggested by his retrospect. Some of these will be examined as the individual novels are considered but it is perhaps pertinent to note here that the violent aspect of external history which has already been mentioned is in some cases treated very differently. The first part of Gunn's fourth chapter is entitled 'The Murderousness of the Modern World' and it is here, rather than in the historical novels, that the greatest consideration of these external historical forces will be considered.

Non-narrative history

The exact title of this chapter, 'The Highlands as history', is, like so many of the meta-novel's chapter titles, capable of varying interpretations. It could mean that the Highlands were finished as a viable community and had passed into history, a reading for which there is some justification. However, given the format of the meta-novel and its explicit movement towards a positive conclusion, a more appropriate meaning must be sought. The choice of words could suggest that the Highlands themselves are a repository of history. In this sense the landscape is itself a sign system capable of being read, a non-narrative history.

It has been asserted that the novels in this chapter form a loose history of Gunn's home area and it is helpful that, for over a decade, the Department of Archaeology of the University of Glasgow has undertaken an ongoing and detailed survey of the Dunbeath area. This has not been a series of excavations but rather a systematic field survey of the archaeological and historical remains in the area, with a detailed record being made of the resultant data. Dr Alex Morrison, who directed this continuing survey, wrote a progress report in 1996 as the 'Department of Archaeology, University of Glasgow Occasional Paper No.3', published jointly with the Dunbeath Preservation Trust, and entitled *Dunbeath: A cultural landscape*.[50] This resource will assist in the reading of the landscape's 'history' and will enable the events recorded in the three novels to be verified against the evidence of the Highland landscape. In a similar vein, the existence of archaeological artefacts such as the Ballachly stone and the Portormin stone - of which more will be said later - represent further sources of non-narrative history that can be borne in mind when assessing the contributory novels.

---

[50] Alex Morrison, 'Department of Archaeology, University of Glasgow, Occasional Paper No. 3', *Dunbeath: A cultural landscape* (Glasgow: Dunbeath Preservation Trust and the Department of Archaeology, University of Glasgow, 1996).

Gunn's historical novels

In the three novels allocated to this chapter, Gunn has chosen 'turning points' for his Highland community. Although some of the events described may appear tragic, within the structure of the meta-novel some positive contribution can be expected, the finding of that which was lost. Certainly, however, Gunn has no wish to perpetuate Highlandism in his work but rather aims to reclaim the true history of the community.

Ian Grimble records that when Gunn was writing *Sun Circle* Eric Linklater was also working on a novel of the Viking age and that 'they each discovered what the other was doing, and there was some very embarrassed correspondence between the two men, hoping they were not treading on each others' toes'.[51] He continues that the two writers 'were such different people that even if they wrote two novels on exactly the same subject they'd be entirely different and so these were'.[52] The Linklater novel in question was *The Men of Ness*[53] and, as its subtitle 'The Saga of Thorleif Coalbiter's Sons' suggests, is written very much from the point of view of the Viking settlers. Orkney was ruled for so long by Norse Earls that this association with the Vikings by an Orkneyman is entirely understandable; indeed it is mirrored in the work of George Mackay Brown.[54] By contrast, in Gunn's novels, the authorial voice speaks for the indigenous Highland population, albeit a changing one over the span of time embraced by the novels. Throughout these novels Gunn is concerned to convey the reality of communal life in what he called in one of his essays 'My Bit of Britain'.[55] Although Gunn locates the activity of each novel within a wider context, the emphasis is always on the local Highland community, which is the concern of his entire *œuvre*.

---

[51]Grimble, p. [7].
[52]*Ibid.* p. [7].
[53]Eric Linklater, *The Men of Ness: The Saga of Thorlief Coalbiter's Sons*, The Orkney Edition (London: Cape, 1952).
[54]For example - George Mackay Brown, *Vinland* (London: John Murray, 1992).
[55]Neil M. Gunn, 'My Bit of Britain', *The Field*, Vol 178, No. 4623 (August 1941).

Sun Circle covers the Viking invasion and that of Christianity. This double focus creates a perceived flaw in this book over its chronology. Although the coming of Christianity was earlier than the Viking incursions, and is shown to be so in the novel, Gunn depicts Molrua, the Irish monk who converted the area, still visiting at the time of the Viking raids recounted in *Sun Circle*. Most commentators have dated the action of the novel to the eighth or ninth centuries AD, coinciding with the earliest recorded attacks of the Vikings, notably the sacking of Lindisfarne Abbey in 793 AD, and Gunn has Molrua use a prayer common in ninth-century France: *A furore Normanorum libera nos, Domine*.[56] All perfectly consistent with a ninth-century setting except that the historical Maol Rubha (Richard Price spells the name Maelrubha) lived in the seventh century. Price records that he 'settled at Apurcrossan (Applecross) in 673, and who is celebrated in Scottish folklore as being martyred at the blades of the Vikings.'[57] Grimble records that this event is marked by 'a cross by the Naver river which is said to be where he was martyred', although he personally felt the story to be unlikely.[58] Gunn appropriated this legend, of which he must have been aware, and transferred the action from Strathnaver to Dunbeath strath where Molrua still meets his end at the blades of the Vikings. A seventh-century date is also suggested by the existence of a royal court to the South where the chieftain of the local Pictish tribe, Drust, had sent his son for training. At the end of the novel Breeta and Aniel set off for this court to bring the boy back. As has been suggested, King Brude was the King who first united the Picts under one rule and it seems plausible that his was the court in question.[59] He lived from 672 - 693 and was, therefore, an approximate contemporary of Molrua.

---

[56]'From the fury of the Northmen deliver us, O Lord.' - Howard La Fay, 'The Vikings', *National Geographic Magazine*, Vol. 137, No. 4, April 1970, pp. 492 - 541 and *Sun Circle*, p. 95.
[57]Price, p.50 - drawing on John Dowden, *The Celtic Church in Scotland* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1894), p.120.
[58]Grimble, p. [7].
[59]Mackie, p. 18.

It is possible, as the legend of Molrua's death suggests, that the Highlands suffered earlier raids by Norseman than those recorded. This is not as unlikely as may at first appear as the extant histories were written by monks to whom the sacking of Lindisfarne would have been a heinous crime, whereas isolated raids, especially in the far north, may not have been seen as warranting a separate entry. Although the Viking age proper did not start until c 800 AD, Scandinavian incursions into Britain certainly started earlier - the Sutton Hoo ship burial for example, where the funerary goods show close links with Sweden, was effected about 650 AD. R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford, in *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial: A handbook*, records that the 'Anglo-Saxon burial ground was in use in the 6th and 7th centuries'.[60] He also states that, 'at this early time [c 650], the custom of elaborately furnished boat-inhumation, which becomes widespread later in the Viking age, is at present only recognized in two places in Europe, the Uppland province of Sweden and South-East Suffolk'.[61] Although the Norwegians generally started their overseas expansion later than their southern neighbours, there seems to be no practical reason why they should not have ventured over to Scotland during the seventh century. There is, in fact, some suggestion that King Brude may have been connected with Dunbeath itself, whence he had gone in response to Viking raids. R. McCallum, in his essay 'The Picts', writes:

> In 685 A.D. the Picts under Bridei (or Brude), son of Bili, were strong enough to defeat the Angles of Northumbria at Nechtansmere (now Dunnichen in Angus). This Brude is the first Pictish king since Brude McMaelchon to have caught the attention of foreign chroniclers; in the Irish Annals it is recorded that he led a raid on the Orkneys in 682, which resulted in much devastation. It has recently been suggested that the raid was associated with the Norse occupation of the northern isles. A siege of Dunbaitte is interpreted by Skene as a reference to Brude's activities at Dunbeath, Caithness, but this is guesswork.[62]

---

[60]R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial: A handbook* (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1968), p. 15.
[61]*Ibid.* p. 69.
[62]R. McCallum, 'The Picts', in *The Caithness Book*, ed. by Donald Omand (Inverness: Highland

Such a dating could add further credibility to Gunn's account.

A second incised stone found near Dunbeath may ultimately throw some light on the dating issue. The story of its finding is remarkable. Children at the local school had been learning about the Vikings and had seen illustrations of runic letters. Subsequently, whilst playing on Portormin beach immediately to the north of Dunbeath harbour, they found a stone that appeared to bear a runic inscription. 'The stone is an irregularly-shaped pinkish fine-grain sandstone boulder of local origin, incised with eight small runic characters. This inscription has been examined by philologists and early indications are that the script is unusual in a number of ways, and interpretation may prove difficult. The current weight of opinion, however, favours some sort of funerary inscription.'[63] Nan Bethune, who was closely involved with the stone after its discovery, believes that some of the runes are of an archaic variety which could, again, suggest a date earlier than the eighth century.[64] She also believes that the inscription could read Hrafn, suggesting that it marked the grave of a Viking called 'Raven'. Should these suppositions be confirmed it would not only support Gunn's time scales but also would introduce the name Raven, the name he ascribes to the Pictish tribe inhabiting Dunbeath strath. Intriguing though such speculation may be it must be conceded that, despite his claim to be writing a true history of the community, it remains possible that Gunn allowed himself an element of artistic licence and compressed the time scales of this sparsely recorded time to embrace two 'turning points' in the one novel.

The first of these, the coming of Christianity, is the more complex as Gunn's attitude is more difficult to determine. In his travelogue *Off in a Boat*, Gunn expresses

---

Printers, 1972), p. 120.
[63]Blackie and Macaulay, pp. 21 - 22.
[64]In conversation with the author of this thesis.

admiration for the early Irish missionaries, and suggests that Columba's choice of Iona as a base was deliberate, prompted by the fact that it was an important centre for the Druidic world. His description of encounters between these Irish missionaries and the Druidic occupiers of the land is couched in positive terms. He writes:

> We do know, for example, that one king, Fergus, went to Iona for his coronation; and in that same isle he was buried, a generation before Columba landed. We learn, too, that the isle had a great number of standing stones, and late travellers talk of the existence of a Druidic temple of twelve stones, each with a human body buried beneath it. These wise early missionaries of Christianity did not believe in violence and destruction. They sprinkled the pagan monoliths with holy water and carved on them their Christian emblems.[65]

This embracing of the earlier emblems suggests that these early monks practised a peaceful spirit of reconciliation which, after the Reformation, was quickly reversed. Gunn continues:

> The Synod of Argyll pursued the contrary method, and in 1560 A.D. decided that the 360 sculptured stone crosses of Iona were 'monuments of idolatrie' and were therefore to be cast into the sea. Possibly this Protestant Synod did more to destroy the accumulated spiritual riches of Iona than all the Viking ravages put together.[66]

The peaceful approach of the early missionaries seems to have enabled them to achieve a bloodless victory over the native inhabitants and their religion. Gunn records, with some surprise:

> Nearly all writers agree that in Scotland, and particularly in the Highlands of Scotland we were a savage and barbarous people, until Columba changed our hearts. Yet how tolerantly we received Columba, though he walked amongst us as an open perverter of our Druidic faith. Our Druids disputed with him, but offered him no hurt.[67]

---

[65] *Off in a Boat,* p. 208.
[66] *Ibid.* p. 208.
[67] *Ibid.* p. 212.

Whereas Gunn's generally negative attitude towards organised religion, as exemplified in *The Serpent*, belongs to the post-Reformation attitudes of the Synod of Argyll, in *Sun Circle* it is the tolerant inclusivity of the Irish missionaries that is reflected in his depiction of Molrua. But, even given this more positive attitude towards early forms of organised religion, Gunn's attitude remains ambivalent.

Douglas Gifford in his essay 'Neil Gunn and the Mythic Regeneration of Scotland' notes that the structure of the novel relies upon oppositions between darkness and light and contrasts between pairings of characters.[68] In these pairings, Molrua is opposed to the Druidic Master, who presides over the rites and sacrifices in a ceremonial grove deep in the dark moor, and the Druidic acolyte, Aniel, to the Viking leader Haakon. The pun on his own name (Neil/Aniel) suggests that Gunn associates himself with the representative of the indigenous community, underlining his role as their chronicler.[69] However, within these pairings, if Aniel represents the 'light' of the Gaelic community in contrast to the 'darkness' of the Viking, and if Molrua is the 'light' to the Master's 'darkness', it is illuminating that Aniel is the acolyte of the Master. Gunn's ambivalence towards religion is illustrated by this apparent discrepancy.

Even though *Sun Circle* ends with the acknowledgement that Christianity would supplant the old religion and Aniel would go south and 'would bring back the young chief with his Christian religion',[70] the old religion would not totally be lost but would, rather, be absorbed into the new in a parallel to the adoption of the standing stones by Columba. In fact, in *Sun Circle*, Gunn goes further and suggests that all religions serve a single purpose, only fashions and loyalties change. Gunn's omniscient narrative voice tells of how Aniel will continue to respect the traditions of the earlier religion, saying:

---

[68]'Neil Gunn and the Mythic Regeneration of Scotland', pp. 84 - 85.
[69]*Sun Circle*, p. 89.
[70]*Ibid.* p. 388.

> At the end of all religions that which is offered is always the same thing. That might be difficult, more difficult than all else to feel and to believe, and impossible for the old. But if Aniel had to satisfy his own people in the old ways, then he would do so, even if he had to do it secretly. For there was only one law in the end: the spirit has to be satisfied. In the fullness of time the Christian religion might satisfy it, for it, too, was based on blood and sacrifice. There were many religions in the world and the gods had many names. The rest was loyalty.[71]

This highlighting of the similarities between religions is shown in the description of how the Master appears in Aniel's eyes, adopting terms which are overtly Christian:

> Now to Aniel there were three persons in the Master. First, there was the person whom all the people feared. To them he was terrifying and mysterious and silent as a god. They feared him more than any god, for he was midway between the Above and the Beneath, the Far and the Near; he divided the kingdoms of life and death, and made balance of payments between one and the other in goods and in souls.
>
> Second, there was the person whom Aniel knew. This person was withdrawn out of the first, like a son withdrawn out of the father, and spoke to Aniel simply of the things in life and the way of life. Yet in so speaking he did not become familiar to Aniel. On the contrary, he raised in Aniel such a glow of clarity - as if the voice were verily within Aniel himself - that Aniel yearned towards him in affection and homage. For, beyond what the Master said to him, lay the vast dominion of the spirit yet to be apprehended of the novice.
>
> The third person was this dominion of the spirit. Already Aniel caught glimpses of it, often in moments of tranced vision after just leaving the Master, and frequently, too, in his image work. These were moments of intense happiness. Occasionally they passed into periods of abstraction, when his bent for picture-making exercised itself of its own will. And the picture he saw was of the Master abstracting himself from the second person, or son, and withdrawing as a ghost, withdrawing and going afar off, his true spirit, his final self, his holy ghost, going further into regions of stillness, until he came to the centre, and there he stood with eternity about him in a circle of light.[72]

Leaving aside the theological arguments, the actual implementation of the switch to the new religion is depicted as being largely in the hands of the women. The men, feeling the need to protect their community, derived more comfort from the old

---

[71] *Sun Circle*, p. 388.
[72] *Ibid.* pp. 113 - 114.

religion than from the pacifist Christianity, whereas the women, or at least some of them, had embraced the new teaching. Historically, as Ian Grimble confirms, the spread of Christianity owed much to women who had been converted and who subsequently brought up their children in the faith.[73]

If this first invasion was achieved over time relatively bloodlessly, the other, that of the Vikings, following the pattern of oppositions and contrasts spoken of by Gifford, was totally different. It was short, sharp, violent and immediately decisive. Initially these raids were for plunder but, 'with increasing frequency as their world broadened, they settled on the sites of their conquests'.[74] The Norse settlement of Orkney and Caithness already alluded to left a lasting legacy of customs, language and racial characteristics in the area. *Sun Circle* chronicles an early incursion but hints at likely future developments. Haakon's priest, the pagan Sweyn, prophecies: 'This is but the beginning. Yet some day [. . .] we may come back here - or some of you may come back here. There is fertile land for you here and homes and flocks. You will bring women with you and beasts and children. And if you will not come, then others will. We are but the warriors who go before'.[75] J. I. Bramman, writing in *The Caithness Book*, confirms that this prophecy was fulfilled. He says 'the first Norse settlers arrived in Caithness in the year 863 AD but it is probable that the existence of rich farmlands in the area had been known to marauding Viking bands for more than a century before that date'.[76] In racial terms, despite Sweyn's comments about bringing women and children to settle, there would undoubtedly be intermarriage, or at least interbreeding, between the two communities, especially in Caithness, away from the main seat of government in Orkney. This is alluded to through the love affair in the

---

[73]*Neil M. Gunn Memorial Lecture*, p. [7].
[74]La Fay, p. 495.
[75]*Sun Circle*, p. 285.
[76]J. I. Bramman, 'The Vikings', in *The Caithness Book*, p. 124.

plot between Haakon and Nessa which, although it ends tragically, suggests a formal union between the two races. Aniel says: 'if the Northman will agree to lead us and take our ways, then as Nessa's husband he could do so.'[77] On a more realistic note women are presented as the spoils of war used sexually by the victors. Earlier in the novel, Breeta asks her mother what would happen should there be further Viking raids. She replies 'they would kill us all [. . .] me and your father and your brothers - but they might spare you'.[78] This proves prophetic. After an initial skirmish on the beach where the Ravens, depicted as showing the same self-destructive propensity that Gunn had noted in his review of the contemporary Highlands, are beaten and their chief, Drust, killed. As the plot develops, the tribe take refuge in a readily defensible tower that is adequately supplied with food and water. However, the impetuosity which had driven them to an open charge against a larger, better-trained and better-armed, force on the open beach allows them to be hoodwinked by the attackers and the tower is lost. Most of the defenders, including women and children, are slaughtered, with Breeta's mother amongst them.

Before moving on to a consideration of *Butcher's Broom*, an assessment can now be made of the extent to which the non-narrative history, embodied in the Dunbeath landscape, validates *Sun Circle's* narrative. Adjacent to Dunbeath's modern harbour is a shelving beach where longboats could have been run aground and hauled up out of reach of the tide. The warlike nature of the Viking presence in Dunbeath is supported by the Portormin stone with its funerary inscription. Moving inland, Molrua had his dwelling or chapel on a hill near to the river close to the tower. It is described thus:

> When they came down to the river level, the men who were standing about, or leaning against the hill, stopped talking. Drust and Taran went ahead and crossed the tributary from the Little Glen near where it

[77]Succession being possible through the female line. See also *Sun Circle,* pp. 356 - 357.
[78]*Sun Circle,* p. 18.

> entered the main stream. A large knoll now rose out of the river flat on their left hand, and as they went towards it they saw the hooded figure of Molrua descend its green side, for on the flat top of this knoll he had built himself a small round stone dwelling. There he had dispensed the sacraments and baptised in time past.[79]

Morrison's survey states 'traces of what might have been a medieval monastic site survive at Ballachly on the east bank of Dunbeath Water just south-east of where it is joined by the Houstry Burn [. . . with] the foundations of at least one stone-built building on a ridge'.[80] The subsequent finding of the Ballachly stone near the site strengthens the case for the ruins having been occupied by Irish monks. The knoll is known locally as Chapel Hill and, elsewhere, Gunn refers to it as The House of Peace.

The tower to which the Ravens retreat is obviously a Broch. Bramman, in a further essay in *The Caithness Book*, states 'Brochs, popularly - but incorrectly - known as Pictish Towers or Pict's Houses, belong to a family of defensive structures of the Iron Age period in northern Scotland'[81] and would, therefore, have pre-dated the tribe of the Ravens. The Dunbeath Broch 'stands on the promontory formed by the confluence of the Houstry Burn with the Water of Dunbeath'[82] and drawings of the remaining parts of the structure mirror the description in the novel. Tribal members travelling to this Broch are depicted as having come from dwellings situated further inland and, whilst today there is little in the way of habitation inland from the Broch, there is ample evidence of land further up the strath having been occupied and farmed from well before the time of this novel. As this was the Ravens' home area, it is interesting that one settlement is called 'Clashraven'.[83] The language of the landscape, therefore, fully supports Gunn's fictional historical re-creation.

---

[79] *Ibid.* p. 87.
[80] Morrison, p. 70.
[81] J. I. Bramman, 'The Age of the Brochs', in *The Caithness Book*, p. 111.
[82] Morrison, p. 47.
[83] *Ibid.* p. 108.

Butcher's Broom, set in Kildonan Strath, Sutherland, records the later history of the area; its 'turning point' being the clearances. It is worth noting that clearances did occur in Caithness - and the village of Badbea already referred to was peopled by cleared residents of the Langwell valley [84] - but they 'were not attended by the atrocities committed elsewhere, particularly in Sutherland and Ross-shire, [so] they have been little publicised'.[85] Gunn, in choosing to write about Kildonan (traditionally Clan Gunn land), selected the most vicious and extensive of the clearances and the one which impacted most harshly on the resident communities. In doing so, he clearly had an eye for making dramatic impact.[86] In this he was not alone, and the events of the Sutherland clearances as recounted by Alexander Mackenzie in *The History of the Highland Clearances*, which provided his source material, were also used by other novelists, notably Iain Crichton Smith and Fionn MacColla.[87]

As Gifford has commented in relation to Gunn's fictional representation of his people's history, 'the Ravens have become the people of the Riasgan, as the Master foresaw'.[88] He, viewing the burning grove, told Aniel that 'far into the years to come I saw the glen smoking again'.[89] Gunn emphasises this sense of continuity by depicting the pre-clearance Kildonan community in *Butcher's Broom* as altered by the effects of the 'turning points' chronicled in *Sun Circle*. The people are Christian; not the inclusive and humane Columban version but rather the rigid and exclusive post-Reformation doctrine, with its concept of the Elect. However, as Aniel had prophesied, traces of older practices survived alongside the new: for example the

---

[84]This valley, and Langwell Water, reach the sea at Berriedale, the village just south of Dunbeath.
[85]Mrs M Gunn, 'Since the "Forty-Five"', in *The Caithness Book*, p. 142.
[86]Between 1811 and 1821, the population of Kildonan parish fell from 1574 to 565. - see: Alexander Mackenzie, F.S.A., Scot, *The History of the Highland Clearances*, Second Edition, altered and revised with a new introduction by Ian MacPherson, M.P. (Glasgow: Alex MacLaren & Sons, 1946), p. 282.
[87]Iain Crichton Smith, *Consider the Lilies* (London: Gollancz, 1968)
Fionn MacColla, *And the Cock Crew* (Glasgow: William MacLellan, 1945)
[88]'Neil Gunn and the Mythic Regeneration of Scotland', p. 90.
[89]*Sun Circle*, p. 387.

central character of *Butcher's Broom*, Dark Mairi, 'made the men walk sunwise round their craft. Then she blessed the craft and she blessed the men, but she did it in the name of the Three-One, ever-living, ever-almighty, everlasting, who brought the Children of Israel through the Red Sea. "Sain and shield and sanctify; be seated, O King of the elements, at their helm, and lead them in peace to the end of their venture"'.[90]

In racial terms, the community has remained Celtic in its traditions, its mythology and its language but there is evidence of differing races having been absorbed and accommodated within the community. Dark Mairi herself is described as being:

> a small woman, roundly built, deep-chested and straight, yet she did not give an impression of bodily strength so much as of something delicate and hardy that persists evenly. Her skin was pale and a little wrinkled; her eyes dark, and of a jewelled smallness. But perhaps the suggestion of persistence, of abidingness, that was the silent note struck by her person, was sustained most distinctly by the cheek-bones that did not obtrude in round knobs but ran straight back towards her ears, each in a visible ridge. These ridges drew the skin taut and gave the frontal expression a curious flattened steadiness. Her hair was black and coarse-grained, with grey strands showing here and there in a good light. It was drawn firmly back from the forehead, tautening the skin at the temples, as the cheek-bones tautened it down the sides of her face.[91]

It is tempting to liken these characteristics to those of the Finlags, referred to in *Sun Circle* as an older race supplanted by the Ravens, who occupied the inland areas; a link that would make Mairi heiress to a much older tradition. The question of relationships between races is one result of the 'turning points' examined in the discussion of the earlier novel. In his perceptive essay in *Neil Gunn's Country*, Douglas Gifford touches on this issue when he writes 'two ancient presences come out of *Sun Circle* to the future'.[92] To these two presences, namely the Ravens and the Finlags, the Vikings

---

[90]*Butcher's Broom*, p. 403.
[91]*Ibid.* p. 9.
[92]'Neil Gunn and the Mythic Regeneration of Scotland', p. 89.

ought to be added; they did return as Sweyn had foretold and their impact features in the third historical novel, *The Silver Darlings*.

The other two novels previously referred to as being fictional histories of the clearances, *Consider the Lilies* and *And the Cock Crew*, can now be compared with *Butcher's Broom*. All three draw on Mackenzie's account of the Sutherland clearances executed by Patrick Sellar,[93] but are all very different accounts. *Consider the Lilies* is ostensibly the simplest narrative, concentrating on the eviction of Mrs Scott. In his preface Iain Crichton Smith acknowledges this saying 'essentially, this is only the story of an old woman confronted by eviction. A way of life may emerge indirectly but it is not explicitly documented'.[94] MacColla's novel is broader in scope and covers the whole community, including their minister. Many ministers, who owed their livings to the lairds, compromised their principles and supported the evictions. Unlike them, Maighstir Sachairi, the central character of *And the Cock Crew*, is portrayed as being conscientious and having the well-being of the community at heart but, as the novel's title suggests, he fails them by interpreting the evictions as God's judgement. MacColla's novel is powerful but the implication that, had the minister championed the people, the outcome could have differed, seems flawed. A different stance would have provided valuable moral support but with the force of law and the militia to support the landlords it is inconceivable that the outcome would have been different.

It is noteworthy that each of these three novels sets a character in opposition to the minister. In *Butcher's Broom* it is the Drover; in *Consider the Lilies* the free thinker Macleod 'stands, in a sense, for the force of storytelling against the church's suppression of local tradition'[95] and in *And the Cock Crew* Fearchar the poet, who attacks the Calvinistic concept of the Elect, counters Maighstir Sachairi. All these

---

[93] He is referred to as Heller in *Butcher's Broom* and as Byars in *And the Cock Crew.*
[94] *Consider the Lilies*, p. 8.
[95] Hart, *The Scottish Novel*, p. 329.

characters are, like Aniel and his father, inheritors of the bardic tradition, repositories of the old wisdom, and keepers of the community's history and myths, between which categories there is more than a little overlap. In these oppositions, the bard is always depicted as the positive influence, so Gunn, whilst the only non-Gaelic speaker of the three, is not alone in valuing the Gaelic tradition.

Butcher's Broom is a long novel that places its subject matter in a world context. Without diluting the tragedy of the clearances, Gunn seeks to contextualise the issue and to understand, if not excuse, the actions of all parties. The lasting impression on the reader is less the tragedy of the individuals who were uprooted and dispossessed and driven to the edges of inhospitable cliffs, or the edges of the known world, than the tragedy of the passing of a way of life, an ancient culture with its accumulated wisdom, hospitality and humour.

The Kildonan community, as depicted, enjoys an oral tradition; theirs are spoken rather than written narratives - hence Gunn's fiction being seen as providing the Gaelic Highlander with a voice - but whether this lack of written narrative makes them 'historyless', as Craig suggests, is a matter for conjecture. He mentioned *Butcher's Broom* specifically when he spoke of history impacting destructively on the 'historyless' world of the Highlands and it is true that Gunn does show such destructive forces intruding but this seems less of a literary device to create a backdrop for the credible depiction of Highland characters than a realistic account of events in a wider world context impacting on a traditional community.

In *Butcher's Broom*, Gunn compares and contrasts the way of life of the Riasgan with that of the southern culture, both English and Lowland, with which it came into contact, in order to highlight the wealth of that which was at risk of loss in the passing of a way of life. This is summarised in the novel thus:

> 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. 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.[96]

This is not only a literary device to place Gunn's Gaelic community centre stage but also an attempt to understand and explain the historic forces shaping the Northland.

Butcher's Broom is primarily concerned with events that were inexorably moving towards their culmination in the clearances. It is recounted, again, from the point of view of the native population, and Gunn unfolds for his readers the routine life of the community. The breadth of Gunn's canvas enables him to introduce into the narrative many of the historical issues that have been considered in this section.

Colin, Elie's lover, volunteers for the army leaving her, unbeknown to him, pregnant. His reason for enlisting was that 'our chief and our king need us. [. . .] Besides, look what we are promised! Not only the money, but a tack of land. Something that a fellow could really marry on.'[97] At the time, the narrator informs us, 'it could not occur to either of them to doubt their chief'.[98] However, their chief, the Duchess of Sutherland, living in London far removed from her ancestral lands, sees her role within a wider sphere, as the reader learns from the narrator. Her actions are driven by continental economics because 'the condition of Europe is critical. That is, our condition. It might become pretty near fatal, if we don't learn to feed ourselves'.[99] The proposed 'improvements' mean 'that within a very few years - five or six - one hundred thousand fleeces and twenty thousand ewes and wethers for carcases [sic] would be sent from your northern estate'.[100] The Countess is portrayed as receiving

---

[96] *Butcher's Broom*, p. 21.
[97] *Butcher's Broom,* p. 93.
[98] *Ibid.* p. 96.
[99] *Ibid*. p. 254.
[100] *Ibid.* p. 254.

information from Heller and her husband which places the existing tenants in a bad light. She says to Heller: 'It would appear that I can get little credit in my ancestry! I suppose you, too, have found my clansmen savage, dirty and illiterate', a question which receives a positive answer.[101] Her husband then makes his case saying:

> Now on your estates you know the conditions. Apart from whether the people are ignorant and slothful and bestial in their habitations, we do know that they live in poverty, and some of them have got charity from you. As tenants they are of little use to you financially, and none at all to the country. Well here's a scheme that is going to use the land in the only way it profitably can be used. You will benefit largely, but not more than the country, for the estate will now export huge quantities of wool and mutton. Ultimately what benefits the country as a whole benefits the people as a whole. Thus England will benefit. [. . .] As a nation we are more and more becoming industrial. Industrial workers need food and clothing. If there is no food there will be food riots. We have had them already. We shall have more of them, because we cannot yet feed ourselves. Our enemies, recognising this, have done their utmost to shut the world's ports against us. [. . .] It really comes to this [. . .] that what benefits the landlord benefits the nation. The greater his rent from the land, the greater the output from the land, for no man can pay a high rent who is not himself receiving a high return for his labours.[102]

This is a powerful economic argument, into which Gunn has managed to introduce the question of the beneficiaries who are not the people of the land, or even Scotland, but England, embroiled in her Napoleonic conflict.

In the second part of the last section, references in *The Drinking Well* to Alexander Campbell's poem, *The Grampians Desolate*, were discussed. It was argued that this was advanced by Gunn as a tried and tested alternative land use. The importance of this is heightened by his return to this theme in a 1954 radio dramatisation in the 'Heritage' series entitled *The Highland Clearances: A reflection*.[103] The first narrator describes how in 1849 the Rev. Dr. Maclauchlan undertook a 'trip through the Highland area, describing the desolation. Glengarry. The Cameron country around

---

[101]*Ibid.* p. 259.
[102]*Butcher's Broom,* pp. 260 - 261.
[103]Neil M. Gunn, 'Heritage, Programme 18', *The Highland Clearances: A reflection* (Unpublished: BBC Glasgow, 1954).

Loch Arkaig. [. . .] I can still remember what he says about that. "There was a day when three hundred able, active men could have been collected from the shores of this extensive inland loch; but eviction has long ago rooted them out, and nothing is now seen but the ruins of their huts, with the occasional bothy of a shepherd, while their lands are held by one or two farmers from the borders'".[104] The journey round the Highlands continues to reveal the same picture, 'with the exception of the usual large sheep farmers, [it] is one wild waste', except that 'to the north of Loch Ness, the territory of the Grants, both Glenmoriston and the Earl of Seafield, presents a pleasing feature amidst the sea of desolation'.[105] Gunn then introduces the alternative approach adopted by Campbell at Lochtraig, part of the Duke of Gordon's estate, which he was running for his son-in-law Keppoch Macdonell, who was serving in the army. Rather than clearing the holding, as happened in the Riasgan, Campbell sought to improve productivity, and rental income, *via* improvements and alterations to their husbandry, whilst leaving the population *in situ*. 'Campbell issued peremptory instructions to his tenants about the proper use of manure, turf, and so on, and offered a small subsidy to the one who first built his house entirely of stone.'[106] As the land returned to good heart, joint-stock schemes were introduced to bring poorer holdings up towards the level of the better ones. Ultimately Campbell and his family, whilst landlords (or even chiefs) of Lochtraig, were tenants of the Duke of Gordon. He had been offered, privately, a four-fold increase in rent but permitted Campbell to have a new tenancy at only three times the previous level. Horrified at the level of increase Macdonell and Campbell conferred and Campbell suggested his son-in-law should:

> apprize the tenants of the delicate predicament in which you now stand - you are their chieftain; some of them fought by the side of your grandfather Keppoch who fell on Culloden Moor; and several of them fought with your father on that day when our immortal Wolfe fell on

[104]Gunn, *The Highland Clearances*, p. 11.
[105]*Ibid.* p. 11.
[106]*Ibid.* p. 22.

> the plains of Quebec. [. . .] Try what they will do of their own accord. So they did this, and the tenants replied saying that they would support their chieftain to their last shilling. And they did, paying their portion of that inflated rent punctually though it verged, as the poet said, on that hateful and alarming evil rack-rent.
> The old relationship between chief and clansmen worked!
> Because they were in it together.[107]

This combination of close involvement and strong leadership displayed by Macdonell can be contrasted to the uncaring, absentee, approach in Sutherland. Gunn strongly makes the point that, in Highland communities, the chief, as *primus inter pares*, was chosen for his qualities and, under the principals of *duthchas*, was expected to fulfil his basic duty as protector and as guarantor of land possession. When, following the conversion from chief to landlord, this did not happen, the people felt utterly betrayed. Macdonell, by contrast, acted more in keeping with the principals of *duthchas* and under his guidance the land was made to yield rentals little short of those achieved with sheep runs whilst, at the same time, continuing to support the existing population and to preserve their culture and language.

In the arguments put to the Countess of Sutherland in Gunn's novel, the Highlander is seen as being 'savage, dirty and illiterate', an impression aggravated by language.[108] When the factor shows Heller and Elder over the estate, they register 'amusement at the sight of this queer half-drunken figure [the Drover] spouting a lingo of which they knew nothing'.[109] Mr Elder asks the factor whether the Drover's speech made sense as 'we know they are unlearned, and their dialect can have only a very few words, because the things around them are few and they live pretty much like animals. But what could he have found to say intelligibly at such length?'[110]

---

[107] *Ibid.* p. 25.
[108] *Butcher's Broom*, p. 259.
[109] *Ibid.* pp 155 - 156.
[110] *Ibid.* pp. 159 - 160.

As a result of Gunn's depiction of the community, the reader knows that this assessment is faulty. However, from a stranger's perspective, without a common language, the temptation is to assume that their culture is as impoverished as their basic subsistence life style. This is very much the situation recounted in Daniel Corkery's work, *The Hidden Ireland*, published in 1924, two years before Gunn's first novel, *The Grey Coast*. After describing the visual appearance of the Irish community in similar terms he writes:

> 'But this much,' one hears whispered, 'we knew before; and why do you speak of the *Hidden Ireland*?' [. . .] The truth is the Gaelic people of that century were not a mob, as every picture given of them, whether by historian or novelist, would lead one to think. [. . .] They were the residuary legatees of a civilisation that was more than a thousand years old.[111]

Gunn argues a similar case for the Highlander as Corkery does for the Irish, but against the background of clearance rather than famine. Like their Irish equivalent, Highlanders were the legatees of an ancient oral culture, as epitomized by Gunn's narrator when he describes the story-telling following the wedding of Elie and Rob and comments that 'the guests revelled in this kind of invention, for it was born naturally out of their love of the ancient tales of their race, of proverbs, of impromptu satirical verses, of song-choruses, of witty sayings and divinations'.[112]

The betrayal by the chiefs was compounded by the further betrayal by ministers of religion. In his radio documentary, Gunn states 'the betrayal had not been a betrayal of their heritage themselves; it had been a betrayal by those whom the people absolutely trusted not only in their earthly affairs but in spiritual affairs: their chiefs and their ministers'.[113] This failure to support their congregations is portrayed in Gunn's fiction

---

[111]Daniel Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland* (1924) (Goldenbridge, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1989), pp. 40 - 41.
[112]*Butcher's Broom,* p. 287.
[113]Gunn, *The Highland Clearances*, p. 2.

as being a major factor in preventing resistance to the clearances, albeit he does not ascribe to them the same degree of blame as does MacColla. Prior to Heller and Elder having their audience with the Sutherlands in London they were told by the factor, Mr Falcon, that the Church would support the law, which was on the side of the improvers. When some incredulity was expressed, Falcon suggested that, with the possible exception of a weakling, named Sage, 'every one of them will threaten their people with the fires of hell, if they don't go peaceably'.[114] Throughout the Highlands, with the exception of the historical Rev. Donald Sage, this is precisely what happened. In *Butcher's Broom*, the flavour of one such sermon is recounted by the Drover immediately before the Riasgan was cleared.[115] Generally speaking the actions taken by the improvers were legal and as such, as quoted above, were supported by the ministers. Earlier in this thesis it has been asserted that the adoption of English land laws was a contributory factor in the clearances. In *Butcher's Broom*, after the arrest, trial and acquittal of Heller - the details being identical to those of Patrick Sellar's trial - Tomas MacHamish the Drover, with whom Gunn may associate himself as the reader is told that the MacHamishes were 'a sept of the Gunns',[116] gives a commentary on the law which enabled such a miscarriage of justice to take place in the following terms:

> Fools! That great court was not dealing with history, with truth, with justice - it was dealing with law. And as the law of the land - the law *of the land* - is against us, how could it decide but in its own favour? Heller and her ladyship own this land. Who gave it to them? The law. Who made the law? Landlords like her ladyship in times past. At one time the land belonged to us all. There were no 'sheep-skins' then.[117] But now it belongs to her ladyship and is administered by the lily-white hands of her parasites. They have the law's right to clear us off the land, which our fathers fought and died for, to clear us into the sea, into

[114]*Butcher's Broom*, p. 168.
[115]*Ibid.* p. 343.
[116]*Ibid.* p. 168.
[117]This is a reference to parchment on which deeds were written, but has an added significance here due to the nature of the improvements.

> nothingness, into hell. It is out of their great mercy, their deep concern for their 'subjects', that they allow us to rot on their sea-beaches.[118]

As 'the cleavage between the desires of the people and the desires of the landlord was fundamental'[119] the people were driven out of their ancestral lands by the force of law and the joint betrayal of chiefs and ministers. As has previously been argued, the attachment of the Gaels to their native land was deep-rooted and this enforced breach caused great and lasting damage. The economic position of the landlords has already been made clear; now Gunn's narrator tells the reader:

> On the people's part there was love of the land, love of its visible features as something near and natural to them as their own limbs; they grew out of it as a birch tree grows out of it, and could be removed only by a tearing up of roots.[120]

This loss of roots has already been identified as being of particular import in the creation of the problems of the contemporary Highlands.

From historical records, it is known that many of the dispossessed died or emigrated and there is evidence of both in this novel. In the latter case Davie, Mairi's grandson, had planned to emigrate to Red River in North America but, on walking to the place of embarkation, found that his place had been taken and he returned home.[121] Although Davie did not in fact leave, the episode demonstrates that it was the more dynamic members of the population that took the plunge and left, thus encouraging, from the point of view of the Highlands, 'a survival of the unfittest'.

Central to Gunn's narrative and to the community of the Riasgan is Dark Mairi. She is not only the skilled herbalist and healer in the community - giving rise equally to acceptance, fear and awe - but also the most complete of Gunn's female archetypes. She is of the earth, and is as enduring, and is the embodiment of the people's culture.

---

[118] *Butcher's Broom*, pp. 416 - 417.
[119] *Ibid.* p. 267.
[120] *Butcher's Broom,* p. 267.
[121] *Ibid.* pp. 311 - 317.

She is the one to whom Elie can come in her trouble knowing that she will find succour without judgement. Indeed when Mairi dies at the end of the novel, it is Elie who is, in a sense, her successor. Ultimately, as Douglas Gifford states, she and the land are indivisible, 'she is, finally, Mairi Sutherland, eponymous spirit of her race'.[122]

Although the story of *Butcher's Broom* is one of tragedy, the tragedy of the passing of a way of life and a culture, there are seeds of hope. These are hinted at when Heller says to the Duke 'with that absolute power to dismiss your tenants completely, you yet have provided them with land by the seashore. The food resources of the sea have never yet been properly touched by your people. They will be, to the great benefit of the country'.[123] The story of this great enterprise is the 'turning point' illustrated in *The Silver Darlings*.

Before moving on to an assessment of the rise of the herring fisheries as described in *The Silver Darlings,* corroboration of the historical action associated with the clearances should be sought from the landscape itself. Alex Morrison states in his survey of the Dunbeath area that 'the remains of cleared settlements or those abandoned as a result of "improvements" form a major element in the cultural landscape of the Highlands'.[124] Around these settlements the ground can still provide evidence of the cultivation methods of the pre-clearance communities.[125] Although the action of *Butcher's Broom* is set in Kildonan, Morrison's comment refers to the Highlands as a wider entity and certainly the pattern of ruined and deserted settlements is replicated in Kildonan and the rest of inland Sutherland. The pattern of resettlement following the evictions is also verified by Morrison who refers to a 67% increase in the population of Latheron - which includes Dunbeath - between 1811 and 1821 as being

---

[122]'Neil Gunn and the Mythic Regeneration of Scotland', p. 89.
[123]*Butcher's Broom,* p. 262.
[124]Morrison, p. 150.
[125]*Ibid.* p. 106.

partially explainable 'by an influx of population, cleared from Kildonan and other parts of inland Sutherland, resettling in coastal areas of Sutherland and Caithness.[126] On a more positive note, the landscape bears witness to this influx as the crofting lands along the Caithness coastal strip still exist and they, and the harsh way of life that went with them, featured in Gunn's opening chapter which described the contemporary Highlands. The village of Badbea, now no longer inhabited, remains precariously perched on cliffs above the sea and has become part of the tourist trail, being described on the Ordnance Survey map as 'Historic Depopulated Township'.[127] As was seen when reviewing the historical period of *Sun Circle*, the land is again bearing silent witness to the historical past of the clearances.

In terms of narrative chronology, *The Silver Darlings* is very much a direct sequel to *Butcher's Broom.* At the close of the latter, after having been resettled in the eastern coastal areas of Sutherland and Caithness, the men were making first, tentative, attempts at fishing. It has already been noted that Mairi had blessed their boat which was described as being 'old and some of the planking so rotten that a knife blade could be thrust into it as easily as into a cheese'.[128] *The Silver Darlings* continues this exploration of the sea when Tormad and his crew make an initial trip in their 'old tarred craft'.[129]

Historically this is sound as Colin, returning home after the battle of Waterloo (1815), arrives in time to witness the death of Mairi, which occurs in the July of the year in which the trial of Patrick Sellar took place.[130] The jury returned their verdict on this trial on the 24th April 1816.[131] With regard to the fishing 'Dunbeath was noted

---

[126]*Ibid.* p. 141.
[127]*Ordnance Survey: Road Atlas Britain* (London: Chancellor Press, 2001), p. 165.
[128]*Butcher's Broom*, p. 381.
[129]*The Silver Darling's*, p. 32.
[130]*Butcher's Broom*, p. 421.
[131]Grimble, *The Trial of Patrick Sellar,* p. 1.

as having 18 boats in 1808 and 155 in 1814 [. . .] [and] the greatest increase of all time in the parish population was between 1811 and 1821'.[132]

Despite the sequential nature of *Butcher's Broom* and *The Silver Darlings*, the two novels do not employ the same characters although there are a number of interesting parallels, even if these tend to be almost mirror images. Both feature a single mother, although Catrine in *The Silver Darlings* had the benefit of marriage. Both women had a partner in what was, essentially, the English armed forces: Colin had volunteered and fought in the Napoleonic wars whereas Tormad was taken, involuntarily, by the Press Gang. Once they had departed, their womenfolk had no means of knowing whether they had lived or died. Colin did come back, after Elie's husband Rob had conveniently died. By contrast Catrine had a premonition of Tormad's death the moment it happened, but she did not feel free to marry Roddie Sinclair until after confirmation was received. The former novel describes a community's enforced loss of their ancestral land whereas the latter is concerned with their embracing of the sea as a new source of livelihood and prosperity.

This shift from the negative to the positive also involves the assumption of a leadership role by the people themselves rather than a reliance on their clan chiefs. This, again, provides a link with the earlier *Sun Circle*, as the genetic legacy of the Vikings is now made manifest. In *The Silver Darlings* Aniel's vision of a Viking leader of the Celtic inhabitants becomes a fact in the person of Roddie Sinclair. This has been noted by Margery McCulloch in her study where she commented that:

> Catrine symbolises the people's rootedness in the land and their fear of the sea, while Roddie, truly a sea-figure, epitomises the new commitment of the young men to the sea. Roddie also provides an interesting link with the earlier *Butcher's Broom* and *Sun Circle*. He fulfils the Druid Aniel's vision of the future in *Sun Circle* as *Butcher's*

[132]Morrison, p. 141.

> *Broom* had fulfilled the Master's vision of the smoking glen. Aniel had seen the future of the Celtic peoples as being in the hands of those who, like the conquering Norsemen, could 'make their own decisions.' (SC357) It is significant that Roddie would appear to be of Viking stock. He is described as 'one of the old Vikings' (281); 'tall and fair, with his blue eyes and his quiet ways.' Musing on his activities, one of two old men sitting by the Inn 'had a sort of feeling that he had come himself up out of the sea - like one sent to deliver us.' (85)[133]

If there were any doubt about Gunn's intention to contrast the negative and tragic aspects of the enforced clearances with the positive embracing of new industries and opportunities they can be dispelled by reference to an article he wrote in 1968 entitled 'The Wonder Story of the Moray Firth' where he contrasts the times of the herring fisheries with the earlier clearances saying:

> The beginnings of the story coincide with the peak of the Clearances in these northern parts. From whole straths, up Kildonan way, the people were evicted and their homes destroyed. We all know something about that tragic business, and happily I am not concerned with it here. How reluctant we are even to remember it - and how pleasant to tell a story of another kind! If I mention it, then, it is because though great numbers of the evicted were shipped to Canada, many of them built shacks by the seashore and managed to keep alive long enough to take part in the new great adventure - the adventure with the sea.
> Behind them was the land - and they knew what had happened to them there. In front of them - the sea; and the wonderful thing about the sea was that it was free to them all.[134]

The symbolism of turning their back on the land and turning to the sea is inescapable - and the result of the people's more positive, and self-reliant, actions was that 'the seaboard round the Moray Firth went up in a human blaze - as hectic a blaze as ever was seen in any gold rush to the Klondyke. [. . .] It threw - and, I maintain, still throws - a light on all those notions about Highlanders being indifferent or lazy'.[135] This comment refutes the prevailing attitudes of the 'improvers' and the English in *Butcher's Broom* and reflects more the results of Campbell's experiment in *The*

---

[133]McCulloch, p. 88.
[134]Neil M. Gunn, 'The Wonder Story of the Moray Firth', *Anarchy,* Vol. 8, No. 4, (April 1968), p. 122.
[135]*Ibid.* p. 122.

Grampians Desolate. It very much points the way towards Gunn's own vision as evidenced by his meta-novel.

Sun Circle saw the coming of both Christianity and the Vikings and, in *Butcher's Broom*, the force of Christianity was seen, albeit of the post-reformation variety. It was noted when this was discussed earlier in this thesis that, despite the conquests, traces of the earlier attitudes and beliefs endured. In *The Silver Darlings* the same post-reformation Christian beliefs hold sway but, again, traces of earlier beliefs linger. In the quotation cited earlier from Gifford's essay 'Neil Gunn and the Mythic Regeneration of Scotland' he comments that Finn, in *The Silver Darlings* sees a vision of the Master and, as such, provides a link with *Sun Circle*.[136] The link with the earlier novel is unquestionably true but whether the cowled figure that Finn sees is the Master is unlikely. From the evidence of the text, and from the location of the vision itself - the House of Peace - the cowled and tonsured figure is Molrua and the link with the past is with the more inclusive Christianity practised by the Irish monks.[137]

The other link with the past as depicted in *Sun Circle* is with the Viking invasion. Although the victors of these incursions seem to have lost their cultural identity and their language, having been absorbed by the Celts, their genetic legacy lives on in their seafaring skills as well as in their leadership abilities, especially in the blue-eyed seafarer Roddie, who most fully embodies the Viking spirit.

The Silver Darlings is a novel of great dynamism; movement, in many different manifestations, is at its very heart. As has been inferred, there is the movement from the land to the sea, there is the movement of Catrine from the home she had enjoyed, briefly, with Tormad to Dunbeath (Dunster), there is the movement from reliance on

---

[136]'Neil Gunn and the Mythic Regeneration of Scotland', p.89.
[137]*The Silver Darlings,* pp. 95, 189, 214, 419, 540 and 583 - 584.

lairds to self-reliance and, above all, there is the movement by its principal characters towards self-knowledge, especially in the case of Finn, whose journey of self-discovery incorporates movement at many points. Finn himself walks back to Helmsdale, retracing his mother's steps and meets with relatives there, so forging links with his personal past. He makes a journey into the unknown again when he goes to seek out the plague doctor first in Watten and finally in Wick before returning with the medicine that will cure his mother's illness. Despite his mother's fears and opposition, Finn goes to sea with Roddie and his journey takes him to the Hebrides and contact with a fully-functioning Gaelic community. Finn's relationship with Roddie is a complex one. He is both a hero figure and a rival for the affection of Catrine. These problematic relations are developed throughout the plot but, perhaps especially, in two events involving movement. One is the climb up a precipice in search of food and water for the crew; the other a descent of a cliff to rescue two shipwrecked seamen. In the latter case, Roddie controls the rope which forms Finn's lifeline and total trust is both needed and achieved. Ironically, despite the dynamic activity of those episodes, Finn's lessons are finally learned in the stillness which exists at the heart of the circle - depicted here as the House of Peace, a place where Finn does indeed find peace and a communion with his forebears.

Finn's experience reflects the purpose to which the novel's dynamism is directed, the achievement of wholeness and balance. Catrine, as a true descendant of Mairi and Elie, represents the earth principal and she fears the trackless sea which has taken her husband. Roddie in contrast represents the sea and its mastery but, far from this being a novel where the new supplants the old, Gunn is at pains to show that a true synthesis is needed - not the land only but the land and the sea together, a concept encapsulated

in his *Scots Magazine* article 'Land and Sea: Twin halves of the Mystery'.[138] The final union between Catrine and Roddie represents this coming together of the land and the sea. It is the final coming together also of the Celtic and Viking elements, the marriage between Haakon and Nessa spoken of by Aniel as being the way to achieve an effective leadership and, after the lack of leadership from the Gaels' chieftains, this need is as great as ever.

It is, however, in the characterization of Finn that the true synthesis can be seen. He is seen to be in total accord with his Gaelic past, an understanding that he obtains from his Hebridean sojourn, and he is shown to be moulded naturally in the Bardic tradition stretching back to Aniel and his father - as well as forward to Gunn himself whose narrative style mirrors the oral traditions of his predecessors. Yet, at the same time, Finn is able to assume the leadership of a crew engaged in the fishing that provides financial security for the future. It is no coincidence that Gunn has given him the name of his preferred mythic hero. It will be recalled from the comments in the first part of section two that Gunn's preference for Finn MacCoul, was because of the wisdom (gained through eating the 'Salmon of Wisdom' which had been feeding on the 'hazel nuts of knowledge')[139] that made him a great captain. Ultimately it is through the acquisition of wisdom through experience and meditation that has made Finn in *The Silver Darlings* a fine leader.

Before moving on to a consideration of 'that which was lost' as demonstrated by Gunn's chapter three it is appropriate to consider the structure of *The Silver Darlings* as a text and evaluate what Gunn was seeking to achieve. Apart from the links with the past that are in evidence, and the associated recurrence of the collective

---

[138]Neil M. Gunn, ' Land and Sea, twin halves of the mystery', *The Scots Magazine*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (November 1940), p - 122.
[139]*Young Art and Old Hector.* pp. 17 - 18.

unconscious in this novel, Gunn again uses symbol and archetypes to underline his points. As was seen in *The Grey Coast*, Finn's expedition to the Outer Hebrides, to a haven of the old Gaelic culture, had a marked effect. Both Finn and Ivor Cormack, from the earlier novel, were reunited with their cultural heritage - symbolically seen as having an inherent completeness and balance - *via* ceilidhs and oral storytelling traditions. Both were able to see their way forward with greater clarity, thus enabling them to be more decisive in their everyday lives, boosting leadership qualities. The symbolic use of names is again evident in *The Silver Darlings*. Finn has already been alluded to and once again we have a Hector as a male archetype, this time appearing as the principal storyteller encountered by Finn in his visit to North Uist. The narrator's comments at the time of the landfall on North Uist make it abundantly clear that this return to a spiritual source is of the utmost importance when he says:

> The nights they spent in that remote place were never to be forgotten by Finn. They had the influence on his life of a rare memory that would come and go by the opening of a small window far back in his mind. Through such an opening a man may see a sunny, green place with the glisten on it of a bright jewel, or a brown interior place and the movement of faces, or a strand in the darkening and the crying of a voice, but whatever the sight or the sound or the moment, it is at once far back in time and far back in the mind, so that it is difficult to tell one from the other. Indeed, an odd commingling seems to take place, and a curious revealing light is not even thought of, yet had always been there.[140]

The Silver Darlings, which has been described as a 'folk epic',[141] is a big novel in every way. It is rightly considered to be one of Gunn's finest novels and yet, insofar as the story of the fishing industry is concerned it tells only a partial story. It is apparent from the first chapter of Gunn's meta-novel that he was acutely aware of the collapse of the fishing industry at the time of his physical return to the Highlands, indeed it was

---

[140] *The Silver Darlings*, p. 535.
[141] Alexander Scott, 'Folk Epic: The Silver Darlings', in *Neil M. Gunn: The Man and the Writer*, ed. by Alexander Scott and Douglas Gifford (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1973), pp. 123 - 140.

his reaction to the severe economic decline that was felt to be a contributory factor in his deciding to write commercially. Despite this he chooses to leave the action of *The Silver Darlings* on a high note. Finn has come of age, he is about to embark on matrimony and he has taken delivery of a new fishing boat of his own and the future is looking set fair. Gunn deliberately chooses to leave the reader with a positive message.

Corroboration of these events can, again, be made by reference to the landscape itself. Morrison notes that in Dunbeath 'a small pier was built on the north bank at the mouth of Dunbeath Water in 1850'.[142] He goes on to say that 'remains of this nineteenth century activity can be seen in the rubble-built warehouse and the ice-house and salmon-bothy at the mouth of Dunbeath water.'[143] All the way up the Caithness coast from Berriedale to Wick evidence can be seen of the herring boom. Every available harbourage was pressed into service with the most dramatic one being that of Whaligoe where 365 steps were cut into the cliff to make a precipitous descent to a tiny cove which provided a precarious haven for a few fishing boats. All the catch had to be manhandled (or womanhandled) up these steps and all the equipment had to be transported up and down them as well. The growth of larger villages along the eastern coast is also attributable to the fishing industry in many instances. Retracing Catrine's walk over the Ord into Caithness takes the traveller past the Grey Hen's Well where she stopped for sustenance. This is now marked by a stone giving the name. The place where the dramatic rescue takes place is more difficult to determine but it could well have been Portormin Head just to the North of the harbour. Overall the message of the landscape of Caithness and Sutherland bears witness to the historical activity described in all the contributory novels

[142]Morrison, p. 144.
[143]*Ibid.* p. 144.

That which was lost

Perhaps as a result of Gunn's chapter three being concerned with the past, there are many examples of things that could plausibly be listed under the heading of 'that which was lost'. Taken collectively they fall into three general categories, namely: those which are repetitions and reinforcements of elements already noted in this thesis, secondly those which have been touched upon before and which, in this chapter, become reinforced and elevated to the status of 'that which was lost' and, finally, those which are genuinely new elements, being highlighted in this chapter for the first time.

Section two concluded that 'that which was lost' was the wisdom of boyhood. This was equated with the ability to see clearly; colour and joy being drained from adults largely as a result of the relentless toil required of economic necessity. Wisdom was seen to be rooted within the continuing community, which was linked to the Gaelic language in which this wisdom was recorded. In that section it was made clear that, following the Act of Union, and especially after the 1745 rising, English increasingly became the language of officialdom, education and history, the latter of which became, effectively, English history. This led to a rupture between the present and its constituent past, a lack of continuity that results, Cairns Craig argues, in Scotland becoming 'historyless'.

It was asserted in section two that, to take full advantage of education and skills training, native Highlanders needed to go to the Lowlands or England to gain qualifications but that they should then return - the theme of 'the man who came back' was noted - to enable their homeland to benefit. All too often those who left never did return, usually with the full approbation of their parents. This depopulation, often justified on economic grounds, accelerated the demise of Gaelic communities, their culture and language. As theirs was largely an oral culture, the loss of language had

far-reaching consequences. This meant that, increasingly, the modern Highlander was separated from his roots. In the second part of section two this was seen as being a major element of 'that which was lost' and one that needed to be repaired. In this chapter, Gunn argues that a reunion with one's roots is an integral part of the action which needs to be taken if regeneration is to take place.

In chapter three, the historical epicyclic journey, the causes of these ancient schisms are identified and investigated. This not only reinforces the message of the earlier chapters but also, by making the causes clear, makes the way forward towards regeneration easier to see. Certainly the imagery of losing one's roots, and with them the life-perpetuating sap, was made very clear in *Butcher's Broom* - 'that crucial connection with a sustaining "source" has been lost',[144] and, with it, the Highlander's sense of self, and even of belonging.

Although the subject has been touched upon earlier in the thesis, in the three novels under review in this section, the subject of 'English' law, and especially land law, has been referred to in much greater depth and can be seen to be, in part, linked with the communities' oral tradition. Previously a verbal agreement on tenancy, and a handshake, had sufficed but now the 'sheepskins', the deeds of title, were all-important, a factor that was to prove crucial in the clearances.

Aspects of 'that which was lost' that are new to this third chapter can be identified as leadership, self-sufficiency, oral traditions and Columban Christianity. These novels show how the traditional Highland approach to leadership was to appoint a Chief to be *primus inter pares*. Despite the fact that 'clan' inferred a family, this Chief was not necessarily, in the old days, a hereditary one. However, following the union, the Chief of the time became the freeholder, even though he (or she) could no longer

[144]Burns, p. 66.

be regarded as *primus inter pares*. This legal change, as has been recorded, was extremely important but, arguably, even more important was the fact that after a tradition of having a Chief who was chosen for his leadership qualities, and who was then served almost mindlessly in the belief that he served the clan's best interest, there was now a landlord who could in no way be regarded as a Chieftain. This left the people rudderless, with the negative results that Gunn has plotted over the three historical periods covered by the novels allocated to this chapter. Clearly a different approach is needed by the modern Highlander and, in *The Silver Darlings* Gunn is clearly suggesting that the Highlander must become more self-reliant and take a greater degree of initiative. The new role model, drawing on imported Viking genetic heritage is, surprisingly, not the Viking figure of Roddie but rather Finn in whom is seen the synthesis of both the Viking and the Celt. He retains all the cultural heritage, which Gunn sees as being vital in any regenerative process for the Highlander, and yet incorporates the self-reliance and decisiveness of the Viking sea lords.

Ironically, the loss of traditional subsistence farming, and thus a form of self-sufficiency, as a result of the clearances has been shown in this series of novels as being the catalyst for a new form of self-sufficiency relying, this time, on both land and sea, the synthesis encompassed by the mature Finn.

Inherent in what has been said above is the difference between the oral and written traditions. Gaelic traditional mythology and lore has, essentially, been passed on orally rather than as a written heritage. In these novels Gunn continues to stress the importance of this heritage to the community, both past and present. The novels also demonstrate how, perhaps especially after the union, written sources increasingly take precedence over oral. It is the written deeds which testify to land ownership rather than an oral agreement between the parties; it is the written histories which are seen as

being the most dependable and, as was seen when *Highland River* was discussed, this tends to be an English version of history. The concept of an impoverished peasantry retaining an oral high culture, as recounted in *The Hidden Ireland*, seems so incredible that those without a knowledge of the language or the community would be likely to make the type of superficial judgements recorded in *Butcher's Broom*.

Another element that was lost, as recorded in the three novels in this Chapter is that of Columban Christianity. Certainly Gunn writes with some affection for the earlier Celtic form of Christianity as espoused by Molrua and equally clearly has a marked aversion for the post-reformation variety that had taken hold in the Northland by the time of *Butcher's Broom*.

Of all the things that were lost, and highlighted in this section, the question of a pre-reformation form of Christianity raises the biggest problems. It has been argued that, in Gunn's retrospective vision, the recovery of 'that which was lost' would aid the process of regeneration. Realistically it is not now possible to reinstate Christianity in its original form and it would be unrealistic to suggest that this was Gunn's aim. In so far as we can include religion at all in any recapturing of 'that which was lost' this must be restricted to the inclusivity that was a part of the Celtic church and which is notably lacking in the reformed church.

Re-appraisal

In the discussion of Gunn's Chapter Three, the contributory novels have been examined in relation to their position within the meta-novel. The ways in which the narrative of these individual novels relates to the chapter title have been considered as has their collective contribution to the developing plot structure of the meta-novel.

It has been noted throughout this thesis that Gunn habitually re-used and developed his material. This tendency continued to the end with the meta-novel concept representing a further, and final, re-working of the material although, as this was a private exercise, this new vision was never fully realised, leaving the individual published novels as his literary legacy.

However, just as an examination of Gunn's own source material can help to illuminate his later use of the material, so an examination of the role played by his individual novels within the meta-novel enables a re-evaluation to be made of these works as stand-alone novels.

The three novels allocated to this chapter have long been considered Gunn's 'historical novels', with Grimble, amongst others, seeing them as a trilogy. The retrospect offers little by way of insight into these novels and, whilst it may seem to be stating the obvious, Gunn merely confirms the previously held view by linking the three novels under an 'historical' heading.

Although these three novels were all written prior to *Highland River*, Gunn placed the latter book in an earlier chapter of the meta-novel and, consequently, the historical summary contained in that novel has already appeared, giving background substance to the historic causes of the 'state of mind' exhibited by the contemporary Highland communities as described in Chapter One. To a large extent, therefore, the message of this Chapter is repetitious. It is ironic that this chapter, containing at least

two of Gunn's finest novels (*Butcher's Broom* and *The Silver Darlings*), is the one that has the least impact on the developing plot structure of the meta-novel.

As an historical novel, *Sun Circle* appears to adopt a questionable chronology. In this section, prompted by the meta-novel's chapter heading, this perceived flaw has been considered in the light of non-narrative history. The evidence has still not been fully evaluated but it is at least possible that the chronology Gunn offers may be supportable.

Within the meta-novel structure *Sun Circle* and *Butcher's Broom* can be regarded as essentially backward looking, predictably providing an extended explanation and exploration of the causes of Chapter One's negative attitude of mind. Conversely, and surprisingly, it is *The Silver Darlings*, arguably Gunn's best book, that poses the most problems in any re-assessment. As an historical novel, it purports to chronicle the herring-fishing boom that dramatically changed the lives and fortunes of the far North East but, in this, it creates a distorted view by ending whilst the herring boom is in full swing rather than providing a more complete history, covering also the later decline. It could be argued that, as an historical novel, this is a flaw. But for its premature ending this novel could also have been regarded as an extended explanation of the negative state of mind caused by the demise of the industry, the basis of the first chapter of the meta-novel. *The Silver Darlings* seems, therefore, to be fulfilling a different role within the larger structure. As has already been noted, the upbeat ending underlines the fact that the historical achievement of the fishing boom had been brought about by the efforts of the folk themselves. In this, the positive message of *The Silver Darlings* is most nearly reflected in that of the meta-novel itself. It may also prove to be the case that the positive message of the meta-novel may, like that of *The Silver Darlings*, be achieved *via* a literary device.

This central chapter of the meta-novel, perhaps appropriately, appears to strike a balance between a backward-looking explanation of earlier chapters in the narrative and a forward-looking parallel to the positive conclusion of the meta-novel as a whole, a regeneration achieved by and for the community.

SECTION FOUR

'TRANSITION'

PART ONE:

The Murderousness of the Modern World

The title of the chapter as a whole

Like chapter two, chapter four comprises two parts, entitled 'The Murderousness of the Modern World' and 'Escapism Validated'. Unlike chapter two, Gunn does not allocate these parts numerical values (i.e. 4 and 4a) but merely quotes their titles as subtitles to the overall chapter title, 'Transition'. Gunn allocated only one novel, *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* (1944), to part one, but no less than five, a quarter of his published novels, to part two, underlining the importance he attributed to the subject. These novels were, *Wild Geese Overhead*,[1] *The Lost Chart*,[2] *The Shadow*,[3] *The Key of the Chest*[4] and *Blood Hunt.*[5] All of these novels will be considered later.

Transition implies movement and it is worth devoting some space to a consideration of Gunn's intended reading of the word. Within the meta-novel's structure, such movement could relate to the transition from the developmental element, which ends with chapter four, to the conclusion in chapter five. Perhaps a more probable connotation is that it refers to a transition between the two parts of this chapter. This would, again, mirror chapter two where, within the context of the epicyclic journey involved, part one identified 'that which was lost' and part two started to show how its recovery could be used as a regenerative tool.

A further possibility is that Gunn's chapter four, in its entirety, forms a transition between the preceding three chapters and the conclusion. This may at first sight seem unlikely as chapter four is perceived as being part of the developmental element of the meta-novel (chapters two to four inclusive) rather than having a separate and stand-alone function but a closer examination suggests there could be justification in seeing

---

[1]Neil M. Gunn, *Wild Geese Overhead* (London: Faber, 1939).
[2]Neil M. Gunn, *The Lost Chart* (London: Faber, 1949).
[3]Neil M. Gunn, *The Shadow* (London: Faber, 1948).
[4]Neil M. Gunn, *The Key of the Chest* (London: Faber, 1946). The printer's notices quote 1945 as the date of publication but the novel was published on the 26th January 1946 - see Stokoe, *A Bibliography of the Works of Neil M. Gunn*, p. 66.
[5]Neil M. Gunn, *Blood Hunt* (London: Faber 1952).

this interpretation as a realistic supplementary reading. In the novels allocated to the chapters discussed so far in this thesis the Highlands have been portrayed as the backdrop to a living community, of which the novels' principal characters were members. This continues in the first part of chapter four but, in the second, the emphasis moves from individuals working within community to a concentration on the individual alone. This shift of focus may seem a small one given that Gunn always saw Highland regeneration being achieved by individuals as his recurring motif of 'The Man who Came Back' amply illustrates: the Highlander who leaves to gain new knowledge and skill which, on his return, he places at the service of the community. However, in the novels in part two of chapter four, while Gunn continues to depict the Highlands in positive terms as a site of healing, of regeneration, this healing is in relation to individuals rather than community, and extends to non-Highlanders. This change of emphasis invites a reassessment of Gunn's aims and objectives.

Earlier in the thesis, it was postulated that Gunn's initial, politically motivated, aims may have shifted over time; and it is possible that the term 'transition' used in this chapter reflects a transition in his own thinking. Given the subject matter of *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*, it is possible that any change of thinking on Gunn's part was caused as a result of the second world war. Of the novels allocated to part two of this chapter, *Wild Geese Overhead* was published in 1939 when war seemed imminent and the remainder were written either during wartime or the subsequent cold war period. However, the suggestion that the war may have affected Gunn's thinking must remain tentative, as some novels written during war time have already been considered and are in accord with Gunn's originally perceived aims. This is especially true of *The Drinking Well* which is concerned with regeneration in the community. All these possible interpretations of 'Transition' will be considered in the following review.

The Murderousness of the Modern World - the contributory novel

Part one, unlike any other division within Gunn's meta-novel, involves only one novel, *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*.

Gunn's motivation for writing this sequel to *Young Art and Old Hector* has been touched on earlier. Gunn's biographers favour the suggestion that it was written in response to Naomi Mitchison's accusation that the earlier work was over-sentimental. However, Gunn himself claimed to have been prompted by Walsh.[6] Whatever the inspiration, *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* is, as Colin Manlove states, 'a highly political allegory, in the tradition of Yevgeny Zamiatin's *We* (trans. 1924)[7] and Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932),[8] on the consequences of the deification of the state at the expense of the individual.'[9]

There has been some debate as to whether the novel is a critique of the excesses of Fascism or Communism. John L. Broom wrote that it 'is a powerful and impressive allegory of totalitarian corruption and brutality. Written during the war, it was, of course, specifically directed against the Nazi tyranny, but its message will remain valid so long as dictators of the Right or the Left try to exercise dominion over the mind of man.'[10] Ian Grimble, commenting on this statement, said, 'I like the "of course" when it wasn't!'[11] However, in June 1944, Gunn writes to Naomi Mitchison :

> Think of what your criticism amounts to. My book is against fascism. You take it as being against communism. Now isn't that a thought! In analysis, what does it amount to? If we take dialectical materialism as the unity of theory and practice, that practice having primacy, isn't it odd that when I leave the theory out and describe only the practice, the actual practice, you assume communism? Yet I described fascism, using its proper word "corporate" in the Italian fashion and even describing the salute, which is so different from the Russian one![12]

---

[6]Hart and Pick, pp. 194 - 195.
[7]Yevgeny Zamiatin, *We* (New York: Dutton, 1924).
[8]Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (1932) (London: The Folio Society, 1971).
[9] Colin Manlove, *Scottish Fantasy Literature: A critical survey*, p. 171.
[10]John L. Broom, ' The Novels of Neil M. Gunn', p. 21.
[11]Grimble, 'Neil M. Gunn Memorial Lecture', p. [5]
[12]*Neil M Gunn: Selected Letters*, p.80.

Hart and Pick, in their biography, after quoting from this letter, say they regard the assertion that the novel is specifically about fascism as 'disingenuous, because *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* is closely based on the brainwashing techniques used by the Russians for the Moscow show-trials'.[13]

In truth, as the quotation illustrates, Gunn is concerned not with specific political theories but only with the practices themselves. As these appear indistinguishable one from the other, regardless of the underlying theory, the critique must be levelled at totalitarianism *per se*. The text of *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* confirms this view when the Questioner, after comparing 'corporate' with 'freedom' states, observes 'that though each side fights for its own label, what both sides are getting at is clearly the same thing in final result - namely, an efficiently organised State, with each individual integrated into the whole [. . .].' [14] Gunn's article 'The Novel at Home' in The Scots Magazine, April 1946, further suggests that totalitarianism as such is what he had in mind. He writes 'the notion of testing, as it were, the ways of life of the old man and the little boy against the conscious ideology of totalitarianism got a grip on my mind that I couldn't shake off'.[15]

The Green Isle of the Great Deep, written during war time, examines themes of universal importance. It is, perhaps, surprising that this novel should be the one chosen to see a return of Young Art and Old Hector, with their homespun wisdom, but it will be seen as this study proceeds that the character of Gunn's two protagonists, and their inherent beliefs and qualities, are crucial in the search for an antidote to 'The Murderousness of the Modern World'. This is an epicyclic journey with a cultural focus, specifically Highland culture.

---

[13]Hart and Pick, p. 196.
[14]*The Green Isle of the Great Deep*, p. 197.
[15]Neil M. Gunn, 'The Novel at Home', in *Landscape and Light: Essays by Neil M. Gunn*, ed. by Alistair McCleery (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), p. 133.

Craig's view of Scotland's history, or lack of it, has already been aired. Here it must be acknowledged that external history does intrude on the novel's Highland community *via* news-sheets reporting brainwashing. This may support his argument that Highland narratives require the support of external history, but it is remarkable that Gunn can commentate on world politics, totalitarianism and psychological mind-control through the medium of a small Highland community and a Celtic paradise.

The Green Isle of the Great Deep is a dystopian novel that can be viewed alongside those better known works in the genre, *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.[16] It was initially popular, 'selling 18,000 copies within four years, far beyond the publisher Faber's initial conservative run of 8,000'.[17] This popularity, however, 'has not endured as has the work of Huxley or Orwell'.[18] Both *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* and the later *Nineteen Eighty-Four* were published by Faber, and Gunn's novel was almost certainly known to Orwell, whose book also concentrates on brainwashing techniques although, unlike Gunn, Orwell offers no positive solution. Gunn clearly thought highly of *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* as, when Dr. Robert MacIntyre of the S. N. P. asked him why the book was not better known, Gunn said 'I don't know, it was my best book'.[19] It is pertinent to note that, unlike the regimes described in *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Gunn's vision is of a paradise, which has gone awry.

The structure of *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* is worthy of comment. All the action between pages 24 and 252 takes place in the moment of drowning. In this it is similar to *Pincher Martin* by William Golding.[20] However Gunn, unlike either Golding or Orwell, generates a positive outcome, even if this, like *The Drinking Well*,

---

[16]George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954).
[17]Manlove, *Scottish Fantasy Literature*, p. 171.
[18]*Ibid.* p. 178.
[19]Stokoe, *A Bibliography of the Works of Neil M. Gunn*, p. 64.
[20]William Golding, *Pincher Martin* (London: Faber, 1956) - another novel from Faber.

relies upon a *deus ex machina* device. The novel's form follows the tripartite form adopted by Gunn for his meta-novel but, the comparison between *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* and the meta-novel goes much deeper. The first part, like chapter one of the meta-novel, is concerned with the contemporary world and its problems, notably politically inspired brainwashing techniques. The second part of the novel, which equates to the developmental part of the meta-novel, deals with the problems identified in a fantasy world operating 'out of time'. The whole of the action in the middle part grows organically from seeds sown in the first part, despite it being only eighteen pages long. The final part, which is even shorter, sees a return to the real world, but a world changed as a result of the action in the developmental section. With its positive ending and tripartite structure, *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* follows the form of Comedy and, given its cultural focus, is very much a microcosm of the meta-novel itself.

Identifying the issues

The thoughts Gunn recorded in his diary at the outbreak of the second world war (quoted by John Burns in *A Celebration of the Light*)[21] reflect his anxieties at the time, anxieties to which *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* was, in part, a response. It is clear that he felt the individual was under threat from the forces unleashed in war but it is equally clear that he felt a mission to set down his positive feeling of light and happiness for the benefit of his fellows. He writes:

> In these last two years or so I have been increasingly conscious of certain qualities like light and happiness, conscious of them in a triple aspect - personal, philosophic and artistic. I might, if left to myself to ponder on them, manage to produce or reproduce them in writing. I know that if I could do this, it would be a vastly greater service to some of my fellows than would any routine clerical job in a service department. I am convinced, further, that writers will have to do something like this, in the first place to save the integrity of the individual threatened by the tyranny of the mass or collective mass, and in the second, to revitalise the core of life itself in each individual.[22]

Gunn here, as early as 1939, expresses his wish to convey his feelings of joy (Atoms of Delight) and employ them as a regenerative force. The additional role he identifies of revitalising the core of life in each individual may go some way to explain the suggested shift of focus from the individual within community to the individual himself.

All the themes and issues of the novel are identified in the opening few pages. They are debated in a gathering at Old Hector's house where conversation centres on news-sheets reporting on the horrors of the second world war. Reports of the brutalities of concentration camps which they contained, whilst horrific, could at least be understood, brutality being not unknown in the Highlands - as the experiences of

---

[21]Burns, pp. 63-64.
[22]N. M. Gunn, 'Diary', 4th September 1939. (Unpublished: National Library of Scotland, Deposit 209)

the Clearances attest - but the real horror for these Highland folk was the barely credible report of brainwashing, of breaking the mind so 'that when they have finished with you, you are different.' (GI 12) In his narrative, Gunn is at pains to make a distinction between a person cowed under torture who makes a false confession, which can be recanted, and the permanent results of the brainwashing techniques. Hector expresses the feeling of the group when he states that 'the mind is all we have finally. If they take that from us - if they change that - then we will not be ourselves, and all meaning goes from us, here - and hereafter.' (GI 13) When it is suggested that, over time, everyone changes, Hector amplifies his statement by adding, 'No [. . .] not in the things that matter. If we change in them . . .' (GI 14) The attitude of the Deity to such matters is implied in Hector's reference to 'hereafter' but is more specifically invoked by his daughter Agnes who says of the perpetrators of such practices that 'God will call them to a terrible judgement for it.' (GI 11) In response, Red Dougal comments, without obvious cynicism, 'that, for some reason, He does not always interfere when wrong-doing is going on.' (GI 11)

In her commentary, Margery McCulloch draws attention to an aspect of brainwashing that is of particular relevance to this study when she writes:

> There is, however, it seems to me, an additional dimension to the loss feared by Hector [the changing of the mind] in view of the emphasis placed on the sense of continuity between past and present in the Celtic culture Gunn depicts. For Hector and his community, individuality is inextricably woven into the communal experience of past and present. If the mind is broken, not only does all meaning go from us, but the past too will be nameless. Life itself will be meaningless.[23]

The sense of continuity has been a major theme in the examination of the meta-novel and the rupturing of that continuity and sense of history has been identified as a cause of contemporary Highland problems, so this aspect is of major importance.

---

[23]McCulloch, *The Novels of Neil M. Gunn*, pp. 107 - 108.

During the meeting at Hector's house, following an anecdote about the treatment of a boy who refuses to betray his parents, Willie says 'they could take a little boy like Art there -', to which Red Dougal adds 'If they could catch him!' (GI 13) This last comment refers to Art's legendary win in the race for boys under nine at the Clachdrum games, recounted in *Young Art and Old Hector*, thus forming a link with Gunn's earlier work. Loyalty and legendary running ability both feature in the activities of The Green Isle. (A further link with the previous novel, and yet also forming part of the agenda to be worked through in The Green Isle, is a reference to the hazel nuts of knowledge and the salmon of wisdom.)

In the short, straight-forward debate described in the early pages of the novel, the scene is set for the main action of *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*, taking place within that fantasy land which is entered by falling through the Hazel Pool.

The issues revisited in The Green Isle

When Young Art and Old Hector reach The Green Isle through the Hazel Pool the real action of the novel commences. Their first encounter is with a coastwatcher, a task that Gunn himself had undertaken during the first world war.[24] One of the duties of coastwatchers is to watch for, and counter, enemy activity. The introduction of a coastwatcher to the paradisiacal Green Isle makes it clear from the outset that all is not well and that new arrivals are viewed as potential enemies - a reversal of the normally accepted state of paradise. This reversal of the normal order of things is a continuing feature in The Green Isle and confirms that an original utopia has gone sadly astray. A similar reversal of expectations features in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* where the slogan of the mis-named Ministry of Truth is:

> WAR IS PEACE
> FREEDOM IS SLAVERY
> IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH [25]

Despite this similarity there is no suggestion that the regime in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* had ever sought to be utopian and, unlike *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*, there is no positive outcome for humanity at the end of the novel.

The coastwatcher instructs Art and Hector not to stray from the road and only to eat at the inns where they are to stay each evening on their way to the administrative centre, the Seat on the Rock. This, again, proves a reversal of the norm. Inns should give the wayfarer succour, whereas in The Green Isle the specially prepared meals establish a form of mind control and also make it impossible to eat the fruit, the fruit of life, which grows plentifully in The Green Isle. From the very start of Art and

---

[24]Hart and Pick, p. 50.
[25]*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p. 7.

Hector's visit to The Green Isle, Gunn brings his main theme, that of brainwashing, to the fore.

Intuitively, or perhaps exercising the wisdom of boyhood, Art dislikes the coastwatcher. (GI 27) Consequently, his instructions are disobeyed and Art and Hector travel alongside the road rather than on it, eating the forbidden fruit. The sense of unease the pair feel following their encounter with the coastwatcher results in them uncharacteristically burying the shells from the hazel nuts they eat. (GI 31) Despite Hector's attempts to comfort him, Art remains fearful and is adamant that he will not go to the inn, preferring to sleep in the open on a pile of straw. Here 'Art felt safe now, for he knew it was real straw by its smell'. (GI 32) Their refuge is in the shade of an enormous apple tree, associated in the narrative with the Edenic tree of the knowledge of good and evil, symbolically suggesting a confirmation of Art's intuition.

After two days of travel Art and Hector feel strengthened by their diet of fruit, and have suffered no ill effects from sleeping out. After their third night, Gunn introduces two new characters, Robert and Mary, who have a central role to play. Robert discovers Art and Hector in the orchard and takes them back to his croft where his wife Mary, an archetypal mother figure, gives them porridge for breakfast and a warm welcome, very different from others met with *en route*. Over breakfast Art and Hector discover to their surprise that, in The Green Isle, 'no-one eats the fruit'. (GI 41)

After this breakfast, Robert directs Hector and Art to the Seat on the Rock where each is allocated a guide - Merk is allocated to Hector and Mavis to Art. Characters in The Green Isle often bear a close resemblance to Clachdrum residents; here Mavis looks similar to Art's sister Morag but, as with The Green Isle itself, these similarities are never quite right, giving substance to the comment made at Hector's croft that if the mind is altered 'we will not be ourselves, and all meaning goes from us, here - and

hereafter.' (GI 13) At the Seat, the personal details of the two new entrants are recorded and, almost immediately, the proceedings take an unsavoury turn. The wonderfully innocent relationship that exists between Art and Hector, and which is in evidence throughout *Young Art and Old Hector*, is in danger of being misinterpreted by the administrators. When Hector is asked if Art is his grandson he replies 'No. sir, [. . .] He's no relation of mine. He's a neighbour's boy, and the name is Art Macrae.' (GI 45) This reply causes the official to regard him 'in a curious searching way', a reaction that is not helped by Hector's further comment 'For anything that may have been done between us, [. . .] he was not to blame.' (GI 45) It seems possible that a questionable relationship, rather than an innocent friendship, is suspected, indicating a major deviation from the attitude that should prevail in paradise.

At this point in the narrative the paths of the two protagonists diverge. Art escapes from the Seat on the Rock and goes into hiding near Robert and Mary's croft. Hector is consigned to the Questioner, the interrogator given the duty of laying his mind bare and subsequently indoctrinating him into the norms of The Green Isle. This procedure is necessary as Hector, by avoiding the inns, has not eaten the special porridge that renders the fruit of life a poison.

Robert's croft, where Hector is allowed to help, now becomes the principal site for the protagonists' meetings. Gunn makes the reader aware, through Hector's conversations with Robert and Mary and some of their close friends and neighbours, that God does indeed exist and is the final arbiter in his paradise, to whom all citizens have a right of appeal. To facilitate an extended meditation, God delegates the administration of paradise. The administrators, with the best of intentions, seek to control the population for the benefit of all. To make the population more malleable, they are denied the fruit of life and are fed instead with a processed gruel that saps

individuality and makes them appear 'like clean empty shells on a strange seashore'. (GI 41) After eating this processed food, any attempt to eat the fruit makes people ill. However, Mary has developed a herbal antidote and a select few have been eating the fruit with impunity. From Robert and Mary, Hector learns that the growth of legends rouses God from meditation, an event the administrators seek to avoid. By evading capture through his prowess at running, Art is rapidly becoming such a legend, making his arrest the highest priority for the administrators.

It can be seen that, with the exception of a direct comment on the war, Gunn has introduced into The Green Isle, all of the agenda items culled from the conversation in Hector's house.

Back at the Seat, Hector's interrogation continues with his main concern being to avoid inadvertently betraying Art. In *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* this questioning, whilst relentless and distressing in the extreme, does not extend to physical violence. However, in conversations between Merk, Hector's guide, and his colleague Axle, the reader learns that techniques used on earth, and hence the basis for the reports of brainwashing debated by the Highland community, have been adopted in other administrative districts of The Green Isle. Axle talks of 'the use of drugs and hypnotism' and advocates that they 'use fear. Defeat their violence with a greater violence. And in the end you will get them to accept your new conditions with gratitude.' (GI 50) Such approaches are much more in keeping with those used in the other dystopian novels mentioned. In *Brave New World* brainwashing commences in infanthood where, as a result of electric shock techniques, children associate books and flowers with pain.[26] Similarly, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, questioning is associated

[26]*Brave New World*, p. 21.

with torture and pain (including the infamous Room 101 where prisoners are exposed to the one thing that is, to them personally, unendurable).[27]

The paths of Art and Hector reconverge through God. The legend that Art has become (associating him with both art and King Arthur), born out of his intuitive nature and fuelled by the strengthening fruit of life, finally comes to the attention of God, who then returns to his rightful place at the Seat. Meanwhile Hector, driven beyond endurance by the Questioner, turns at bay, claims his right to an audience, and demands 'to see God'. (GI 155) The similarities with known friends continues with Art mistaking the old, bearded, man first for his friend Hector, and then for the starter of the races at Clachdrum, while Hector is reminded of 'someone he had seen long long ago in a tall mirror at the end of a landing in a forgotten house', a phrase that suggests Gunn subscribed to the view that Man had created God in his own likeness. (GI 238) God, appropriately within a Celtic paradise, is a Gaelic speaker and able to converse with Hector in his native tongue, so putting him at his ease. Back at the Seat, God interrogates the administrators, highlighting the flaws in their stewardship.

Art meets God and feels totally comfortable in His presence. The conversation between them is easy and reflects the relationship that Art has enjoyed with Hector for most of his young life. Evident is a warmth and a deep, genuine, concern on both sides that makes the acquisition of knowledge easier. (GI 173 - 179) From Art, God learns, at first hand, about the state of affairs in The Green Isle and God, basing his comments around the legend of Finn MacCoul and the Salmon of Wisdom, suggests to Art that the true order of learning sees a progression from knowledge to wisdom and then to magic. Later, the audience that Hector has with God expands upon this issue with God commenting:

---

[27] *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, pp. 192 - 194 and p. 228.

> The problem then is how to bring wisdom to knowledge, so that knowledge, instead of getting the sword's edge, which is cruel and sterile, will be given wisdom which is kind and fruitful. [. . .] Yet the way must be found. (GI 241)

God, after associating knowledge with the head and wisdom with the heart, observes:

> One thing seems clear [. . .] the head alone will never find that way. It has tried and always failed. For in the conscious power of the head there is a fascination. It is the instrument of logic, and it has within it the itch to fashion and sharpen and dissect. It dissects and finds out, and it takes the bits it finds and puts them together in an invention, and then it pulls the trigger. Whether with a system, or a plan, or an instrument - that is what the head alone has always done. (GI 241 - 242)

Speaking of the Questioner, God shows not only how paradise had strayed from the true path but also how the rift can be repaired, and so comes to the very heart of this novel and its message. He says to Hector:

> There was a time when the Questioner had wisdom. He used his head and drew on his wisdom. But the more he used his head only, the paler his wisdom became, until at last the elements of wisdom were no longer so but only the ghostly bits he used for making a pattern with his head. He knew in his head that you suffered, but as the head itself does not suffer, he himself was not affected, for what is affected swims deep with the salmon. He has divorced knowledge from wisdom, the head from the heart, the intellect from the spirit - for man has many words for these two regions - and because of the divorce, the taste of life has gone bitter and its hope sterile. (GI 242)

The legend of the salmon also contains the remedy: 'The ripe hazel nuts of knowledge fell into the pool and the salmon of wisdom ate them. And was made the wiser for the knowledge he ate. It is the natural order. There is no other. [. . .] The pool was everyman's pool in the river of life.' (GI 243) Finally, after talking of knowledge and wisdom, the third element was added, magic, 'which is the scent of the flower, the young feet of the runner, and the deep smile in the face'. (GI 245) To this trio God suggests a fourth and final element - the creator, love.

At the heart of this exposition, and its solution, is the conflict between the analytical and intuitive mind which will be the next subject to be considered but, before doing so, a brief consideration of the third part of the book must be made. This is the return to the contemporary world, but a world different as a result of the action in the development section.

The ending of *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* with Art and Hector's return to the real world has been seen as 'something of an anti-climax and with some loss of credibility'.[28] There is justification for this view as, after the audiences with God, the action of the novel becomes rather trivialized prior to Art and Hector's return to the real world *via* the Hazel Pool.

Art and Hector were in the process of gaffing a salmon from the Pool when they fell into the river and, in the conclusion, it becomes clear that Art's sister Morag and her boyfriend Tom were enjoying a secret picnic nearby at the time. They hear Art's cry and immediately run to pull the pair to safety and resuscitate them, Morag taking on the role of archetype that Mary had played as 'she was the only woman among them and life was her concern. And life she brought back as far as it could come'. (GI 254) It then becomes clear that the whole of the second part of the novel, as with *Pincher Martin*, was a dream whilst drowning. There is very little narrative beyond this point but it is apparent that Tom and Morag are moving towards a union, Art and Hector retain their close friendship and have much to talk about, and the leaflet about the brainwashing that was present at the outset does not resurface.

Gunn seems, perhaps naively, to be suggesting that the salmon myth contains all the elements necessary to counteract 'The Murderousness of the Modern World'. Almost the last words of the book refer to the salmon landed by Art as he fell:

---

[28]McCulloch, *The Novels of Neil M. Gunn*, p. 117.

> It was a cock fish of fully twenty pounds and he lay his length on green grass. Behind him the ground uprose in a tuft of grey grass and hazel withies. A bracken frond, which the autumn had touched, curved outward and over his tail. He had the girth which makes length deceptive, so that his proportions had the perfection which becomes legendary. Then there was his colour. It was not, below the blue-back, pure silver. It was silver invaded by gold, as knowledge might be invaded by wisdom. And finally, beyond the mouth, which was closed, lay also on the grass two hazel nuts which had fallen out of a ripe cluster from the bough overhead. (GI 255)

Symbolically, this salmon of wisdom will be brought to Hector and Art. (GI 255-256)

The final part of the tripartite form of this novel, true to the structure of Comedy, has reverted to the present day. All the issues discussed at the beginning have been worked through in The Green Isle (the developmental section) and solutions offered involving a blending of knowledge and wisdom and demonstrating the relative importance of the analytical and intuitive minds.

The analytical versus the intuitive mind

Gunn's continuing concern over the destructiveness of the analytical mind is given its most comprehensive treatment in *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*.

Hector, realising Mary has successfully survived her interrogation at the Seat, meditates on the nature of love:

> Growth. Increase. The flower. The fruit. No creation without *that*. Never had there been any creation without *that*. Never had anything been created, beautiful and shining beyond man's dream, unless love had been at the core. It was known. For love is the creator; and cruelty is that which destroys. In between is the no-man's land where men in their pride arrange clever things on the arid ground. (GI 204)

In his audience with God, Hector says that the administrators 'live in their heads', (GI 240) which leads to God's exposition on his representatives' lapse into error, quoted earlier. He talks of the separation of knowledge from wisdom and goes on to say that 'man has many words for these two regions' and paraphrases by referring to 'the head from the heart' and 'the intellect from the spirit'. (GI 242) He could have added 'the analytical from the intuitive' and the 'conscious from the unconscious' as further terms for these regions. God's final indictment of the administrators is his statement that:

> They have to destroy, because wisdom is always beyond logic at any moment. They have to destroy because though, as you say, their plan for running affairs is smooth, and their concept of the corporate mind permits of a logical exposition, yet as you also say, beneath their plan lies that belief in its logic which always grows merciless. So it has always been. And no matter with what force and cunning the plan is imposed there will be those who will rise against it. And bitter and terrible then is that rising. (GI 242)

In placing this statement in God's mouth, Gunn is clearly setting out his own belief; that the head divorced from the heart, the analytical mind uninfluenced by the intuitive, gives rise to destructiveness and 'The Murderousness of the Modern World', as this part of chapter four is entitled.

The Green Isle of the Great Deep, as political allegory, demonstrates that in a totalitarian state administered in a logical, analytical, way the intuitive will wither and be followed by repression and the cruelty that destroys. Ultimately the administrators themselves will be caught up in the results of their policies. God remarks 'they think it is not bitter with them yet and not sterile, for they still have the fascination of pulling the trigger, yet sterile with them, too, because they have to destroy'. (GI 242)

However, Gunn does not advocate dispensing with the analytical mind. In *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*, Gunn has consistently encapsulated his message within the terms of the Finn MacCoul legend. From this it is quite clear that wisdom is fed by knowledge, and the spiritual is enhanced by the intellectual and it follows that there also needs to be a balance between the analytical and the intuitive for growth and true health.

The suggestion that the conscious and the unconscious are further analogies to knowledge and wisdom is supported by the comment, again related to the legend of the salmon, that 'knowledge is high in the head as nuts on a tree, but the salmon of wisdom swims deep'. (GI 241) The concept of the salmon swimming deep, and largely unseen, seems a most appropriate metaphor for the unconscious which is similarly out of sight but greatly influential. In Jungian terms a rupture between the conscious and unconscious elements within a person leads to one-sidedness and lack of wholeness, just as Gunn depicts in the administrators within The Green Isle.

It will be remembered that John Burns was quoted earlier in the thesis on the subject of analytical thought when he said:

> Gunn clearly does not want us to see this [Kenn's quest for the source] as a regressive movement. There is something positive in this quest back to the primitive and beyond. And this positive is the liberation of the mind from its domination by analytical thought. Gunn does not advocate a turning away from thought altogether, but he is so aware of the limiting nature of the uncontrolled intellect that he sees man as trapped by a faculty which should be one of his greatest assets. In *The*

> *Shadow*, Nan puts it thus: 'we have to rescue the intellect from the destroyers. They have turned it into death rays and it should be the sun'. (p. 42) When thought becomes reductive, as analytical thought so often and so easily does, then it becomes destructive.[29]

Although the quotation relates to *Highland River*, it is apposite here also as not only does it highlight the problems of the uncontrolled intellect but it also refers to *The Shadow*, one of five novels allocated to the second part of this chapter, and which will be examined later. It is also pertinent to note that in *Highland River* a graphic contrast is made between Kenn and his brother Angus. Of the two, as Burns suggests, Kenn leans towards the intuitive whereas Angus is the more analytical and logical. After poaching a salmon, they see the keeper and his assistant approach before they can hide either themselves or the fish.

> Kenn looked at Angus's face. It had whitened, and playing on it was a weak surface smile. All the dark proud life was gone. Doom was in the nervous lips, in the shallow glitter of the eyes. The spirit, netted in the white smile, haunted Kenn through all the rest of his years.[30]

Kenn 'saw that look again shortly before Angus's death' in the First World War.[31] In the novel, the two events follow one another making the connection crystal clear. Angus aware, logically, of the dangers involved, feels fear, fear that destroys his spirit. Kenn, by contrast, on his way to the trench to meet Angus had been narrowly missed by a bullet that embedded itself in the bank. 'Instead of fear, he experienced a curious feeling of elation, of detachment.'[32] In Kenn's case the analytical mind is balanced by the intuitive that has its fullest flowering in moments of intuitive insight which Gunn dubbed atoms of delight, the title he gave to his spiritual autobiography.

The murderousness of the modern world as disclosed in *The Green Isle of the*

---

[29]Burns, p. 55.
[30]*Highland River*, pp. 210 - 211.
[31]*Ibid.* p. 218.
[32]*Ibid.* p. 219.

Great Deep is essentially an intellectual violence. It is true that reference is made to the 'industrial peak' with its Dickensian factories, but this is made *en passant* and does not form part of the main narrative. When the response to this murderousness is considered in the second part of section four, some expansion of the term murderousness will be possible, but this novel is concerned with the mind and its manipulation by the analytical probing of the Questioner.

As the administrators have done such a good job of stamping out individuality and intuition among the population of their tarnished paradise, there are few forces ranged against them. Such resistance as remains is strongly intuitive and falls into three, not mutually exclusive, categories: namely, women, those who eat the fruit clandestinely and the newly arrived Young Art and Old Hector. Of these, the women form the most potent group, especially Mary who struggles to protect Art. Hector recognises that her motivation springs from love, the creator; in Mary, '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'. (GI 201 - 202)

Mary, however, is not Art's only female supporter as, at one point, a group of women frustrate the Hunt's search for him. (GI 173) Gunn's depiction of women as central to the maintenance of life tends to confirm Ian Grimble's assertion that Gunn knew 'it was women, always, who with their traditional lore, with their loyalties and steadfastness who actually kept society together'.[33] When God invites Hector to join his proposed council of the wise, he feels unworthy of the honour and inadequate to the task. He adds his own confirmation of the crucial role of women in society when he remarks, plaintively, 'If only [. . .] I could find my wife - she would keep me right'. (GI 246) There is an oblique reference here to the corrupting influence of power as, in

[33]*Neil M. Gunn Memorial Lecture*, pp. [11] - [12].

God's proposal for a 'council of the wise men' (GI 246) it 'was to have no power' (GI 245) - a situation that can perhaps be seen as analogous to the House of Lords within Westminster.

Apart from being an archetypal mother figure, Mary was strengthened by eating the fruit of life, as was her husband Robert and their friends Tom the shepherd and his wife. All of these, in their own way, befriended and supported Art in his bid to evade the authorities at the Seat on the Rock but, again, the prime motivator was Mary.

This leaves the third category, the new arrivals from Clachdrum, Art and Hector. As knowledge and, especially, wisdom are under consideration in this first part of Gunn's fourth chapter it is pertinent that the previous appearance of these characters within the framework of the meta-novel should have been in the chapter concerned with 'The wisdom of boyhood'. In the first part of section two, it was noted that a parallel between wisdom and age existed in *Young Art and Old Hector*. In Gunn's vision there were three ages of man, which Hector summarised as:

> [. . .] all life is divided into three parts. The first is the period of childhood and it extends up to the courting age; then there is that age itself in the middle; and then there is the third age, beyond the courting, where I am myself.[34]

It was established in the earlier section that wisdom resides in the first and third of these divisions with Hector's further observations relating to whisky providing further confirmation. He says:

> 'It's young [. . .] 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 the wild flowers in sheltered hollows. It has not yet begun to get old, Donul. With the days it grows rank a little, going through all the green humours as man himself does. Only in advanced

[34] *Young Art and Old Hector*. p. 30.

> age does it get back the original innocence, with something added besides'.[35]

In his poem, *The Myth*,[36] Edwin Muir depicts similar divisions in the life of man, even if the serenity of Old Hector is not fully mirrored. Appropriately, the representatives of the two ages of man where Gunn sees wisdom residing are the ones pitted against the analytical minds of The Green Isle's administrators.

Art, in the first age of man, represents 'Youth itself, as yet unspoiled' [37] with a clearness of vision and an appreciation of nature in all its diversity that is often lost in adulthood. In *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* this vision of boyhood is amplified by contrasting the experiences of urban and rural childhood. The Questioner when rationalising Art's escape from the Seat on the Rock, tells the Head that something Art had seen in The Green Isle had aroused his fear, and suggests Art found a strange crowd of people ominous. The Head counters by asking 'Do not all boys, then, experience this?' (GI 181) To which the Questioner responds:

> In some measure, yes. But the vast bulk of boys come from a city or industrial life where they have got used to crowds and to incoherence. The later phase of life on Earth has tended to destroy the wholeness of the child mind at a very early stage. The intensive pursuit of what is called education has also tended to disintegrate the young mind. Where the young mind undergoes disintegration, its capacity for coherence and action are impaired. It can thus quickly be made amenable to those who can gather the parts together and suggest a saving line of action. (GI 181)

Asked 'In what way does the boy Art differ?', the Questioner continues:

> In that he was still the complete boy. The country community he came out of was to him a complete and familiar community. Old Hector - and this is what some of us were slow to grasp - was his natural friend. The boy's simplicity was found again in the old man's - and the old man's was the simplicity refined out of experience. Added to that was the background of what they call Nature. Which means that the

---

[35] *Ibid.* p. 188.
[36] Edwin Muir, *The Complete Poems of Edwin Muir*, p. 141.
[37] *Young Art and Old Hector,* p. 188.

> subconscious responses had a natural field of action. Which further means that their acts must occasionally have the appearance of a high degree of irrationality. (GI 181)

Art then is 'the complete boy', firmly rooted in his community's culture, with a healthy balance between the analytical and the intuitive, the conscious and the unconscious. This natural balance between the two states of mind in Art was apparent at his first meeting with God when the narrator states that 'thought and feeling wrote themselves on that young face in the one living script'. (GI 177) Yet, as is apparent from the Questioner's comment, Art's acts, when viewed within a purely analytical dimension, are seen as irrational.

The novel talks of Hector displaying a 'simplicity refined out of experience', which surely can be interpreted as indicating that he has gained wisdom. During his interrogation of Hector, the Questioner 'was still uncertain' about his motives. Highlighting Hector's intuitive response to the interrogation, the Questioner summarises thus:

> Either the old man had something to hide - or fear, primitive fear, made him both wary and stupid. There was no reason in this wariness or stupidity. That was its immense difficulty. It was primitive - mythological - and to get reason's truth out of it was like hunting the needle in a morass.
> Whether the old man intuitively knew this and was acting up to it with extraordinary cunning, or whether the cross-examining was actually beating him back into the meaningless mental morass, could not be made absolutely certain; some final element in the old man, some ultimate twist of the serpent, eluded all rational pursuit. (GI 153)

If doubt remained in the Questioner's mind about Hector, it perhaps ought to be mentioned that Mary was so highly motivated and so subtle in her responses to the Questioner, that she deceived him completely.

It is fortunate for Art and Hector that, however much it may have drifted away from the ideal, the setting for their story, The Green Isle, is paradise and, as such, the

domain of God, who was able to come to the aid of the embattled protagonists. Such an outcome was not available, for example, to Winston Smith who was completely destroyed by his questioners and tormentors. In the end, whilst waiting for the long-hoped-for bullet in his brain he announces 'But it was all right, everything was all right, the struggle was finished. He had won the victory over himself. He loved Big Brother'.[38]

Gunn acknowledges that, in comparative terms, it is the conclusion of his fable that is out of step, saying: 'in actual life we know perfectly well what would have happened; the two simple country folk would have been physically liquidated'.[39] In *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*, however, God's intervention not only paves the way for paradise to be restored to its utopian splendour but also validates the behavioural patterns and mental make-up of Art and Hector. Against the logical and exclusively analytical approach of the administrators, God supports the balanced make-up of 'the complete boy' and the wise old man who, apart from representing the first and third ages of man are also representatives of a single Highland community.

Gunn's comment that in the real world Art and Hector would have been liquidated, acknowledges the difficulty of directly applying conclusions reached in *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* to the real world. The positioning of this novel within the meta-novel's structure seems to recognise this difficulty as it does not form the conclusion *per se* but rather forms part of the development section. Indeed, it only forms the first part of the third epicyclic journey and its conclusion needs to be tempered by the findings of part two.

---

[38]*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, p. [239].
[39]'The Novel at Home', p. 133.

It is now time to consider what, in this epicyclic journey, can be regarded as 'that which was lost' as it is this aspect that will be incorporated into the overall conclusion.

That which was lost

The conflict depicted in *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* is between ordinary folk and the administrators, and mirrors *Nineteen Eighty-Four* where the conflict was between the party and the proles.[40] In the bleak Orwellian vision 'if there was hope, it *must* lie with the proles, because only there, in those swarming disregarded masses, 85 per cent of the population of Oceania, could the force to destroy the party ever be generated'.[41] In reality, the situation in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is hopeless, but in The Green Isle, where resistance similarly lay with the subjugated majority, a different outcome occurs. Appropriately for paradise, this is achieved through God's direct intervention, but the catalyst for the intervention is the appearance in The Green Isle of Art and Hector, and the enquiry into 'that which was lost' must commence with them and their attributes.

In differentiating between the administrators and the new arrivals, Art and Hector's cultural background is important. However, as there had been no prior revolt, despite this culture being shared by others in The Green Isle, a further dimension is clearly involved, one represented by the 'completeness' of Art and Hector in whom a proper balance existed between head and heart. The reality, as McCulloch suggested, is that brainwashing the inhabitants of The Green Isle, other than those like Robert and Mary that ate the fruit, severs the links to their personal history and cultural background and destroys the natural balance achieved by Art and Hector. McCulloch's prophecy that 'Life itself will be meaningless' has been proved true.[42]

It has previously been made clear that the friendship, and unquestioning trust, between Art and Hector was regarded as being a normal attribute of their community

---

[40]*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, pp. 55 - 56.
[41]*Ibid.* p. 59.
[42]McCulloch, *The Novels of Neil M. Gunn*, p. 108.

and cultural background, even if the behaviour they exhibited was seen by the administrators as irrational. The quotation given earlier (GI 181), not only saw Art as the 'complete boy' but also saw the community itself as being complete. In successfully overcoming the Questioner and his cohorts, Art and Hector draw on the strength of this cultural inheritance, to which they can provide a living link - indeed Hector is referred to by Merk as a 'missing link'. (GI 53) The complete community represented by Clachdrum is no longer the norm; indeed it is this whole and complete community that is, in this third epicyclic journey, 'that which was lost'. It will be remembered that Gunn, when he penned his biographical entry, expressed his admiration for this old Gaelic culture as: 'it managed to hold a fine balance between individual freedom and the duty the individual owes to society.'[43]

The question that must be posed is, if Gunn in his meta-novel is seeking for 'that which was lost', the recovery of which could assist in the process of regeneration that provided the overriding theme of the work, how realistic is the recovery of the old complete community he depicts at Clachdrum? The success of such a venture must be considered unlikely although Aonghas MacNeacail, in the introduction to a volume of new work by Scots authors dedicated to the memory of Gunn during his centenary year, did suggest that it was not impossible - certainly at the time Gunn was working. He drew comparisons with the Japanese experience and Zen and said:

> On the other side of the world, as [Gunn] was to discover, there existed a culture of complexities and simplicities which resonated in many ways with his own. Zen, he perceived, would not be out of place in the glen. Japan may have retained more of its direct links with the past. Gunn believed, with some justification, that enough of our older past survived to be able to reconstruct a similar Gaelic route to harmony.[44]

---

[43] *Twentieth Century Authors,* p. 589.
[44] Aonghas MacNeacail, 'Introduction' to, *A Writers Ceilidh for Neil Gunn*, ed. by Aonghas MacNeacail (Nairn: Balnain Books, 1991), p. 11.

This comment was made well after Gunn's death by a poet and playwright who was still actively working in the Gaelic language in those parts of the Highlands and Islands that had preserved the language and its associated culture. To support MacNeacail's view that Gunn believed a reconstruction to be possible it should be noted that when the second part of his chapter four, 'Escapism Validated', is discussed it will be seen that Gunn places his, often urban, heroes within rural settings that often incorporate areas where a living Gaelic tradition exists, such as the Western Isles. In many of the novels considered in earlier sections this leavening influence from the Western Isles has also been in evidence. When the second part of chapter four is discussed more fully, the concept of the 'Murderousness of the Modern World' will be expanded upon and an inquiry will be conducted into the ways in which a recovery of 'that which was lost' may enable the regenerative process to be efficacious.

It is worth noting that, when considering the chapter's overall title, 'Transition', it was suggested that, apart from a natural transition from the first to the second part of the chapter as mentioned above, the term may reflect a shift of emphasis in Gunn's thinking, giving primacy to the individual rather than the community. The actions of the protagonists depicted in *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* amply evince Gunn's belief in the individual over and above ideology and the favourable outcome of the novel depends on actions taken by individuals and it is pertinent that, as will be seen in part two, 'Escapism Validated', the focus remains on the individual.

SECTION FOUR

'TRANSITION'

PART TWO:

Escapism Validated

The Contributory Novels

As stated earlier, Gunn allocated five novels, a quarter of his total output, to this part of chapter four. Taking them in the order they appear in the retrospect these are *Wild Geese Overhead*,[1] *The Lost Chart*,[2] *The Shadow*,[3] *The Key of the Chest*[4] and *Blood Hunt.*[5] Of these, *Wild Geese Overhead*, the first novel to be written during his creatively productive residence at Brae, was published immediately prior to the second world war, with the others being published in the years following the cessation of hostilities and in the subsequent cold-war period. Given that, within the structure of the meta-novel, all these novels are responses to 'The Murderousness of the Modern World', as exemplified by *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* (1944), it is tempting to see the timing of their publication as being influenced by the war and its aftermath. Whilst there is undoubtedly some truth in this, it should be acknowledged that, during the period covered by the spread of these novels, Gunn published a further six novels *Second Sight* (1940), *The Silver Darlings* (1941), *Young Art and Old Hector* (1942), *The Serpent* (1943), *The Drinking Well* (1947) and *The Well at the World's End* (1951). With the exception of the last one, these have already appeared in earlier chapters of the meta-novel and are mostly optimistic works; indeed it was Naomi Mitchison's accusation that *Young Art and Old Hector* was too sentimental that is argued as being the prompt for Gunn to write *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*.

When considering Gunn's overall output rather than just his novels, it becomes noticeable that the five novels in 'Escapism Validated' draw on Gunn's short stories to a greater extent than has been seen to date. *Wild Geese Overhead* appears to have

---

[1]Neil M. Gunn, *Wild Geese Overhead* (London: Faber, 1939).
[2]Neil M. Gunn, *The Lost Chart* (London: Faber, 1949).
[3]Neil M. Gunn, *The Shadow* (London: Faber, 1948).
[4]Neil M. Gunn, *The Key of the Chest* (London: Faber, 1946). The printer's notices quote 1945 as the date of publication but the novel was published on the 26th January 1946 - see Stokoe, *A Bibliography of the Works of Neil M. Gunn*, p. 66.
[5]Neil M. Gunn, *Blood Hunt* (London: Faber 1952).

been based heavily on a short story 'The Mirror' that appeared in *The Scots Magazine* in June 1929.[6] This is an altogether bleaker tale, lacking any sense of regeneration, which Gunn appears to have tried to re-work to provide a more positive conclusion, much as he attempted to do, albeit perhaps less successfully, when he re-worked 'The Man Who Came Back' as *The Drinking Well*. The story 'Whisky' is the model for the section in *Wild Geese Overhead* dealing with the search for the ex-shipyard worker, Jamie, whose wife had died in childbirth; a passage anthologised in *Storm and Precipice*.[7]

The Lost Chart is an expansion of 'Sun and Moon', a short story that appeared in *The Scots Magazine* in November 1942.[8] This story was written immediately after *Young Art and Old Hector* and before *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* and yet it anticipates not only the need to escape from a murderous present but also defends this action from charges of escapism and nostalgia. Gunn writes there:

> It can never be a case of going back to an old pattern of life with nostalgic longing; it's the bringing forward of what was vital in the old, into the new [. . .] that matters to us.[9]

The Shadow, like some of his other novels (for example *Second Sight* and *The Silver Darlings*), had an extract published rather like a 'trailer' in *The Scots Magazine.* In this case a story entitled 'Convalescence' appeared in *The Scots Magazine* in October 1944.[10] This story, slightly amended, became chapter one of part one of *The Shadow*: the whole of the first part in the final novel bore the title 'Convalescence'. *The Shadow* also incorporated a short story 'Snow in March' from *The Scots Magazine*

---

[6]Neil M. Gunn, 'The Mirror', in *The Scots Magazine*, Vol. 11, No. 3, June 1929, pp. 180 - 186. The story was later collected in *The White Hour* (London: Faber, 1950.
[7]Neil M. Gunn, 'Whisky', (Unpublished: National Library of Scotland, Deposit 209). From the date of the typescript this was written between 1925 and 1937 (Stokoe. *A Bibliography of the Works of Neil M. Gunn*, p. 41). The passage in *Wild Geese Overhead*, comprising part of p. 81, pp. 82 - 107 and part of p. 108 appeared as 'Streets' in *Storm and Precipice* (London: Faber, 1942).
[8]Neil M. Gunn, 'Sun and Moon', in *The Scots Magazine*, Vol. 38, No. 2, November 1942, pp. 83 - 99.
[9]*Ibid.* p. 94.
[10]Neil M. Gunn, 'Convalescence', in *The Scots Magazine*, Vol. 42, No. 1, October 1944, pp. 1 - 13.

of June 1938 as a dramatic interlude.[11] *The Key of the Chest*, like *The Lost Chart*, is an expansion of an earlier short story, in this case 'The Dead Seaman' from *The Scots Magazine* of July 1931.[12] Once again the reworking, as with *The Drinking Well*, is much more positive in its conclusion.

Of the five novels in this section *Blood Hunt* is by far the most original and, alone amongst this group, does not depend upon earlier work, although the unpublished story 'Presents for their Wives', a story of Irish tinkers in a style more reminiscent of Gunn's close friend Maurice Walsh, incorporates a passage where money is 'refunded' in a similar way to that adopted in *Blood Hunt.*[13] Whether this reliance on earlier work indicated a failing imagination is hard to say but the source material as well as the novels themselves will be considered as the enquiry proceeds.

It will remembered that the collective title for the two parts of chapter four is 'Transition' and of the varying interpretations that could be put on this title one is undoubtedly the transition or movement between the two parts of the chapter. In this sense the five novels in part two are responses to the first part. The escapism, referred to in the title of the second part of the chapter can, therefore, be seen as an escape from 'The Murderousness of the Modern World'.

The term escapism will be considered shortly but, as the five novels differ widely in construction, it can be argued that each is a response to a specific ill of the modern world, and incorporates a suggested remedy or recipe for regeneration. This is a line of argument that can be made more readily for the first three novels listed, *Wild Geese Overhead*, *The Lost Chart* and *The Shadow*, than for the last two, *The Key of the Chest* and *Blood Hunt*, which are much more difficult to categorize in this way.

---

[11]Neil M. Gunn, 'Snow in March', in *The Scots Magazine,* Vol. 29, No. 3, June 1938, pp. 191 - 199.
[12]Neil M. Gunn, 'The Dead Seaman', in *The Scots Magazine*, Vol. 15, No. 4, July 1931, pp. 265 - 289.
[13]Neil M. Gunn, 'Presents for their Wives', (Unpublished: National Library of Scotland, Deposit 209).

Another interpretation of the title 'Transition' is that it may reflect a transition in Gunn's own thinking where he began to concentrate more on the individual than the individual in community where the emphasis had been at the beginning of the meta-novel; the split between the first three and the last two novels referred to above also reflects this aspect. The first three are all concerned first and foremost with the problems of individuals, problems that can be related to some aspect of 'The Murderousness of the Modern World'. Despite the meta-novel being a novel of the Highlands, the settings for two out of the three in this grouping are urban rather than Highland. The process of regeneration does, however, involve the rural, if not always specifically Highland, and reflects the symbiotic relationship between town and country that was identified in the sections relating to chapter two. It is also true that whenever the Highlands or Highland folk are mentioned or introduced it is usually in a positive way. Such references are, almost invariably, to those areas of the Highlands where Gaelic traditions and culture remain strong.

The second grouping, containing *The Key of the Chest* and *Blood Hunt*, reverts to a Highland setting with a concentration on individuals within community. However, in both cases, the principal character or characters live on the edge of the community, both physically and metaphorically, and the dilemmas they face are largely personal.

Given the differing emphasis of the two groupings identified within this section, each will be discussed separately as this section's argument progresses.

A consideration of escapism

Martin Gray, in his dictionary of literary terms, defines 'escapist' as:

> A criticism levelled at some kinds of writing, on the grounds that they do not confront 'reality' but allow the reader to dwell temporarily in a pleasant world of illusion or fantasy. 'Romantic' novelettes are deliberately escapist; but the charge is also sometimes made against more serious kinds of literature.[14]

This critical view of escapism was mentioned in`the introductory section and Timothy O'Neil, in mitigation, was quoted as saying - specifically about the works of J. R. R. Tolkien:

> The idea of escape literature carries with it the implication of unhealthiness, of trivial, unwholesome fantasy, and denial of that which is 'real' and hence worthy of our interest. My proposition is just the opposite: that it is the relative ill-health of our age which creates the need for the special kind of fantasy that Middle-earth provides, and that the narrow view of 'reality' that the critics champion may be the beginning of what is really unhealthy.[15]

As, in Gunn's meta-novel structure, 'Escapism Validated' is set in contradistiction to 'The Murderousness of the Modern World'; it can be assumed that Gunn saw escapism within his own books in the same light as O'Neil. Indeed, in an essay of 1940, 'On Looking at Things', Gunn wrote:

> To keep the mind focused on danger or fear does not always help it when the critical moment arrives. There is much hysterical folly written these days around the word 'escape' or 'escapism'. Indeed there are persons who think it wrong to live outside a vague welter of sensational fear, as if to do so were in some way a betrayal.
> We all in a certain measure understand this mood. But it can become a tyranny and a weakening. If a man is mud-stained, he does not take a mud-bath. When his eyes are tired he shuts them. We forever need contrast if we are to be strengthened or refreshed. A man who, in a flash of vision, sees the beauty of his aeroplane, will pilot her all the better for that instant of detachment. We are strong because of our

---

[14]Martin Gray, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Harlow: Longman, 1992), p. 109.
[15]Timothy R. O'Neil, *The Individuated Hobbit: Jung, Tolkien and the Archetypes of Middle-earth* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), p. 2.

> resources gathered in moments other than the moment of conflict. And like the petrol tank our resources need constant refuelling.[16]

This article is concerned with the need to see properly the things around us, 'most of them seen over and over again, and therefore commonplace.'[17] This comment underpins section two's conclusion, following the epicyclic journey from a child's perspective, that 'That Which was Lost' was the ability to see clearly. Gunn seems to be suggesting that a reversal of the current obsession with 'escapism' as a negative term is an integral part of his thinking. The comment about viewing the commonplace also predates by half a century the ground-breaking work by George Leonard that saw Wordsworth as the beginning of a movement leading to John Cage where the art of the commonplace was elevated over that of 'Art Objects'.[18]

In part one of chapter four, 'The Murderousness of the Modern World' was examined. The destructiveness of the analytical mind, and of the totalitarian state - of whatever denomination - was demonstrated. By introducing God, Gunn emphasised not only that this was not the intended order of things but also that the antithesis to this destructiveness was the creator, love. In his essay 'On Destruction', Gunn writes:

> [. . .] by a combination of elements and circumstances [. . .] the destructive impulse can be elevated into a predominate principle of action. Its capacity for destroying human life and creative human institutions then becomes colossal. The morbid phantasy is projected into the external world and made factual. I am not, of course, here trying to establish a theory which most of us have already accepted. What was made clear to me was the *actual process* whereby the destructive is made dominant and becomes active on a vast scale. Until we understand and see clearly the process itself, we will never understand how to set about organising and elevating the creative impulse, which is its opposite and which is stronger than it. (Were it not stronger, we should have disappeared off this earth long ago.)[19]

---

[16]Neil M. Gunn, 'On Looking at Things', in *The Scots Magazine,* Vol. 33 No. 3, June 1940, p. 170.
[17]Neil M. Gunn, 'On Looking at Things', p. 171.
[18]George L. Leonard, *Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to Cage.* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994).
[19]Neil M. Gunn, 'On Destruction', in *The Scots Magazine,* Vol. 35, No. 4, July 1941, p. 293.

This repudiation of violence and the positive introduction of the creative impulse, as well as developing the ability to see our everyday surroundings as objects of delight, lies at the heart of Gunn's meta-novel as well as being his validation of escapism. This is very different from the replacement of reality with fantasy that is at the core of the critics' condemnation of escapist literature.

As this part of chapter four is a response to the 'Murderousness of the Modern World', it follows that the value of the contributory novels to the plot structure is in the detail of this response and, in the examination of the novels that follows, it will be this aspect that is concentrated upon rather than an examination of the works as individual novels in their own right.

The first three novels

It has already been noted that *Wild Geese Overhead* was the first novel to be written after Gunn took up residence at Brae and it is worth considering the complex events in Gunn's life that preceded the move. In section two, part two, of this thesis, mention was made of 'an appalling household incident' that sent Daisy Gunn into premature labour and the still-birth of a male child, an event thought to have been in 1932.[20] It is considered likely that the firearm accident that was to progressively rob Gunn of the sight of one eye, was the incident involved. Daisy blamed Gunn for the still-birth and their relationship suffered, with reconciliation not being achieved until 1936, following an idyllic and extended Highland holiday. In 1934, during this period of estrangement, Gunn went abroad on holiday with his friends, Robin and Malcolm MacEwen and, on his return, an affair with their sister Margaret is said to have started. Whilst working on their biography of Gunn, Hart and Pick were approached by Margaret MacEwen who told them about her relationship with Gunn; a relationship previously unsuspected. After enquiry, they accepted the basic truth of her story and sought corroborative evidence for it in Gunn's fiction which, predictably, was found.

In 1937, with all this turmoil in his private life very much to the fore, Gunn, with Daisy's approval, gave up his job with the Customs and Excise office, sold his house and took off for an extended holiday around the West Coast of Scotland and the Inner Hebrides in an old motor cruiser, *Thistle*, before taking a lease on Brae Farmhouse. This radical change of career direction to become a full-time writer could also, in the context of the meta-novel, be considered escapist. Whilst one would not readily associate working for the Customs and Excise, or indeed living in Inverness, with 'The Murderousness of the Modern World', his biographers assert that Gunn's abandonment

[20]Hart and Pick, p. 127.

of his career led to charges of escapism.[21]

In Hart and Pick's examination of the novels seeking evidence for both the trauma of the still-birth and the affair with Margaret MacEwen, they found *The Serpent* (1943) and *The Shadow* (1948) to be the most revealing. This appears justifiable, although the passage of time between the events and their fictional treatment seems very long for there to have been a cathartic effect. The more contemporaneous work, *Wild Geese Overhead*, would have seemed a more likely candidate. Looking at the novel from this point of view it is noticeable that the work is dedicated to Maurice Walsh's wife, Toshon. The Walshes had briefly joined *Thistle* on its extended voyage, and the dedication suggests a link between Gunn's thoughts at the time of commencing the novel and the events surrounding the decision to go 'Off in a Boat'.[22]

There are four women who feature reasonably prominently in *Wild Geese Overhead*: Ivy, a prostitute; Mrs Armstrong, the hero's landlady; Jenny Baird, Mrs Armstrong's niece, and the society girl, Felicity. Gunn's mixture of fear of, and fascination with, those engaged in the 'oldest profession' - as was, again, discussed in section two, part two - continues in his characterization of Ivy, a most atypical member of the profession. In contrast, Mrs Armstrong embodies all the archetypal qualities associated with Gunn's depiction of mothers, particularly Highland mothers.

The hero, Will, is attracted to Jenny Baird and seeks to befriend her. He also tries to warn her of the dangers he perceives in a relationship she is developing with Philip, an acquaintance of his, but Jenny is cool, aloof and actively avoids him. At the end of the novel Will, who is hospitalized and has lost the 'will' to live after being badly beaten, learns through a visit from his landlady that her niece had cancelled her

---

[21]Hart and Pick, p. 151.

[22]The events of the voyage were written up in - Neil M. Gunn, *Off in a Boat* (London: Faber, 1938) – the first book to be written at Brae.

planned weekend with Philip in favour of tending her garden. It also becomes apparent that her aloofness is acute shyness and that she really reciprocates Will's affection. After a near-death experience, the crisis passes and Will and the 'gardener' are united. Gunn used the pseudonym 'The Gardener' for his wife Daisy in the Brae days (*vide* the dedication to *Highland Pack*)[23] and there seems to be a coded message here for Daisy who Gunn knew would be typing up the manuscript. The message runs along the lines: Will, representing Gunn himself, has been feeling terrible. The object of his affection, who has been cool and aloof for a lengthy period, is revealed as being warm and loving and the crisis passes. As Will tells Jenny 'You are like someone who has been a long time away'.[24] With his own problems so recent, this can plausibly be viewed as a commentary on, and celebration of, his reconciliation with Daisy.

The fourth woman, the society girl Felicity, is depicted in the novel as predatory. At a house party she and Will attend, she is the one who instigates sexual advances by inviting Will to her room. Will intends to accept the offer but is subconsciously not ready for the encounter and proceeds to get sufficiently drunk to render their meeting null and void. Could this be a representation of Margaret MacEwen, whose family held a respected place in society? It is intriguing that, in their biography, Hart and Pick associate the short-story 'The Mirror' on which, *Wild Geese Overhead* is, in part, based, as being indicative of Gunn's state of mind after meeting Margaret because it concerns two sisters, of which the hero is enamoured of the elder - and Margaret MacEwen had a younger sister.[25] If parallels can be drawn it may suggest that Margaret made more of the running than Gunn, and that there may have been less substance to the affair than has been suggested. It is always, of course, possible that

---

[23]Neil M. Gunn, *Highland Pack* (London: Faber, 1949).
[24]*Wild Geese Overhead*, p. 340.
[25]Hart and Pick, p. 128. The date of the story (1929) seems too early to refer to the MacEwen sisters specifically but the association is an interesting one, given the story's link to *Wild Geese Overhead.*.

this was a further coded message to his typist wife designed to allay suspicions she may have entertained.

Returning to the main theme of this section, the influence of the short story 'The Mirror' on *Wild Geese Overhead* has been noted. In this much earlier work, the hero, a writer, moves to the country for inspiration, and the peace in which to develop it. Sadly, the muses fail him, he develops writer's block and ultimately returns to Glasgow. Initially, the action of *Wild Geese Overhead* follows a similar pattern, although the move from the city is prompted by his sighting of a skein of geese:

> Just a year ago, he had been here in the spring. An afternoon it was, and, standing not far from this house, he had heard that rusty *honk! honk!* and wondered - and then, strung out in an irregular arc, he had seen the geese. At first he had thought they were swinging to the south, and that had vaguely disturbed him, for he had the notion that they should go north to nest. As they continued to swing round, a deep pleasure and reassurance had flooded in upon him, and when they assumed their arrow-formation and headed a little west of north, he had watched them enthralled. One barb of the arrow was much longer than the other and, going away from him, it undulated slowly like a ribbon drawn through the still air. Where had they come from? And wither bound? Watching, he was invaded by the feeling that he was watching something which it was hardly right he should see, something out of occult books, out of magic. He should have been better prepared. It was going from him; and he had not got it all. He had missed something. What he had missed, he wondered over.[26]

This is the description of one of those moments of intuitive insight that Gunn called 'Atoms of Delight', the first of a number in this novel. Symbolically, the geese represent freedom and escape but, as with much in Gunn's own life as well as in these books validating escapism, it is as much an escape *to* something as from something. In the case of the geese, heading a little west of north as they pass over the environs of Glasgow, they were heading for their breeding grounds. The fact that this course would take them to the Gaelic West Coast and Hebrides may also be symbolic.

---

[26] *Wild Geese Overhead*, p. 12.

Will takes lodgings in a farmhouse close to where the geese were sighted but, as in 'The Mirror', finds the experiment not to be conducive to work, or sleep. He rarely is able to sleep in the mornings because of the dawn chorus which he finds tedious to the point where he intends to return to the city. One day, being awake, he decides to actively listen to their calls. As with Mr Pope in one of Gunn's early short stories, 'Birdsong at Evening', Will becomes fascinated by the different bird songs.[27] This develops a feeling of inner peace and oneness with nature. He sleeps soundly again, and has to buy an alarm clock to enable him to wake and listen to the songs.[28] The natural surroundings have a profoundly beneficial affect on Will, although he views his change of domicile in terms of escape, perhaps reflecting Gunn's own sensitivity.[29]

Attention must, however, be given to what specific facet of The Murderousness of the Modern World' Gunn is featured in *Wild Geese Overhead.* Early in the novel Gunn has his character, Will, muse on his decision to move to the country. He writes:

> Deeper than all that, too, lay this thought - the only one he found no difficulty in sustaining. It was a thought or theory that had begun to divide the whole modern world. It dealt with the conception or nature of freedom. Hitherto we had believed that a man could not be absolutely free until he found himself independent of his fellows, with the power to go where he liked and do what he liked. No one man must have dominion over another. So feudalism was fought and conquered and man became free. But soon it was found that man was not free, that he was still everywhere in chains, and more inhuman chains, because they tied him to machines rather than to other human beings. And the results were certainly more inhuman than the world had yet known, in the form of slums, unemployment, poverty, and wars of a brutality and magnitude beyond any medieval dream.[30]

This brings into focus issues of politics and the industrialisation of the larger cities, with their attendant deprivation and squalor. The comments about war in the above

---

[27]Neil M. Gunn, 'Birdsong at Evening', in *Cornhill Magazine*, Vol. 61 New Series, No. 363, September 1926, pp. 298 - 314.
[28]*Wild Geese Overhead*, p. 185.
[29]*Ibid.* p. 68, as an example.
[30]*Ibid.* pp. 33 - 34.

quotation, written before world war two started, bring to mind the political and ideological issues debated in *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* - the horrors of the 'industrial peak' in that novel and the tenements of *Wild Geese Overhead* are also akin.

As a journalist, Will is well placed to see a full cross-section of Glasgow society. He has family connections who represent wealthy upper-middle class values but also, through his left-wing politics, he meets the socialist leader Joe Wilson. As a political activist, there is much for Joe Wilson and his co-workers to do, as Glasgow is in the grip of severe economic depression. In Joe's company Will is introduced to the teeming tenements in which the workers are housed in squalid, grossly overcrowded, conditions, very different from the other Glasgow that Will's family occupy. Gunn's descriptions of these tenements, and the hopeless condition of their occupants, is graphic; the sense of hopelessness being conveyed by the imagery in the passage:

> Tall dark tenement walls . . . Cliffs, canyon walls. Bodies appearing and disappearing, in a furtive inimical secrecy. A long street, blue-dark, lit by blue globes . . . A besieged, a beleaguered town, seen from above, like a Cretan maze. They would never find their way out. Even if they wanted to find their way out.[31]

This, then, is the particular manifestation of 'The Murderousness of the Modern World' in *Wild Geese Overhead*. Will is determined that 'they [the economic conditions] were not going to suck his whole life away'.[32]

As the earlier quotation stated, feudalism had been successfully conquered but mankind was now subject to the more inhuman yoke of the machine. The challenge for left-wing politics was now the replacement of a capitalist society by a socialist one. Joe Wilson, a strongly drawn character, takes up the challenge and does much good work in the city but Gunn, through Will, argues that there is a flaw, in that there is a

---

[31] *Wild Geese Overhead*, p. 114.
[32] *Ibid.* p. 151.

concentration on ideology to the exclusion of the individual. 'Joe was a force gathering things and humans together towards a higher integration'.[33] He is depicted as an upright man, believing passionately in his cause. He is respected by both those he leads and those for whom he works, including Will, but in his thrust for the greater good, he is considered in danger of overlooking the individual humanity of those he deals with. In his summation of Will's criticism, Joe says:

> You mean that Jamie and Ettie were units to me? Not altogether, of course, but still what I did for them I really did for the cause? In the long run I should be prepared to sacrifice Jamie and Ettie and you and even myself - for the greater glory? That being so I am losing my individual response, losing this vivid personal life you talk of? That's really your point? [. . .] Had it not been for the cause, I should not have done what I had done? Possibly. What is certain is that had it not been for the cause I should not have known them at all, and so have done nothing.[34]

These are the words of an honest and ethical man but Gunn is right to suggest a flaw. Within the structure of the meta-novel, *Wild Geese Overhead* is a response to *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* where it was identified that the current dystopian state of paradise was unintentional. The changes wrought by the administrators were meant to have been for the benefit of all and, in this seeking after the greater good, the individual had to defer. Gunn is warning that giving primacy to ideology can sow the seeds from which people like the Questioner grow. Almost the last words of *Wild Geese Overhead*, reaffirm Gunn's argument when Will says to Jenny:

> You see, they are making all sorts of mechanical theories about the individual, about human nature. The individual is nothing without society, we know. That is the mechanism. But the creative spirit - it is a personal thing, and I have the idea that it comes only out of love and tenderness.[35]

---

[33] *Ibid.* p. 154.
[34] *Wild Geese Overhead,* pp. 207 - 208.
[35] *Ibid.* p. 341.

Dairmid Gunn, writing the foreword to a later edition of *Wild Geese Overhead*, acknowledged that 'admirers and critics of Gunn affirm that the author is never totally at home in an urban environment, an assertion made with some justification'.[36] He goes on to record Will's (and, by implication, Gunn's) 'belief in the sanctity of the individual. To him people are not figures or the stuff of averages but real beings with a dignity and importance all of their own. [. . .] And the overwhelming mass of them are extraordinarily decent; the women caring for their room and kitchen, or even single end . . . putting up a magnificently stoic fight against a real or ever-threatening economic famine that is hellish because it shouldn't be.'[37] It has already been asserted that Gunn saw a symbiotic relationship existing between town and country and here he depicts Will finding personal regeneration by communing with the natural world, the blue skies, trees and birds that the flight of geese had mystically drawn to his attention. The concentration on Will as an individual also reflects Gunn's changing emphasis.

Not everyone would want, or be able, to physically move to the country but communing with nature is possible, even in a city; when lying in hospital, Will found that the sight of a small patch of blue sky was sufficient to conjure up his vision of the flight of geese - the 'Atom of Delight' that, with cultivation, Gunn believes can be achieved by anyone.[38] More importantly, in *Wild Geese Overhead*, the inhumanity of the conditions obtaining in the slum areas is featured. Given Gunn's political beliefs, the novel, unsurprisingly, comments favourably on the socialist initiatives taken by the likes of Joe Wilson. There is, however, an overriding caveat, that the furtherance of political ideology must never be at the expense of the individual.

---

[36]Dairmid Gunn, 'Foreword', to *Wild Geese Overhead* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1991), p, [5].
[37]Dairmid Gunn, 'Foreword', to *Wild Geese Overhead* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1991), p, [6].
[38]*Wild Geese Overhead*, p. 295.

Although it is not difficult to establish the facet of 'The Murderousness of the Modern World' involved in *Wild Geese Overhead*, perhaps disappointingly, there is no offer of a universal means of regeneration. Indeed, in this novel, Gunn can be seen as endorsing the political efforts being made by the likes of Joe, subject to the caveat above. To avoid the error of the Questioner, and retain the warmth of human life and experience, the individual must never be made subservient to ideology.

In terms of regeneration, Gunn only gives a detailed answer as it affects Will and, in the event, this depends in large part on the regenerative power of love, the creator. This, however, did form part of the resolution to *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* so it is logical and understandable to see it repeated here.

The Lost Chart is the second of the novels listed in this section and is, once again, set in Glasgow - the later Glasgow of the cold-war years. It is based on the short story 'Sun and Moon' that appeared in the Scots Magazine in November 1942, and which was itself adapted for radio and broadcast on the 1st June 1944. In this case the novel develops rather than reworks the story, and draws on both earlier versions.

'Sun and Moon' dealt with contemporary (1942) matters - a fast motor patrol boat based in the Hebrides, submarine hunting. The story involves the island of Cladday, probably in the Inner Hebrides, and clearly draws heavily on Gunn's own war-time experiences in the first world war, translated in time to that of the second world war. In the 1914 - 1918 war Gunn was based at Kinlochleven and was in charge of routing vessels round the Hebrides, including a Norwegian vessel - and 'Sun and Moon' features a drowned Norwegian seaman.[39] 'Sun and Moon' is a story written in epistolary form, a form not conducive to radio, so an element of rewriting was necessary in preparing the dramatisation for the BBC Radio production.[40] Some of the

[39]Hart and Pick, pp. 49 - 53.
[40]'Sun and Moon', Dramatisation for radio (Unpublished: National Library of Scotland, Deposit 209),

dialogue that was constructed for this exercise was transferred, almost verbatim, into the *The Lost Chart* - as with that between the Skipper and Iain MacNeil who was, like Gunn, a coastwatcher; a job also featured in *The Green Isle of the Great Deep.*[41] As with 'Sun and Moon', the action of *The Lost Chart* is contemporaneous with its date of publication (1949), with the episode narrated in the earlier short story depicted as a report of happenings ten years earlier.

As discussed previously, Gunn was preoccupied with escapism and specific reference is made to it in both 'Sun and Moon' and *The Lost Chart*. In 'Sun and Moon', the Skipper records:

> The sun came up before we had finished [re-interring the Norwegian sailor]. I took off my hat to the drowned Norwegian, to the sun and all it had created of life, and to this mystery of death. It was a morning of great serenity, and I can remember thinking with a strange calm that I should not mind being buried here. Death at that moment was realised and had no terror.
> I have sometimes tried to think myself back into that calm condition of acceptance, but have found it difficult. And let me say at once that I am not impressed by the labels that could be pinned on me, such as 'going native', or 'escapist', or even the fashionable French one, *participation mystique*. Not at all impressed, for now I know that they are the labels behind which 'the white man' himself tries to dodge.[42]

Cladday is depicted as being firmly rooted in the old Gaelic traditions (the title of the story refers to the deference paid, quite naturally, and without pagan overtones, to the life-giving sun and the moon), which were in almost terminal decline. As the Skipper further comments: 'I became pretty certain that only in Cladday did the old culture pattern of the west survive with - strength is the wrong word - some natural ease'.[43] The Gaelic verse used in the address to the moon is quoted as:

> Glory to Thyself, O God of Life,

---

p.4.
[41] *The Lost Chart*, p. 94 for example.
[42] *'Sun and Moon',* p. 95.
[43] *Ibid.* p. 93.

> For Thy Lamp of the Ocean,
> Thine own hand at the tiller
> And Thy love behind the wave.[44]

Much has been written in this thesis to date of 'That Which was Lost', in which links to Gaelic community values have featured strongly. 'Sun and Moon' reinforces this theme with the Skipper commenting:

> We have lost 'the love behind the wave'. We have lost a natural relationship to sun and moon and wave and land; but, above all, we have lost a natural tenderness in human relations. It's a cash-and-carry basis for us. The measurement is money, and tenderness is the last element we could allow within the 'Sacred precincts' of our 'business concerns.'[45]

Gunn's protagonist in *The Lost Chart* is the skipper featured in the earlier story, Dermot Cameron, although in the novel Gunn has demoted him to a subsidiary rank, possibly to distance his hero from the intrusive actions of the skipper in the earlier story, which created tensions within the island community. Dermot does, however, retain a great love of the qualities he encountered in the Cladday community during that war-time visit. This is not just nostalgia because he recognises that 'it can never be a case of going back to an old pattern of life with nostalgic longing; it's the bringing forward of what was vital in the old, the power behind the wave, into the new, that matters to us.'[46] In *The Lost Chart*, Dermot's maritime skills are likely to be called upon should the cold war develop into open conflict. To this end he is entrusted with a naval chart of Cladday, suitably annotated with sea approaches, thus providing a link with the earlier action. The chart is 'lost' when Dermot attempts to foil the snatching of a handbag from a young lady who turns out to be Christina MacNeil, the granddaughter of Iain MacNeil the Cladday coastwatcher who had died whilst saving Dermot from the sea during the war, providing yet another link with the past. The

---

[44] *Ibid.* p. 93 and *The Lost Chart,* p. 77.
[45] 'Sun and Moon', p. 95.
[46] *Ibid.* p. 94.

earlier history is drawn out principally *via* conversations between Christina and Dermot. The Cladday chart is also the embodiment of escapism in the *The Lost Chart*.

As stated, the historical setting is the cold-war period but, being post war, it is also post Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The possibility of nuclear war is ever present and the escapism could be seen as being to get away from cities that could be principal targets. In Dermot's club, after being entrusted with the chart of Cladday, there is talk of 'retreating to some "pocket" in the wilds before or after the cities were blotted out'.[47] Later, in a passage reminiscent of the description of the Glasgow tenements, Gunn writes of Dermot's visit to 'the poorer part of the city, away from his own kind',[48] where:

> the city became to his vision an entanglement of streets, a vast dim maze [. . .] *When the buttons are pressed*. It used to be, thought Dermot, *when the balloon goes up.* The irony had a savage tonic quality. Thousands of miles away fingers pressed the buttons and this city became a ruin, the maze of streets fallen in, life crushed and slowly writhing to stillness.[49]

Quite clearly, this nuclear capacity forms at least a part of what is being identified as 'The Murderousness of the Modern World' in this novel. As a further, if subsidiary, manifestation of murderousness, there is talk of a police state:

> The police state! Hell, is this what it's like? The entanglement, invisible threads, tough as wire, knotting on this dark lump in the human breast. Waiting for the thing to happen. The news, the newspapers. And all the time, in every corner of the city, *this* business of watching eyes.[50]

This talk of a police state links, appropriately, to the regime in *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*, but, even more, it calls to mind Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* although,

---

[47]*The Lost Chart*, p. 20.
[48]*Ibid.* p. 42.
[49]*Ibid.* p. 43.
[50]*Ibid.* p. 43.

as both that book and *The Lost Chart* were published in 1949, there is no question of Gunn's being influenced by Orwell's work. In both cases this is a response to the tensions in the world at the time.

As with *Wild Geese Overhead*, the action of *The Lost Chart* sees a positive direction to the escapism issue. It is not just a blind flight from the unpleasant but a positive embracing, in the present, of Cladday's Gaelic cultural heritage and standards.

In *Wild Geese Overhead*, the flight of wild geese is Will's 'Atom of Delight', the recollection of which is a key element in his recovery from injury, and to his maturing as an individual. Similarly, in *The Lost Chart*, Dermot is haunted by his own 'Atom of Delight'. This is associated with his war-time visit to Cladday and centres on the islanders' natural acknowledgement of the Sun and Moon in a number of separate incidents. In *Wild Geese Overhead*, the patch of blue sky Will could see from his hospital bed was sufficient to recall the wonder of the original vision and this is mirrored in *The Lost Chart* by Dermot's memories of the islanders raising their hats to the morning sun and curtseying to the new moon, as well as the recurring theme of Gaelic folk song, here performed by Ellen MacArthur. The effect of these songs on Dermot is encapsulated in the following passage:

> When the piano began its tinkling introduction to *Caol Muile* he felt:
> O God, now I'm for it!
> Even if she sang that song every night of the week to him, the effect upon him would merely grow. That was where it was different from an ordinary drug. Nor was it any help saying that the effect was extra-musical. For what did that mean - except that the song and the voice evoked something beyond them. It was a whole country, a lost world. And the quality in her voice - it went wandering through that world, it was a remembering of it, and the only word that for him could describe it was *innocence*. It was a primordial innocence.[51]

It seems certain that, Gunn's own feelings were much the same as those he attributes to Dermot for, in their biography, Hart and Pick quote Margaret MacEwen as saying:

---

[51] *The Lost Chart*, p. 58.

> Silly things stick in my mind. I used to sing to him when driving the car - Scots songs, Gaelic songs, dance hits from my schooldays, whatever came into my head. The sillier the words, the more he enjoyed it'.[52]

The biographers further state that, towards the end of his life, Gunn frequently asked Gene Pick and Lorena Hart to sing to him in the same way. It seems apparent that the passages relating to Gaelic singing, and indeed to ancient Gaelic culture generally, were firmly rooted in his own experience. Given his positive view of Gaelic culture and his consistent recommendation that the regenerative process should include the re-forging of links with this communal past, Gunn's reluctance to learn the language remains problematic, although J. B. Pick expresses the view that he knew and understood more Gaelic than he admitted.[53]

The Lost Chart is principally a thriller and most of the action surrounds the theft of the chart by fifth columnists and the action surrounding the subsequent tracing of the gang, and the chart. In terms of advancing the themes of the meta-novel it is the threat posed by nuclear power and the response thereto, as outlined above, that is important. As with *Wild Geese Overhead*, the focus of *The Lost Chart* lies with the individual. Once again the positive influence of intuitive insight, 'The Atom of Delight', is advanced by Gunn as being important in combating the negative effects of the modern world as is the natural or rural world, here specifically Gaelic. In arriving at a positive conclusion, the positive power of love the creator is pitted against 'The Murderousness of the Modern World' and the novel ends with Dermot taking a new vessel on a proving trip to Cladday with Ellen MacArthur, Christina MacNeil and Dermot's friend Joe Duguid as passengers - a double wedding between Dermot and Ellen and Christina and Joe is in prospect. Gunn's positive endings are often less than convincing and this

---

[52]Hart and Pick, p. 131.
[53]Opinion given in a conversation with C. J. L. Stokoe in October 2002.

novel, whilst better in this respect than *Wild Geese Overhead*, and indeed *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*, is not without its problems. This is a trait in Gunn's work that will be found again in his final chapter, the conclusion, and will be further discussed at that point.

The third book in this sub division is *The Shadow*. The novel comprises three sections entitled: Convalescence, Relapse and Recovery, the first of which, as stated earlier, incorporated as its first chapter a short story of the same name that appeared in *The Scots Magazine*. Structurally the book is awkward with the first section being in epistolary form, being letters from the heroine, Nan, to her boyfriend Ranald through which the reader is made aware that she has been ill and is currently staying in the Highlands with her Aunt Phemie to convalesce. The remaining sections revert to a more straightforward literary style, employing an omniscient narrator.

This is one of the books deemed to contain covert references to the personal matters of the Gunn's still-born child and the affair with Margaret MacEwen. The biographers draw attention to the fact that, in *The Shadow*, Aunt Phemie is a widow whose husband, Dan, died in an 'appalling accident'.[54] A threshing machine being brought to the farm 'caught Dan against the gate post, and crushed him. The sight of his body had killed the child in her [Aunt Phemie] and an ambulance had taken her to hospital'.[55] The manner of Dan's death is reminiscent of that of Iain MacNeil in 'Sun and Moon' and *The Lost Chart*, where he became a human fender trapped between his boat and the cliff, but the associated death of the unborn child in *The Shadow* suggests that Gunn is prompted by the memory of his own 'appalling accident' and its aftermath. The other contributory story 'Snow in March', written closer in time to Gunn's private tragedy, makes no reference to a still-birth. It does, however, depict the

[54]*The Shadow*, p. 38.
[55]*Ibid*. p. 98.

heroine as a spinster of forty whose unfulfilled maternal instincts are directed towards an orphan lamb, as it was unlikely that she would now become a mother herself.

In the novel, Nan, who lives in London where she works for a magazine, has had a breakdown and needs to convalesce. The root cause of her breakdown is, at least partially, related to the war ('The Murderousness of the Modern World') as the severe air raids experienced in the capital have affected her badly. It is felt that a stay with Aunt Phemie in the country would assist.

Ironically, violence continues to haunt Nan as a murder has taken place near Aunt Phemie's farm. Whilst out walking, Nan chances to meet a stranger. Although not really believing him to be the murderer, his presence evokes her mental state at the time of her breakdown. Apart from the horrors of the air raids, she is appalled and troubled by changes in acceptable norms. She writes to Ranald:

> It was then that a section of my past came back on me with a strange fatality, and I shook my head and said it wasn't absurd. I said that murderers were like that now. I said that murderers were no longer the 'criminal type'. Murderers were normal now. They just murdered. When you believe in nothing, why should you believe in not murdering . . .? [56]

Her thoughts lead on to the murderousness of the Holocaust, of which she is clearly aware, to:

> the aftermath of war. The gas chambers. The mass butcheries. Jewish families are taking off their clothes, folding them, placing them in little heaps where they are told. They do this tidily. You can hear the whining sounds in their nostrils. Love sounds and love words and farewell. The naked family, one family and another and another, in the trenches they have dug. A young man is sitting on the edge of the trench with a tommy gun on his knees. He is smoking a cigarette.[57]

Here we have the horror, the inhuman and the unacceptable made normal and everyday; a reversal of all that has previously been held to be sacred. As with *The*

---

[56] *The Shadow*, p. 39.
[57] *Ibid.* pp. 39 - 40.

Green Isle of the Great Deep, man's inhumanity to man is central to the horror. It is also linked to totalitarian thinking, although in this instance there is no doubt as to which version is intended.

Nan has been living in London with Ranald who is depicted as being politically active on the far left like Joe Wilson in *Wild Geese Overhead*, but in his case the 'flaw' Gunn identified of preferring ideological systems over individuals is more evident. Ranald is very intelligent but has an analytical mind that he employs in a cold and calculating way - a destructive way. He is well on the way to becoming a character like the Questioner in *The Green Isle of the Great Deep.* Nan herself, expressing Gunn's own views, rejects the destructiveness associated with the clinical, sterile, and analytical mind.[58]

As in the other novels considered in this group, issues of escape and escapism are dealt with overtly. After the passage regarding the Holocaust, Nan writes to Ranald:

> You say that I have got to watch this emotionalism with its queer images (you mean demented) or I may escape from you altogether and that would be dreadful. It would indeed! And it's lovely of you to put it like that. But I am not deceived. I know what you are hinting at. Let me tell you then that I am not escaping out of sanity: I am trying to escape into sanity.[59]

Given the nature of Ranald, it is predictable that he would see escapism in negative terms. He tells Phemie that:

> as a result of what she [Nan] went through in London, she had a nervous breakdown. As a result [. . .] she went back in her mind to earlier, happier conditions. She saw visions of things from long ago, her father working in a field, the security of her mother, attractive bits of scenery, and so on. She was escaping from a world with which she could not cope - a hellish world admittedly - and going back to an earlier security. That is what Freud [. . .] called infantile regression.[60]

---

[58]Hart and Pick, p. 210. This passage shows the link between Gunn's view and those attributed to Nan.
[59]*The Shadow*, p. 41.
[60]*Ibid.* p. 85.

As has been noted, Gunn used Nan as the spokesperson for his own opinion and it is in a justification of Nan's position rather than Ranald's that the validation of escapism in *The Shadow* will occur.

In each of the novels in the group considered here, the principal protagonist is depicted as escaping positively to, rather than from, something, as with Nan who is trying to escape into sanity rather than escaping out of sanity, or 'reality' as Ranald would argue. Nan's period of recuperation in the country provides the mechanics of both this escape into sanity and her recovery from mental breakdown. In *The Shadow* the countryside is Highland but the Gaelic community does not feature. Although this exposure to the natural world is beneficial, the main agency for healing is Phemie.

Phemie has had her own personal tragedies in the loss of husband and child but has won back to a balanced, stable position.[61] In one of her letters, Nan says 'Aunt Phemie knows a lot about psychology, and not only as a science. She is wise'.[62] But despite her proficiency in psychology, Phemie's wisdom, like that of Old Hector in *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*, is largely intuitive. Through lengthy conversations with Ranald, Phemie has made her own assessment of him and this proves to be helpful in her subsequent dealings with Nan. It has already been noted that Ranald, with his analytical mind, has been partially instrumental in bringing on Nan's breakdown. It is Phemie who, having seen both of the protagonists, starts to rebuild Nan's mental health. This exercise involves exorcising the ghost of Ranald. She tells Nan:

> We talked, you know, a lot about it, Ranald and myself. I see what you mean about the need for being hard and clear-headed. We had better be quite frank about this, Nan. I can understand that you would be a bit sick at the loathing and the horror. Your stomach is made like that. Or

[61] Hart and Pick, p. 126. The biographers here state that Aunt Phemie is generally believed to have been modelled on Daisy. By the time *The Shadow* was published (1948) Daisy had also won back to a balanced, stable position after the still-birth of her own child. Any loss of a husband was, of course, in her case metaphoric rather than actual, although Gunn's impaired sight would remain a reminder of the 'terrible accident' believed to have been the cause of her early labour.

[62] *The Shadow*, p. 45.

> we can say, if you like, that your erotic group of instincts are stronger than your aggressive or destructive group. You prefer love and creation to destruction and death. But when you went beyond that emotional reaction to where Ranald was - you grew *afraid*, not in your body now so much as in your mind.[63]

Nan agrees with this assessment but is at pains to point out that Ranald has not always been remorseless and destructive but, she believes, his more positive nature has merely been suppressed. Phemie is uncertain and says 'I sometimes wondered if the talk about suppression and regression was always right. I don't know, but I wondered sometimes if what was suppressed mightn't, to some extent anyway, just wither away'.[64] This is obviously Gunn's opinion as it is exactly how he depicted the Questioner in *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*, where he had God say:

> There was a time when the Questioner had wisdom. He used his head and drew on his wisdom. But the more he used his head only, the paler his wisdom became, until at last the elements of wisdom were no longer so but only the ghostly bits he used for making a pattern with his head. [. . .] He has divorced knowledge from wisdom, the head from the heart, the intellect from the spirit - for man has many words for these two regions - and because of the divorce, the taste of life has gone bitter and its hope sterile.[65]

It is clear that Ranald has, as was suggested earlier, travelled further down the road towards becoming Questioner-like than had Joe Wilson in *Wild Geese Overhead*. The flaw, that Gunn postulated in Joe's analytical approach appears again here, more strongly. Nan tells Phemie:

> A person like Ranald could talk to the men there, to the farm workers, and find out about everything, and have a scheme for putting things right, but he does not somehow care for the men themselves.[66]

Just as Gunn demonstrated in *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*, Phemie and Nan recognise that purely analytical methodology lacks a quality, 'like kindness or love'.[67]

---

[63] *Ibid*. p. 191.
[64] *The Shadow,* p. 193.
[65] *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*, p. 242.
[66] *The Shadow*, p. 218.
[67] *Ibid.* p. 219.

Gunn's continuing message here, is that the analytical and the intuitive must combine to give wisdom - as Nan writes to Ranald early in the novel, with particular reference to the literary arts:

> Must I tell you that love is the wizard? Is that perhaps the ultimate secret of all great writing? And not only love of a person. Though always at the core, whether of a tree or a mountain (or a political world theory!), what man finds - or loses - is himself.[68]

The countryside around Phemie's farm is open to Nan in her walks and excursions and the 'beautiful real things' she encounters act as an antidote to the destructiveness of the talk and actions of the set that she and Ranald had belonged to in London.[69] As she recounts in one of her letters:

> When I went out just now for a walk and looked at things about me - hedge, field of grain, trees, the light on them - a tired old skin fell softly from me and I was fresh and new.[70]

Apart from its restorative effect, Nan also imbues this landscape with elements of symbolism. Her illness and the local murder both cast a shadow, the shadow of the title, on this landscape. She has set herself the task of eliminating this shadow, and its achievement will equate to her personal recovery. She writes in one of her letters:

> Meantime I shall get on with my job, not merely by helping to clean house for you - we have your room all ready already - but also (my private job) to clean up, to brush away, the shadow from the fields and trees and all the land up to the Wood (the Dark Wood, I call it now) and on across the moor to the burn and perhaps even down to the gorge of the birches. For the murder of that poor old man did cast a shadow.[71]

---

[68] *Ibid.* p. 35.
[69] *The Shadow,* p. 48.
[70] *Ibid.* p. 54.
[71] *Ibid.* pp. 55 - 56.

Although, in this novel, Ranald and Aunt Phemie both exhibit a knowledge of Freud's methods, Gunn's own preference was for the thinking of Jung. The shadow has, in these terms, another and deeper symbolical meaning. It has been defined as:

> The *alter ego*; the negative side of ego consciousness, the invisible remnant of evolutionary heritage. Additional elements repressed by the ego cluster around it by association.[72]

The shadow then becomes symbolical of Nan's psychological state and the Dark Wood, referred to in the above quotation, of which Nan is afraid must relate to her own subconscious. In Jungian terms:

> It is important to remind ourselves [. . .] of the importance of teleology, or goal-direction, in contrast to Freud's gloomy presumptions of determinism. Our motivation is directed toward the ultimate joining of conscious and unconscious, and to the emergence of the Self as the new center [sic] of a balanced psyche. [. . .] The shadow is the alter ego, the unconscious counterpart of the accustomed conscious personality. To ensure Self-realization [. . .] the unconscious complex must be accepted, not stifled and repressed. Note that the objective is not the destruction of the shadow, but rather its recognition, since the shadow is a necessary part of the whole.[73]

In the novel, Nan achieves a psychological wholeness which is mirrored on the physical plane where she comes to terms with the Dark Wood by containing it within a 'Sun Circle'. She tells Phemie 'I want to put a circle sunwise round the shadow. That will keep you quite safe till I come back'.[74] She also treats the murdered man's cottage in the same way. 'I put [. . .] a sun-circle round the cottage. I thought that might help. [. . .] I also said a few words. I won't tell you what. Words of peace - for those gone and for those to come. That's all'.[75]

This novel is open-ended; restored to mental health Nan returns to London to be with, and support, Ranald. This could be viewed as a coming together of the intuitive

---

[72]Timothy R. O'Neil, *The Individuated Hobbit: Jung, Tolkien and the Archetypes of Middle-earth* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), p. 180.
[73]*The Individuated Hobbit: Jung, Tolkien and the Archetypes of Middle-earth,* p. 37.
[74]*The Shadow*. p. 232.
[75]*Ibid.* p. 239.

and analytical but whether wisdom will result is uncertain. There is no evidence of any change in Ranald's make up and his personality seems too strong for Nan to combat. This aspect featured in correspondence between Nan Shepherd and Gunn. Replying to Nan, Gunn writes:

> Ranald will be of no use to her, I'm afraid. In London it would be all right, but when the testing time comes and he answers the call of the head, then Kronos will devour his children. That's the way the world is shaping. The world, ordered by men, will destroy what Nan stands for. I'm thinking of totalitarian man. But we are slipping that way ourselves. Totalitarian or Marxist man, in action, will have no feeling of guilt. And the individual doesn't matter much, and his emotional reactions not at all.[76]

In *The Shadow*, the most psychological of the three novels considered in this grouping, Nan's escapism, her escape into sanity, can be interpreted as a move towards Self-realization, towards the coming together of the conscious and the unconscious in a Jungian wholeness. Her acknowledgement and acceptance of the unconscious, as symbolised by the Dark Wood, have enabled this transformation to take place.

In all three of these novels the focus has been on the individual and, in the light of the psychological insights gained from *The Shadow*, it can be seen that all show the main protagonist escaping into the sanity of Self-realization. However much he may recognise that political ideologies have been developed with the good of mankind in mind, Gunn is arguing strongly for the primacy of the individual over any ideology. However, to achieve his ideals for the benefit of the community at large, wisdom will be required, a wisdom that he has argued comes from the coming together of the conscious and the unconscious, the analytical and the intuitive, in a wholeness touched by love, the creator.

---

[76] *Hart and Pick*, p. 209.

The meta-novel thus far has consistently highlighted the importance of the individual but, in this sub section he has, for the first time, concentrated on the individual as a separate entity rather than as an integral member of their community. This does seem to be a transition in Gunn's thinking as certainly in the three novels just considered there is no suggestion that Highland, or Scottish, regeneration can be achieved; instead there has been a concentration on individual Self-realization.

The last two novels

The two novels in this grouping, *The Key of the Chest* and *Blood Hunt* are more difficult to interpret within the terms dictated by the chapter order of Gunn's retrospect. The five novels included in the second part of chapter four are not listed in chronological order and, as these two novels are the last to appear, there may be *prima facie* evidence for thinking Gunn also had difficulty in allocating them within the structure. However, as they are included in the 'Escapism Validated' grouping, they must also be a response to *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* even though there is no obvious element of escape from 'The Murderousness of the Modern World' in the way that has been observed in the three books already considered.

'Murderousness' in The Green Isle is associated with totalitarianism, and the way that its practitioners manipulate and subjugate the individual for the, supposed, greater good of society. The novels already discussed offer examples of individuals escaping

from this oppression. However, in The Green Isle, there is a religious as well as a political dimension. God's power is delegated to administrators whose lack of wisdom, and inability to assume the mantle of the Creator, causes paradise to go awry. Gunn may have intended these two novels to be a comment on this element of The Green Isle, and the plausibility of this suggestion will now be considered.

In *The Key of the Chest*, issues of belief, both secular and religious, abound. As has been mentioned, the novel is an expansion of the short story 'The Dead Seaman',[77] which features two brothers living well away from the centre of the community. One, Tearlach (Charlie in the novel), is a fisherman and the other Dughall (Dougald in the novel), is the shepherd for the community's sheep flock. Whilst Dughall is away buying supplies, a ship is wrecked and Tearlach saves a sailor who was washed ashore, buoyed up by his seaman's chest. When Dughall returns he finds the seaman dead; the doctor subsequently identifies strangulation as the cause. It is thought that the way in which the seaman had been hauled from the water had constricted his throat with his clothing but, after Dughall purchases sheep on his own behalf, suspicions grow that the seaman may have been murdered for the contents of his chest. In the novel this story is only one strand in the overall structure and the story itself is fleshed out, with the community delineated in greater detail.

To return to the issues of belief, the novel discloses that Charlie (Tearlach) was studying Divinity in Edinburgh on a course funded by the community, including his brother. He loses faith, gives up his course and, after a spell in South America, returns to work as a lobster fisherman.[78] Whilst in Edinburgh, Charlie meets Flora, the minister's daughter, who is also at college. She breaks bounds to meet him, is caught,

---

[77]Neil M. Gunn, 'The Dead Seaman', in *The Scots Magazine*, Vol. 15, No. 4, July 1931, pp. 265 - 289.
[78]A recurring theme in Gunn - *viz* Iain in both 'The Man who Came Back' and *The Drinking Well* and, especially given the nature of his studies, Ewan in *The Lost Glen*.

expelled, and returns home in disgrace. Naturally enough this does not endear Charlie to the minister, who had been instrumental in obtaining funding for his studies, and he suppresses a letter Charlie sends Flora from abroad. After the death of the seaman, Charlie and Flora meet again, a meeting observed by the minister. The ensuing tension between Flora and her father reflects that between Tom and his father in *The Serpent* and, ultimately drives her to leave home and go to Charlie.

The Key of the Chest, like the previous novels in this section, is concerned with individuals and how they interact with the community, but it also incorporates two groups of characters that are not truly part of the community. One, centred on Michael Sandeman a local landlord, provides the opportunity for outside observation of, and philosophical comment on, the community. The other contains those whose jobs distance them from the rest of the community, namely the policeman, the minister and the doctor; the latter also providing a link with the Sandeman group. From this second group, because of his special relationship with his daughter, the two brothers, and the community at large, the minister occupies a central position in the novel. The tensions within the community are exacerbated, if not caused, by the relationship between the minister and the two brothers. The causes of the tension between the minister and Charlie have been noted, but Dougald also falls foul of the minister. He chooses to drive his personal sheep home on a Sunday, thus breaking the Sabbath. The minister sees him and remonstrates with him. Dougald then, probably accidentally, strikes him, an act witnessed by members of the community. As a result Dougald, in his absence, is berated publicly from the pulpit.

In her discussion of this novel, Margery McCulloch, talks of the 'Highland community as prison-house'[79] and J. B. Pick tends to confirm this view in his article 'A Neglected Major Novel: Neil Gunn's *The Key of the Chest*', where he states that the

[79] *The Novels of Neil M. Gunn*, p. 152

novel 'explores the nature of community, and the divisions in the human psyche caused by damaging it'.[80] Writing of the community described in the novel he comments:

> Everyone knows everything - or nearly everyone, and nearly everything. Community is at once a protection and a prison.[81]

In this article, Pick describes the community in almost claustrophobic terms, saying:

> Throughout you get a sense of the community as an organism with eyes, always watching. Someone is watching when the outsider Michael Sandeman takes his prying photographs of birds and people. His camera is watching them, and they are watching him. The boy Hamish is innocent of knowledge, yet he seems to be everywhere and to see everything. He is watching when Michael goes over the cliff, and it is Hamish that calls for help. When Charlie MacIan secretly meets Flora, the minister's daughter, the doctor sees them. When Dougald is driving home his suspect sheep, Hamish sees him. When Dougald clashes with the minister, there are eyes everywhere. The doctor sees the final parting of Flora with her father. [. . .] The seeing is intrusive: but it saves Michael from death on the cliff, and it is his neighbours' detailed knowledge of how Charlie is likely to behave that saves Charlie and Flora when they flee by boat and are wrecked in a storm. So it breaks both ways: benevolent, curious or malicious eyes are watching, to help or to harm.[82]

There is some distinction made in the nature of the seeing between the core community and outsiders, who are seen as intrusive. A similar situation obtained in 'Sun and Moon',[83] where it was the perception of being spied upon that caused the tension between Cladday's community and the naval captain. However, in *The Key of the Chest* generally, there is a prurience about the nature of the seeing that is totally absent in the innocent local community of Cladday.

Running through the novel is a philosophical commentary, detailed in conversations between the Sandeman group and the doctor, which focuses on belief,

---

[80]Pick, J. B., 'A Neglected Major Novel: Neil Gunn's *The Key of the Chest'* in *Scottish Literary Journal* Vol 17, No. 1, May 1990, p. 35.
[81]A Neglected Major Novel, p. 38.
[82]A Neglected Major Novel, pp. 37 - 38.
[83]The story from which *The Lost Chart*, a contributory novel to this chapter, developed.

and makes a distinction between traditional patterns of belief and the contemporary absence of belief. Commenting on the word, belief, Michael Sandeman's guest, Mr Gwynn, succinctly summarises these differences saying:

> It's difficult. We don't want to use the word religion, because it particularizes too narrowly. Denominational. But, for example, away back in your primitive world here you had absolute belief, a complete fusing of intelligence, of imagination, of all the faculties. They did not *believe* in belief. It was the breath they breathed, the life they lived.[84]

This is the quality of belief of the Cladday islanders, and is, to a degree, still in evidence amongst the villagers of Cruime in *The Key of the Chest*; a form of belief that the denominational faith of the Free Church is destroying.

In contrast, the modern lack of belief, linked textually to the destructive, analytical, mind, is aired in a conversation between Gwynn and the doctor. Gwynn comments:

> There's no belief. That's the essence of it. Between the period of belief that was and the new belief that may some day come again, there is this desert, this dark wood. It's the land we inhabit.[85]

Belief, he thinks, has been destroyed by analytically minded people. The doctor argues that, in attributing this degree of influence to relatively few people, Gwynn may be guilty of exaggeration. His response is:

> They don't much matter in an age that has belief. In an age that has lost belief, they do matter. They may be few in number, but they ultimately destroy their society. Always.[86]

To develop the argument about the conflict between the 'primitive' patterns of belief and the Free Church, Gunn uses an example that has appeared many times in the meta-novel so far, the concept of a 'Sun Circle". Apart from appearing in the book of that name, Mairi described a circle sunwise around the fishing boats in an act of dedication in *Butcher's Broom*. It was the way in which Nan, in *The Shadow*, laid the

---

[84]*The Key of the Chest,* p. 205.
[85]*The Key of the Chest,* p. 205.
[86]*Ibid.* p. 205.

ghosts of her unconscious and, as he describes in his autobiographical work *The Atom of Delight*, it was adopted by Gunn himself as a means of protecting his essential core, his second self.[87] The episode in *The Key of the Chest* concerns a boat trip Gwynn made with Erchie, the general factotum at Sandeman's house. Gwynn says:

> Erchie, who attends to the outside affairs of this house, was waiting for me the day before yesterday to take me out to the *Stormy Petrol*. I took the oars and was turning the dinghy round when Erchie, who is a quiet man, all but yelled. I thought he had put his foot through her bottom. All that had happened was that I was turning her round *against* the sun, turning her widdershins, instead of turning her *with* the sun, what he called *jeeshil* - or so it sounded.[88]

This superstition is then linked explicitly with the actions of the minister when it is said:

> He is pulling the boat widdershins. Erchie knows he is doing it. The minister himself knows he is doing it. He is doing it deliberately. He is going to smash the superstition. That's his job. But the superstition stands for a whole way of life. He is therefore smashing that. And what is he offering in its place? Not a new way of life, here and now, on earth, in relation to sea and land, with the natural happiness and mirth which come out of a wholeness of living, magic, imagination, all the emotions and desires in the one integrated pattern - not that, but a quite other thing, namely, the salvation of the soul *in a future life*. Now I am not offering any moral reflection upon all this. I am only trying to see what is happening, what is happening in Erchie's mind, and, in particular, what must be happening in the minister's mind. Fear is the weapon. *Thou shalt not* is the commandment. Now in our no longer primitive world you cannot act like that without enormous consequences, which will be found at work not merely internally in the mind but externally in social relations.[89]

The minister of the Free Church, through the negative tenets of his creed, holds the whole of the community in thrall.[90] For his breaking of the Sabbath Dougald is demonized from the pulpit just as his brother had been ostracised for his loss of belief.

---

[87] *The Atom of Delight*, p. 88.
[88] *The Key of the Chest,* p. 126.
[89] *The Key of the Chest,* pp. 127 - 128.
[90] The negative aspects of the Calvinistic church are highlighted here at least as much as they were in *The Serpent*.

The minister alienates his daughter who, as a result, is driven to join Charlie, and a flight in an open boat that could have cost her her life.

It can be seen that, as a result of the denominational influence of the Free Church, a negative, arid, mind set is in evidence. This 'thou shalt not' culture is similar to that of The Green Isle and it does seem reasonable to regard *The Key of the Chest* as a commentary on the religious aspect of *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*. As has been noted earlier in the meta-novel, the malaise is partially caused by a loss of cultural roots, in this instance associated with belief. The old pattern of belief has been deliberately destroyed by the minister and the community has become prison like. However, as a direct result of his confrontation with Flora, the minister's authority within the community is diminished, facilitating an escape from this prison-like thraldom. Bearing in mind the way the problems in The Green Isle were resolved, it is pertinent that Flora's love for Charlie prompted her challenge. Ironically, although Charlie and Flora will marry, it seems likely that they will feel obliged to leave the area, as happened in *Second Sight.*

The final novel in chapter four is *Blood Hunt*. Assuming that Gunn intended this work to be a commentary on the religious aspect of the 'Murderousness of the Modern World', it should be possible to see elements within this work that, as in *The Key of the Chest*, deal with matters of belief. Many such references can, in fact, be found but perhaps the most telling is the assertion that 'Of all the stories man had made only two were immortal: the story of Cain and the story of Christ';[91] stories plausibly depicting Old and New Testament thinking respectively. Cain murdered his brother through jealousy,[92] and Allan's murder of Robert, following a fight over Liz Murison, can be seen in similar terms. The local policeman, Nicol, is Robert's brother and his response

[91]*Blood Hunt,* p. 233.
[92]Genesis 4. 2 - 15.

reflects the vengeful Old Testament doctrine of 'an eye for an eye' as his investigation increasingly becomes the blood hunt of the title.[93] By contrast, Christ's teaching was less concerned with the letter of the law, and revenge, and more with love. When asked to name the most important of the commandments, he selected two positive ones, to love God and to love your neighbour. By doing this, Christ was not rescinding the 'thou shalt not' elements of the ten commandments (elements beloved of the culture of the kirk in *The Key of the Chest* and of The Green Isle under the administrators) rather he was teaching that, if these two commandments are kept, all the others will automatically be honoured.

Blood Hunt's central character is Sandy who, like Auld Jeems in *The Grey Coast*, is a retired seaman who lives alone in a croft some way out of town. He is one of Gunn's archetypal wise old men, a successor to the composite Hector. He is fiercely independent but well liked and respected. As with Hector, Sandy owns the house of the young men's *ceilidh*, and all the major characters visit and interact with him.

Sandy has two conversations with Mr Davidson, the minister of the kirk, in one of which the minister refers to the 'fear of God' as, predictably, being his preferred attribute of the Deity, to which Sandy counters 'either that or the love of Christ'.[94] This seems to set the battle lines between the two points of view with the minister favouring an essentially Old Testament message and Sandy the New, with its dictum 'a new commandment I give unto you. That you love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another'.[95] Sandy finds himself increasingly at odds with the negative and regulatory nature of the organised religion of the kirk - although Mr Davidson is nowhere near as negative and destructive as Flora's father in *The Key of the Chest* -

---

[93]Exodus 21. 24.
[94]*Blood Hunt,* p. 191.
[95]John 13. 34.

and finds that the commandment to 'love one another' much more in accord with the 'warm feeling at life's real core'. Arguing for the positives rather than the negatives, Sandy tells the minister:

> In profound matters, as I have heard you say, it is often possible to talk only in parables. But there is a real point in what I would be at. I have seen too much goodness and kindliness wither away under some fancied notion that restriction and denial and regulation would cure the world of its evils. Unfortunately it's never the evils that get swept away in the process, it's the goodness and kindliness of the human spirit.[96]

Despite their differences, a feeling of mutual respect between the minister and Sandy is conveyed in this novel, although Gunn made no such concessions in either *The Serpent* or *The Key of the Chest*.

As was highlighted when Gunn's essay 'On Destruction' was quoted, the introduction of the creative impulse, as implied in the 'new commandment', lies at the heart of Gunn's meta-novel as well as being his validation of escapism.[97] Love and the 'warm feeling at life's real core' increasingly dictate Sandy's responses to those around him but this brings a moral dilemma as he can not always do what he feels to be right and yet obey the law. This is a dilemma shared with Old Hector who, when accused of being 'the very fount and origin of law-breaking and all that's wrong' responded:

> Law-breaking, yes, [. . .] but wrong is a difficult word. Many a day I have pondered over it, but I am not sure that I have found the answer. I only have a feeling about the answer and sometimes I go by that feeling. For, you see, laws are necessary, and to break them is wrong. Yet a law can be wrong.[98]

Throughout *Blood Hunt* there are frequent discussions about the behaviour of animals which appear to be a kind of touchstone by which Sandy determines the 'right' course of action. For example when the fugitive, Allan, seeks help and sustenance,

---

[96]*Blood Hunt,* p. 81.
[97]Neil M. Gunn, 'On Destruction', in *The Scots Magazine,* Vol. 35, No. 4, July 1941, p. 293.
[98]*Young Art and Old Hector*, p. 190.

Sandy's dog, Queenie, recognises him with affection (an affection not extended to Nicol) from earlier poaching forays. Unlike Sandy, Queenie has no moral dilemma. Her reaction is summed up by the narrator in the following terms:

> She had her world. The scent of Allan must have stirred memories. Those nights with the moon, and a half-moon was enough. How she had loved it, how the coming of the boys had excited her! Then off into the night . . . her quartering of the ground . . . the hunt. Sex might bowl her over in its season, but the hunt was for ever. It was in her paws when she slept. Man and dog: it was a long partnership, and the hunt was clean and swift.
>
> Laughing they came back from the hunt, and never did they forget to praise her. Allan had his own way of fondling her left ear with his left hand. Not that he made too much of her, though they made a lot.
>
> In that world of hers Allan's crime could not exist.[99]

In reality, Sandy's moral dilemma stems from a similar feeling based on his own deep knowledge of Allan's character. As Sandy muses on his dilemma, he thinks of Allan after a night of rain and storm and Gunn writes:

> He could not move about in the broad daylight. And he would need sleep. A time would come anyway when sleep would overtake his young body though it was lying in a pool. After that, a raging pneumonia would soon finish him off.
>
> It might be the best way out. Gloom assailed Sandy and a whelming sense of his own helplessness. God knows why it bothers me so much, he thought. The lad had done his deed and would have to take his gruel. It was the old law, and strong men and the best of men knew it. But Sandy could not dispel his gloom. Perhaps old age - he had noticed it growing in himself - came to dislike the destroying of life, the deliberate destruction of it. Give it a chance. If age that had had its day could destroy the young human being, then something had gone wrong surely with the warm feeling at life's real core, because that feeling was life itself and the warm surge of life.[100]

Sandy's remote croft becomes the destination for another fugitive; the heavily pregnant Liz Murison calls at the croft, having left home. Ostensibly she has come because she heard Sandy needed assistance following an accident in which his shoulder was dislocated, but, in reality, she is escaping from a disapproving father,

---

[99] *Blood Hunt*, p. 96.
[100] *Blood Hunt,* p. 126. - in 1952 murder still carried the death penalty.

Farquhar. He is prominent in church circles and represents much of what Gunn saw as being wrong with organised religion. Sandy's neighbour, Widow Macleay describes Farquhar Murison succinctly as 'her father, that deacon in the kirk! Yon pretty man with the soft smile on his fat face! A sanctimonious humbug.'[101] It is apparent to Sandy that, if he turns Liz away, she will have nowhere to go as she will not return home so, giving way to 'the warm feeling at life's real core',[102] he allows her to stay saying 'Liz Murison, [. . .] you're safe here. Put fear from you and sleep in peace.'[103] Liz's arrival prompts the second conversation with the minister, who visits Sandy after his accident. Apart from paying a pastoral visit, the minister lets Sandy know that he has a duty to repatriate Liz, saying:

> This young woman, who had wreaked such havoc, should be returned forthwith to the parents who were waiting to receive her and ready to fulfil their responsibilities before man and God.[104]

Sandy, aware that Liz does not wish to return home, resists the minister's suggestion, and decides to continue to provide a refuge for Liz. In coming to this decision he considers that her father is probably less keen to have her returned to the bosom of the family than the minister professes, as it would have been easier for Farquhar to call for her than for Sandy to take her into the town in his injured condition.

Despite Sandy's efforts, Liz finally sees Allan and the shock is sufficient to bring her into premature labour. This is reminiscent of the Aunt Phemie episode in *The Shadow* and may be a reworking of the real autobiographical tragedy. Here, perhaps reflecting Gunn's coming to terms with the past, Liz is safely delivered of a male child (Gunn's own child would have been male had it lived) by Sandy who is the only one present. The infant then joins Liz in the croft.

---

[101] *Ibid.* p. 160.
[102] *Ibid.* p. 126.
[103] *Ibid.* p. 148.
[104] *Ibid.* p. 192.

Shortly after the birth of the child, Sandy witnesses the murder of Allan by Nicol. He is searching the ground using a telescope, reminiscent of *The Key of the Chest* with the ever watching eyes of its community. Nicol is unaware that he has been observed and afterwards Sandy lays out Allan's body decently and makes a cairn of stones to protect it from birds.

Sandy's moral dilemma now reaches a critical point. Whereas the community in *The Key of the Chest* found itself in a 'Dark Wood' between a system of belief that had existed and a future one that may come, so Sandy now saw himself as being 'like an old man of the tribe, as the tribe had been, and might be again, with decision in his hands for the living, and the responsibility for that decision'.[105] In deciding to remain quiet, in an attempt to halt the cycle of violence, Sandy is conscious of the living rather than the dead, and especially Liz and her child. He is also echoing the New Testament message when he says 'Right and wrong. Ay, that was easy. But the new commandment: love one another . . .'[106]

It is clearly no accident that Gunn highlights the positive nature of the 'new commandment', for there are many other biblical references made in this novel. Nicol's actions are obviously associated with the story of Cain, and are equally obviously component parts of the 'Murderousness of the Modern World', as is apparent from the quotation:

> Whatever deeds man committed, to whatever lengths he carried the story of Cain, ay, even though with atom bombs he would yet make Cains of us all and universal death his aim, at the end of it there would be the few left here and there, cutting the grass for their beasts and feeding it to them in a manger when winter froze the earth. As it had been in the beginning so was it here in his croft now.[107]

---

[105]*Blood Hunt*, pp. 248 - 249.
[106]*Blood Hunt*, p. 249.
[107]*Ibid.* p. 233.

This quotation also serves to disassociate Sandy from the 'story of Cain', and invite the reader to align Sandy's philosophy with that of the 'new commandment' and the 'story of Christ'.

Links to the Christ story are made abundantly clear in the symbolism surrounding the birth of Liz's baby. The child is associated with a lamb, born in a barn and laid in a manger. It is heard puling in a crib, wrapped in swaddling clothes - all clearly reminiscent of the nativity of Christ.[108] A final expression of Sandy's 'warm feeling at life's real core' comes at the end of the novel as he returns home after dealing with Allan's body, and after deciding to keep his own council on these events. He watches Liz working around the croft, and dealing with the child, and recognises this as being the future, a future he plans to foster by making them his heirs. As a bachelor, with no other kin, he intends to draft out a will leaving his assets to Liz in a manner identical to that adopted by Auld Jeems in *The Grey Coast*.

Reference has already been made to the way in which this book makes frequent reference to animal behaviour, as a commentary on that of some of the human protagonists. It is worth mentioning that animal behaviour, and its mirror image in the human population, tends to be intuitive whereas it is analytical thinking that dictates the law and other aspects that relate to the 'story of Cain'.

The non-judgemental, intuitive, reaction of Queenie the sheepdog has already been highlighted with her inability to reclassify her friend Allan as a criminal - an inability reflected in Sandy's difficulty in making a similar distinction.

Despite the unconventional nature of Liz's confinement - Sandy's midwifery skills are described in terms of lambing - he was merely assisting in a difficult birth, as he had done many times in the lambing season, and as Aunt Phemie did in *The Shadow*,

---

[108] *Ibid*. pp. 220 - 222.

and these terms of reference underline the essential naturalness of the event. Perhaps as a result of his uncertainty over Liz's relationships with Allan, who she knew was still alive and on the run, and Robert, the child's father, Sandy was anxious about whether Liz would reject her child. He thinks 'She would accept the child yet. He had the feeling that she has accepted it already just because he had been kind to her and helped her'.[109] His anxiety is, again, illustrated by comparison to the animal kingdom. Gunn expresses Sandy's thoughts thus:

> If Liz was wild-eyed and restless, Sandy paid no attention to her. He knew how tough the newly born animal was, incredibly tough - up to that point where it suddenly and mysteriously gives up the ghost and dies on one's hands. But there was no sign of dying here. He handled the fragile slippery body with an easy confidence, dried it with the towel, rolled it in one end of a sheet and brought it to the arms that were waiting for it. 'He's earned his drink,' said Sandy.
> He busied himself until he saw the look in Lizzie's face above the round nuzzling head, then all anxiety fell from him.[110]

Reference was made when Queenie's thoughts were being discussed that 'Sex might bowl her over it its season',[111] and such passages serve to indicate that procreation is an intuitive and natural urge, and may suggest that Liz's 'folly' is not irretrievable; a suggestion strengthened by a reference towards the end of the book to Sandy's maverick hen, Williamena. She had a tendency to lay away and had managed to outwit the humans for, as Sandy was observing Liz working round the croft, he saw the hen 'making towards the hen-house with a swarm of new chicks around her' - another new, one-parent family under Sandy's protection.[112]

Religious symbolism in this novel is so pronounced that the conclusion that Gunn was using the work as a commentary on the religious aspect of *The Green Isle of the*

---

[109]*Blood Hunt*, p. 221.
[110]*Ibid.* p. 222.
[111]*Blood Hunt,* p. 96.
[112]*Ibid.* p. 249.

Great Deep seems certain. The practices of the Free Church are depicted as being negative and proscriptive and far removed from the 'new commandment' of Christ. Although Gunn's characterization of the minister is less harsh than has been seen in other novels, his tendency to accentuate the negative is highlighted. More to the point, the self-important deacon, Farquhar Murison, seems to exhibit the same negative qualities as other examples of the Elect that have occurred in the meta-novel to date.

Through Sandy's adoption of the 'new commandment', Liz Murison has escaped from an overbearing and disapproving father who judges her by the harsh tenets of his religion and, by extension, she escapes from the life-negating creed of his church. As this conclusion is similar to that of *The Key of the Chest*, the suggestion that Gunn saw these two novels as commenting on the religious aspect of 'The Murderousness of the Modern World' seems secure. Liz, like Flora, has escaped to love. In Flora's case this was to a prospective husband whereas Liz has escaped to a safe and loving environment where she can live and bring up her child in peace - she could, as Sandy had told her at the outset, put fear from her and sleep in peace. Although she was not aware of it within the period covered by the novel, even her long term future was secure thanks to the provisions Sandy intends to make for her in his will.

Sandy is described in archetypal terms, and views himself as such, but he can also be seen as 'The Man who came Back', Gunn's favoured instrument of change. It can be argued that, like Auld Jeems, Sandy has made it possible for a new generation to continue the traditional Highland way of life. He harms no one directly and, by intuitively seeking to implement the 'new commandment', achieves much that is good. However, in this novel, although Sandy does positively draw on his Highland cultural heritage, there is no suggestion that his activity will create communal regeneration.

Notwithstanding Old Hector's comment that 'a law can be wrong' and that a man must decide for himself what is right and wrong, it must be said that there is a distinction between the crimes of defrauding the Revenue and murder. Sandy makes an intuitive assessment of the character of Allan and does not give him away. Nicol's character, as depicted in the novel, is less attractive, so Sandy's decision to remain silent over this offence seems more problematic to the reader. In taking the non-judgemental line that he does, Sandy seeks to break the cycle of violence and give young people the opportunity of living out their lives as he has done. There is a hint in the book that, during the war, he may himself have indulged in a vengeance killing after his Italian girlfriend was killed, and this may be thought to have affected his thinking. Within the time span covered by the novel, there is no way of knowing how Nicol's position will work out but it seems unlikely that he will get away with it in the long run.

Re-appraisal

When the novels allocated to chapter one were re-appraised it was speculated that the inclusion of *Second Sight*, a relatively late work, may reflect Gunn's perception that analytical thinking was a contributory factor to the 'state of mind' of the Highlander. The date of this novel (1940) suggests that this was the period when Gunn came to this conclusion. It has also been speculated that the overarching title for chapter four, 'Transition', may relate to a transition in Gunn's own thinking from a concentration on community to that of the individual. In the meta-novel, the structure of chapter four is such that the second part can be seen as dependant, and a commentary, upon the first, containing the single novel *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*, making this a key work.

An examination of the contributory novels to the second part of the chapter reveals that one of them, *Wild Geese Overhead* (1939), was published some five years earlier than the novel it is commentating upon. *Wild Geese Overhead* is the novel that introduces concerns about how the needs and rights of the individual can become subordinated to the ideology itself. These concerns are expressed in debates between the communist, Joe, and the hero Will and, as the character of Joe is arguably the better drawn of the two, it suggests that Gunn was having a little difficulty in expressing his revised thinking. *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* commences with reports of brainwashing and it seems likely that the transition in Gunn's thinking was his response to these reports, emanating from the immediate pre-war period. *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* can, therefore, be seen as a more measured response to the problems of totalitarianism and the analytical mind, together dubbed as 'The Murderousness of the Modern World', thus adding even greater weight to this novel.

Within the structure of the meta-novel, *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* is also separated from *Young Art and Old Hector*, despite being its natural sequel. Although much of *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* affirms and builds upon the substance of the earlier novel, its plot and message is, as the title of this part of the meta-novel's chapter - The Murderousness of the Modern World - confirms, of much more universal import. The ambivalence as to whether Gunn's dystopia refers to Fascism or Communism serves to focus upon the fact that the real danger he perceived was Totalitarianism, or any system of strict centralised control, whatever its ideology.

These centralised controls, including the manipulation of people's cognitive facilities, are shown in this fantasy novel to be contrary to the the natural law and to the will of God and, as such, require to be challenged. The nature of any such challenge, as evidenced by the novel, can now be considered. Within the plot there is

clear evidence that the wisdom and innocence of boyhood and old age, exemplified by Young Art and Old Hector, ultimately receive God's blessing. This serves to validate the behavioural patterns and mental make up of the archetypal Celtic community represented by Art and Hector, who were the ones who presented the direct challenge to the administrators and controllers of The Green Isle, and further serves to suggest that a reconnection with one's heritage, culture, and traditions forms a first step in combating the negative effects of Totalitarianism.

A further strand of the plot must, however, not be overlooked, namely the role of women. Here the emphasis is less on cultural tradition and more on basic humanity, the necessity to preserve the race into the future *via* the next generation. Although Mary had been subversive to the administration of The Green Isle for some time by developing an antidote to the gruel and eating the fruit of life, her challenge was brought to a head by her desire to protect (like a surrogate child) the vulnerable Art. The role of women in Gunn's natural state cannot be overemphasised. As has been seen in the earlier chapters of the meta-novel, the archetypal woman plays a pivotal role within the community. In the novel under consideration here, Mary not only provides the strength and resourcefulness to hold her community together but also has the mental stamina to withstand the questioner, who fails to break her will.

The weight this single, generally well regarded, novel is called upon to bear within the meta-novel structure would perhaps explain why Gunn thought of it as his 'best novel'. [113]

Of the novels in part two of chapter four, *Wild Geese Overhead* has already been referred to. Of the remaining four, *The Shadow* and *The Lost Chart* can be seen as responses to the political and ideological issues raised by The Green Isle whilst *The*

---

[113]Stokoe, *A Bibliography of the Works of Neil M. Gunn*, p. 64.

Key of the Chest and *Blood Hunt* relate to the religious issues of that novel. The description of the denominational application of Christianity in the latter two novels show them to be equally totalitarian in their application, as well as exhibiting an analytical rather than intuitive response to human issues.

When viewed in this way the many biblical references in *Blood Hunt* in particular can perhaps be seen as Gunn differentiating between the dogma of the Free Church and Biblical Christianity, with its 'new commandment'. It will be recalled that this warmer depiction of Christianity occurred earlier when Gunn talked of the early, and inclusive, Celtic Church.

The focus of this third epicyclic journey involves the cultural, and spiritual, dimension and Gunn presents a case for countering the 'Murderousness' *via* a unification of the intuitive and the analytical, the heart and the mind, knowledge and wisdom, where love, the creator, is also present. In the fable, this is achieved by Art and Hector whose natural comradeship, along with other aspects of shared community tradition, aid the overthrow of the Questioner.

In this chapter, true to its title of 'Transition', regeneration is still in evidence, but is expressed in personal terms rather than those of community. Although all the novels involve an escape from some element of 'The Murderousness of the Modern World', in each there is a sense of escaping to a positive, usually involving love the creator.

This transition may appear a radical change of emphasis on Gunn's part but it must be remembered that, as has been shown in the discussion so far, Gunn sees community change being achieved through the efforts of trained or enlightened individuals. Consequently, the effect of this change may be less radical than at first appears, although the apparent watering down of his 'The Man who came Back' motif may argue otherwise.

The final chapter, 'Conclusion', can now be considered.

SECTION FIVE

CONCLUSION

The Comedy of Transcendence and Light

The contributory novels

Gunn allocated three novels to this final section: *The Silver Bough*[1]*, The Well at the World's End*[2] and *The Other Landscape*[3]. These are all late novels and are listed chronologically in Gunn's retrospect. Appropriately enough, his final novel, *The Other Landscape*, appears last in the list. However, other works that have already appeared in the meta-novel, were published between the novels listed here; *The Lost Chart*, between *The Silver Bough* and *The Well at the World's End*, and *Blood Hunt* between *The Well at the World's End* and *The Other Landscape*.

As with the novels allocated to the previous section, Gunn drew heavily on his other published work in this final selection of novels. *The Silver Bough* features an archaeologist, a recurring feature in Gunn's work, and follows a similar theme to that of the early short story, 'The Circle'.[4] As with *The Silver Bough*, this story involves the employment of an idiot as an archaeologist's assistant, an unusual and not totally successful appointment. As with many of Gunn's novels that have drawn on earlier short stories for their inspiration, *The Silver Bough* is considerably more positive than 'The Circle'. Whilst examining links with Gunn's other work, it is pertinent to note that the daring sea rescue in a rowing boat described in *The Silver Bough* is virtually identical to scenes in the short stories 'The Face in the Pool'[5] and 'The Terrible Ally'[6].

The Well at the World's End draws on a number of earlier writings, many of an autobiographical nature. The novel's first chapter sees the principal protagonist, Peter Munro, and his wife, Fand, visiting a well that appears dry although, in reality, it is full

---

[1]Neil M. Gunn, *The Silver Bough* (London: Faber, 1948).
[2]Neil M. Gunn, *The Well at the World's End* (London: Faber, 1951).
[3]Neil M. Gunn, *The Other Landscape* (London: Faber, 1954).
[4]Neil M. Gunn, 'The Circle', in *The Scots Magazine*, Vol. 16, No. 4, January 1932, pp. 241 - 255.
[5]Neil M. Gunn, 'The Face in the Pool', (Unpublished: from the address on the typescript, this dates from between 1948 and 1950).
[6]Neil M. Gunn, 'The Terrible Ally', (Unpublished: from the address on the typescript, this dates from between 1950 and 1960).

of water so clear as to appear invisible. In their biography Hart and Pick make it clear that not only was 'Fand' to be equated with Daisy Gunn but also that the episode at the well actually happened to Gunn and his wife (the well is between Dornoch and Golspie).[7] This episode was recounted in 'The Pursuit of Light' from which the opening chapter of *The Well at the World's End* is taken.[8] The essay 'Primitives in the Pool', concerning a salmon poaching adventure, is also clearly autobiographical and forms the basis of chapter three of the novel.[9] 'In a Spanish Garden', in which the narrator almost drowns, appears as an interlude in the whisky distillers' bothy scene in chapter eighteen of the novel.[10] Hart and Pick assert that this episode is also autobiographical, having taken place during Gunn's Spanish holiday with the McEwen brothers.[11] Gunn's short story, 'The Storm' (1935),[12] - which was itself re-written as 'Ride the Gale' -[13] was re-used as a dramatic interlude in chapter twenty seven of the novel. The above mentioned bothy scene also has similarities to scenes in *Whisky and Scotland*, *Young Art and Old Hector*, and the unpublished film script *The Water of Life*.[14]

In 1931 the short story 'Tragedy into Dream' was published in *The Modern Scot*.[15] This is an exceedingly complex, and very short, story relating to an amour and incorporating an involved dream sequence. It is, in fact, extremely difficult to interpret the story and gain any real grasp of the underlying events. *The Other Landscape*

---

[7] Hart and Pick, p. 226.
[8] Neil M. Gunn, 'The Pursuit of Light', in *Scotland's Magazine*, Vol. 45, No. 4, April 1950, pp. 38 - 41.
[9] Neil M. Gunn, 'Primitives in the Pool', in *The Glasgow Herald*, 28th October 1950, p. 3.
[10] Neil M. Gunn, 'In a Spanish Garden', in *Argosy*, Vol. 12, No. 4, April 1951, pp. 97 - 104.
[11] Hart and Pick, p. 120.
[12] Neil M. Gunn, 'The Storm' in *The Scots Magazine*, Vol. 22, No. 5, February 1935, pp. 349 - 357.
[13] Neil M. Gunn, 'Ride the Gale', in *The Saturday Evening Post*, Vol. 223, No. 25, 16th December 1950, pp. 20 - 21 and pp. 104 - 106.
[14] Neil M. Gunn, *Whisky and Scotland* (London: Routledge, 1935).
Neil M. Gunn, *The Water of Life* (Unpublished film script: National Library of Scotland, Deposit 209).
[15] Neil M. Gunn, 'Tragedy into Dream', in *The Modern Scot*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Spring 1931, pp. 64 - 65.

commences with the narrator Walter Urquhart, an anthropologist (and a Highlander), being asked by a friend, the editor of the London magazine *Serpent*, to go North to interview Douglas Menzies, a composer and writer, about the provenance of the manuscript entitled 'Cliffs' that had been submitted for possible publication. The story had made a great impact at the publishers but they wanted more background detail before printing. The text of *The Other Landscape* contains a quotation from this fictional manuscript, 'Cliffs', which is drawn verbatim from 'Tragedy into Dream'. From a reading of the novel, the impression left is that 'Cliffs' is a more substantial work than 'Tragedy into Dream' but the theme of the two stories appears to be identical. In a very real sense then Gunn's final novel is an interpretation, and expansion, of this early story that was published immediately after *Morning Tide*.

Themes of the concluding chapter

The 'sun circle' as a symbol of wholeness and as a protection for the individual's second self is a recurring image throughout the meta-novel suggested by Gunn's retrospect. Apart from the novel *Sun Circle*, reference is made to such protective circles in, amongst others, Gunn's autobiographical work *The Atom of Delight*,[16] *The Key of the Chest*, *The Shadow* and *Butcher's Broom*. In every instance these circles are executed with the sun and not widdershins. The significance of this aspect was made abundantly clear in *The Key of the Chest* where the reversal of the sunwise direction was equated with bad luck and destructiveness - as evidenced by the Minister's campaign against superstition, there associated with Gaelic culture and tradition. The execution of a circle with the sun is seen again in this last grouping of novels where Peter Munro in *The Well at the World's End* is keen to complete the circle of his journey without going widdershins[17].

It has been argued throughout this thesis that Gunn's imaginative approach involved the concept of return, of circling back. The Meta-novel involved three epicyclic journeys, delving back in search of 'that which was lost' from different standpoints, namely, boyhood, history and the cultural. Taken collectively there is a sense of closure in the novels allocated to this final chapter as they do complete the circle by returning thematically to issues raised in the introduction and re-evaluating them in the light of the knowledge gained from the epicyclic journeys. This will be looked at in greater detail as the individual novels are assessed but it is appropriate that more general topics are discussed first.

Appropriately enough for a chapter bearing the title 'Conclusion: The Comedy of Transcendence and Light', it can be asserted that the conclusion Gunn postulates for

---

[16]*The Atom of Delight*, p. 92, and pp. 245 - 246.
[17]*The Well at the World's End*, pp. 57, 188 and 262.

the meta-novel is a positive one. As has been shown, Gunn re-used material extensively in these works and, in addition, scenes appear in these novels which are reminiscent of themes and passages in earlier works. In every case, where previously published work is drawn on, a more favourable and positive outcome is in evidence.

This group of novels is concerned with familial relationships, particularly marital ones, and also with boundaries, boundaries between past and present and, especially, between the present and the spiritual 'other landscape'. It is in the interchange with this latter boundary that the flashes of inspiration and insight, 'atoms of delight', flow.

These 'atoms of delight' are essentially the province of the individual and, in this chapter, the concentration on the individual rather than the community identified in the last chapter continues to be in evidence. Individual regeneration remains the focus and is, increasingly, expressed in terms of the spiritual. Such a reconciliation of opposing forces suggests a close analogy to the disciplines chosen to illuminate this study, Comedy, Jungian Psychology, and Zen, which all espouse a quest for wholeness.

Finally, before turning to an examination of the individual novels, it should be noted that, as forecast in the introductory section, the action of these final novels returns to Gunn's contemporary Highlands, the setting for the first chapter, but with one major difference. The opening chapter depicted the Highland experience as grindingly hard, a land and community in economic and cultural decline, in thrall to their more powerful and influential southern neighbours, be they Lowland or English, and was permeated by a sense of outrage and bitterness. This bitterness is tempered in Gunn's concluding chapter and, in the final overview of this thesis, consideration will be given as to the extent to which the recovery of 'that which was lost' has contributed to this shift of emphasis.

The individual novels

The first of the novels listed, *The Silver Bough*, brings together the concepts of circles and 'circling back', being concerned with the excavation of a prehistoric stone circle in the Highlands. The geography of Clachar, the fictional setting of the novel, is such as to preclude it being directly associated with the moorland standing stones near Gunn's house at Brae. These feature in his essay 'Mountain Calendar' in *Highland Pack* and, in his foreword to the Richard Drew reprint of *The Silver Bough*, Dairmid Gunn writes: 'One of these essays concerns four standing stones on the moor beyond the crofting land near his home, and their significance. This subject is pursued persuasively and imaginatively in *The Silver Bough*, published in 1948.'[18] This suggestion of a link may be informative. Most of the essays collected in *Highland Pack* were culled from two series in *The Scots Magazine*, 'Memories of the Month' and 'A Countryman's Year', published between 1940 and 1942. 'Mountain Calendar', whilst similar, is not one of these essays, and seems to have made its first appearance in *Highland Pack* in 1949. It is, therefore, possible that this essay was produced at around the time Gunn was writing *The Silver Bough*. The essay tells of how the standing stones align with the sunrise at certain key dates and goes on to say:

> [A divine, . . .] told me that they were known to old Gaelic inhabitants as *Na Daoine Gòrach*, meaning The Foolish Men. From his smile I understood his hidden meaning, for we have occasionally discussed antiquities and place names. The early Christians had undoubtedly an understanding of the human mind in fellowship that went very deep. Whatever the original form of worship or rite at the standing stones, the men of the new faith did not as a rule attack it with brutal intolerance in an effort at utter annihilation. Sometimes they simply put a cross on the stone, or reared a new stone in the shape of a cross. But in any case, and in the new light, these old stones were just foolish stones. Indeed they do rather look today like four old foolish men or bodachs. And once you have seen them like that, fellowship is not lost, it is deepened. We are one with them. What is lost is animosity.[19]

---

[18]Neil M. Gunn, 'Mountain Calendar', in *Highland Pack,* (London: Faber, 1949) pp. 22 - 23.
Dairmid Gunn, 'Foreword' to *The Silver Bough*, (Glasgow: Richard Drew, 1985), p. [5].
[19]*Highland Pack*, p. 23. The Reformation's 'brutalization' of early monuments was seen in Section 3.

Whether or not this essay is contemporaneous with *The Silver Bough* it is tempting to speculate that Gunn may have known the Gaelic name for the stones earlier, at the time of writing 'The Circle'. If he had, their name may have suggested to him the employment of an idiot (a foolish man) as a labourer.[20] In any event he called the idiot 'Foolish Andie' in the novel. Local legend in Clachar, as recounted in *The Silver Bough*, suggested that the stone circle was haunted by an Urisk[21] and, with his habit of visiting the site, Andie is associated with the Urisk, providing a link with the past, with the supernatural - he straddled a boundary between two worlds.

F. Marian McNeill describes the Silver Bough as a passport between worlds:

> In the Ossianic tales handed down through the centuries by word of mouth, there are many references to the 'fairy hills' of Tir nan Og, and the ineffable beauty of this land-of-heart's-desire is still sung in the Hebrides. Its ruling deity is Aengus, who, like the Brythonic Arthur, is in one aspect a sun-god. Aengus has a harp of gold with silver strings, and is attended by bright birds, his own transformed kisses, whose singing arouses love in the hearts of youths and maidens.
>
> To enter this Otherworld before the appointed hour of death, a passport was necessary. This was a silver branch of the mystic apple-tree, laden with blossom or fruit - though sometimes a single apple sufficed - and it was given by the Queen of Elfhame or Fairy Woman to that mortal whose companionship she desired. It served not only as a passport, but also as a food; and it had the property of making music so entrancing that those who heard it forgot all their cares and sorrows.[22]

As an aside, it can be noted that 'the mystic apple-tree' McNeill speaks of seems to have accompanied Gunn from the very beginning - his first published work appeared in the first issue of 'The Apple Tree', the in-house magazine of the Aspirants' Society and he won a competition in the next issue of the magazine with a short story entitled

---

[20]This speculation is by no means impossible as Daisy Gunn came from Dingwall and Gunn would have known the town and surrounding area well. Brae and the moor are only a matter of about two miles from Dingwall and Gunn may well have gone walking up there.

[21]The Oxford English Dictionary defines Urisk as: In the Highlands of Scotland, a supernatural being supposed to frequent lonely places: a brownie.
See: *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, Vol. 2, (Oxford: OUP, 1971), p. 462.

[22]F. Marian McNeill, pp. 103.

'The Apple Tree'.[23] Apple trees, amongst others, provided sustenance to Young Art and Old Hector in *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* and the bough of an apple tree appears again here as a passport to 'The Other Landscape'.

The Silver Bough pursues various quests for wholeness, and the closure of the circle, in which the silver bough is a potent symbol, and indeed a tangible one as Simon Grant, the archaeologist hero, has a replica made for Sheena, his landlady's great-granddaughter, who never tired of being told the traditional story.[24] Gunn's version of the story differs from McNeill's, and is summarised by Richard Price as:

> Grant finds a place to stay at the house of Mrs Cameron, who lives with her daughter [sic], Anna, and Anna's illegitimate child, Sheena. At the house he hears Mrs Cameron telling her granddaughter [sic] the tale which gives the book its title. A king gives up his wife and child for a silver branch which produces the most wonderful music. After a while,[25] however, the king begins to miss his family and sets out to find them. When he finally arrives at a palace, Manannán (the Gaelic magician) [. . .] gives him his family back and returns them all home.[26]

Boundaries abound in *The Silver Bough* and, in terms of links to the past, Andie's association with the Urisk has already been mentioned but there are others - indeed Grant expresses his belief that history tends to repeat itself, telling Donald Martin:

> At least it does one thing to us: it gives us some small sense of proportion. It puts our problems - or our self-importance - in some form of perspective. And that's something these days. [. . .] Not, of course, that it ever happens exactly as before. There is a difference, I suppose, between a stone axe and an atom bomb.[27]

Given the belief in a recurring history, Grant's excavation of a cist containing the skeletons of a young woman with a female child, assumed to be her daughter, provides

---

[23]Neil M. Gunn, 'The Apple Tree', in *The Apple Tree*, Vol. 1, No. 2, June 1918, pp. 3 - 7.
[24]*The Silver Bough*, pp. 38 - 40.
[25]The time span is the time-honoured year and a day.
[26]Richard Price, pp. 158 - 159. Price refers to Mrs Cameron as being Sheena's grandmother, whereas she is really Anna's grandmother. Elsewhere in the novel, Gunn himself has Sheena talk of her granny (e.g. p.283) so the confusion is understandable.
[27]*The Silver Bough*, p. 96.

an immediate and obvious analogy with Anna and Sheena, her illegitimate daughter by Martin.[28] In the narrative, it is clear that readers are expected to make this link across historical boundaries in a similar way to the one suggested between the Urisk, and Foolish Andie. History had not repeated itself exactly - the historical mother and daughter had clearly died, albeit with no evidence of violence, whereas Anna and Sheena were very much alive. Anna and her daughter, living in the hamlet of Clachar, occupy a different world from Martin, the local laird. Differences in their social background would normally have precluded a relationship and this only became possible in the melting pot of war where they served in the army together. After the war Anna, with Sheena, took up residence with her grandmother. Martin, still suffering the after effects of his war-time experiences, returned home and lived reclusively with his sister, taking long solitary walks and rowing solo along the coast.

Apart from their different social backgrounds Anna and Martin also occupied different worlds in terms of outlook. Anna is depicted as being intuitive and full of life whilst Martin, like the Questioner in *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*, and Ranald in *The Shadow*, had an analytical mind. Grant observed that Martin 'would have analysed every statement to its fibres, until there was no life left, nothing. Not with interest, much less with passion, but with that sort of deadly automatism.'[29] In his present mental state, Martin turns his analytical facilities upon himself in a self-destructive way which cuts him off from humanity. Any reclamation, Grant believes, 'would have to start, if start it ever could, from the beginning, with a selfless absorption in some simple kind of doing or making.[30]

One of Gunn's early stories was called 'Half Light' (1925). In this, a Highland schoolteacher takes to going sea swimming at night, swimming further out on each

---

[28]Anna has, however, never confronted or charged Martin with the paternity of the child.
[29]*The Silver Bough*, p. 102.
[30]*Ibid.*, p. 287.

successive visit until the day comes when he goes too far and does not return. In *The Silver Bough*, Martin tests himself in a similar way when he goes out in his rowing boat. The text leads the reader to fear that this practice may have as tragic an ending as 'Half Light' - and it almost does. In his excavation, Grant uncovers a crock of gold which Foolish Andie, drawn by the brightness of the metal, takes and hides. Grant, thinking that Andie may have secreted it in a large sea cave goes to investigate and becomes trapped by the rising tide. Martin, who has been out rowing, notices this and skilfully brings his boat into the cave and rescues Grant, before making an attempt to return to the boathouse. In this instance the sea is not to be denied and Martin fails to negotiate a narrow channel and the boat is wrecked on rocks. However, the wreck is close to the shore and the struggle has been seen by both Anna and Martin's chauffeur. Between them they manage to get both Grant and Martin to shore and, after artificial respiration in Martin's case, both survive. The graphic description of Grant's feelings as he almost drowns suggests an autobiographical element, as in 'In a Spanish Garden'.

It has been mentioned already that Sheena's favourite story was that of 'The Silver Bough' and Grant arranged for a craftsman of his acquaintance to make a replica for her. It was adorned with silver apples, as called for in the story, which gave off different musical notes when struck. She was delighted with this and treasured it, taking it with her whenever possible, and it is Sheena, wielding this 'passport between worlds', who becomes the agent of reconciliation. Whilst out with Grant on the beach, immediately after receiving her 'Silver Bough', Sheena meets her father, Martin, face to face for the first time. At the end of the novel, Sheena and her mother are back on the beach and Martin is also there with his boat. This time Sheena has her passport, her 'Silver Bough', with her which she shows to Martin. This is the catalyst that enables him to take the first step back towards true human feelings and he, together

with Anna, Sheena and 'The Silver Bough', row back to Clachar House. Wholeness has been re-established; the nuclear family has been restored - as in Gunn's version of 'The Silver Bough' story; Martin has rediscovered the intuitive side to his nature, through love; and social differences have been overcome. Through the medium of 'The Silver Bough', symbolically providing a link to the traditions of the community, barriers have been crossed and the circle has been closed.

It is, of course, true that, as in 'The Circle', the idiot dies when a standing stone falls on him but even here Gunn provides a more positive slant on the episode than he had done originally. In *The Silver Bough* Andie continues to work on the site even after the theft of the crock of gold and when the work force is expanded by the arrival of some young students he is accepted with a genuine friendliness and affection which gives him, and his protective mother, enormous pleasure. Even his death is shown as having its positive side. Andie's mother, as with most parents of handicapped persons, worries about what will happen to him when she is no longer alive. Even more she is worried about him being taken from her before she dies, which is beginning to be a possibility as Andie, at twenty-nine years of age, has discovered the opposite sex and, given his physical strength, his mother may find him difficult to control. Although his mother is devastated by his death, these factors act in mitigation, as does the genuine affection felt for Andie by those working on the site, which has its tangible expression in the most elaborate funeral that Clachar has seen for decades.

It should be noted that, in one scene in *The Silver Bough*, Simon Grant and Donald Martin have a whisky-fuelled discussion of some intellectual depth, in an underground bothy, providing a link to similar discussions in chapter five's other two books.

The second of the novels, *The Well at the World's End*, is an episodic novel with a strongly autobiographical element and, in terms of the geographic, starts and finishes

at the same spot, again closing the circle. As such, the novel epitomizes the epicyclic journey motif of the meta-novel as a whole. Of this novel, Jan Curtis writes: 'In Highland folklore and ancient Celtic tales of enchantment, the journey to the well is also a journey across the bourne into a timeless otherworld from which wisdom and poetic inspiration are derived.'[31] This is a perceptive description of the novel's plot which introduces once again the theme of boundaries, which feature in this book.

The central characters are Peter Munro, a university professor, and his wife Fand, who is specifically associated with Gunn's own wife. Hart and Pick write:

> the copy of the book [*The Well at the World's End*] on Daisy's shelf was inscribed: 'This is Fand's own copy, from her husband N.M.G.' And in February 1970 he wrote [to Pick]: 'I have been reading the scripts of *The Well at the World's End* and they've brought vividly back the days when we set off for the wild, for Fand is shaped like Daisy.' An idealised Daisy? No, a Daisy seen in retrospect by an author who wants to pay tribute to her, and to salute the renewal of their marriage.[32]

The choice of the name Fand is intriguing. In Celtic mythology, she was the wife of Manannán, the sea God, who featured in the version of 'The Silver Bough' myth that Gunn used, in which he was instrumental in re-uniting the family. In the usual version of the Fand story, she was deserted by Manannán and, afterwards, made advances to Cuchulain (who she hoped would assist in repelling invaders of her realm). Cuchulain crossed the boundary to spend a month with her in Sídhe and then made a tryst to meet her in his own land. However, his wife Emer, had heard of this, and also attended. During the beauties' confrontation Manannán, repenting of his rejection of Fand, came and wooed her back. Cuchulain and Emer were given draughts of oblivion so that

---

[31]Jan Curtis, 'The Legend of the *Geilt* and quest for *Imbas Forosnai* in Neil Gunn's *The Well at the World's End*' in *Scottish Studies Review*, Vol. 3 No. 2, Autumn 2002, p. 66.
[32]Hart and Pick, p. 226.

Cuchulain forgot his love and Emer her jealousy.[33]

As has been mentioned, at least two autobiographical episodes, 'In Pursuit of Light' and 'Primitives in the Pool' are contained in the first three chapters of the novel which may be associated with the Highland holiday the Gunns took that aided their own marital reconciliation. It is known that they went on regular visits to the Highlands when, as with the protagonists of *The Well at the World's End*, they slept in their car. In his essay 'Off in the Car' Gunn reports:

> [that]. . . after one or two experiences of a small canvas tent, particularly during one moist windless night when midges in black battalions did their combined best with a preference for eyelids, we left canvas and the too solid damp earth alone. We slept in our car, but we got it specially arranged for this purpose. It was a simple arrangement, too, and consisted in reversing the back seat (back to front), then sliding forward the two front seats and folding their backs over towards the back seat until one level was attained throughout.[34]

In this essay Gunn recounts their favourite routes, which were, again, usually circular and he ends by saying:

> . . . but let me finish in the wilds of Caithness not far from the Sutherland border. In a certain spot, which shall be nameless, we have stopped longer than at any other. Red deer are there, and mountain hares and a stream. I have talked about frying fresh trout, but I should despair of attempting to describe how to fry four salmon cutlets when the flakes are so fresh that they break away from the curd. Even if you burn your finger in an anxious moment and stick your finger in your mouth, you merely get the flavour beforehand. For there has always been something truly blessed about that place.[35]

The start and finish point for Peter Munro's journey in *The Well at the Wold's End* was a place marked on the map as 'Picts Houses'.[36] There is a place so named on the upper reaches of Dunbeath Water, whose geography accords with that described in the novel.

---

[33]Charles Squire, *Celtic Myth and Legend Poetry and Romance*, (London: Gresham, Circa. 1910), pp. 186 - 188.
[34]Neil M. Gunn, 'Off in the Car', in *The Scottish Companion*, ed. by Rhoda Spence, (Edinburgh: Richard Paterson, 1955), p. 2.
[35]*Ibid.* pp. 5 - 6.
[36]*The Well at the World's End*, p. 14.

Gunn states 'my job on arrival was to find water, fill the kettle, get the fire going and do the cooking.'[37] If their destination had been Dunbeath strath it is feasible that they may have chosen to camp for their first night between Dornoch and Golspie near Embo woods. If Gunn had called at a local cottage seeking water as 'his job' required, he would have been directed to the well featured in the first chapter of *The Well at the World's End*. From here a journey to the 'Picts Houses' by evening of the following day is an easy one. It was there that the salmon poaching episode of the novel took place, which ties in with the report in the 'Off in the Car' article of cooking fresh salmon.

Clearly there are autobiographical episodes in the novel but to attribute them specifically to the holiday that led to the Gunns' marital reconciliation must remain conjectural. However, taken as a whole, *The Well at the World's End* can be read as a pæan of praise for Fand/Daisy. Given the association between this novel and Gunn's reconciliation with Daisy, the restoration of marriages in the linked Mythological stories cannot help but be significant.

It is clear from the foregoing that the inspiration for much of this novel's plot is rooted in Gunn's own experience, a view reinforced in the final reconciliation scene between Peter and Fand who, in retrospect, is identified as the 'well', the object of Peter's search, when Peter states:

> Beyond times and accidents and sorrow, graces and vanities, child-death and desolation, beyond the hanging gardens of happiness, he saw in her that which was the immortal fountain, and her face and hair had the brightness of the rainbow. And at last he knew that this was the ultimate vision, that this was what remained and rose up when time and chances had done their best and worst, through the deceits and faithlessness of the mortal flesh, and withered away.[38]

---

[37]'Off in the Car', p. 2.
[38]*The Well at the World's End*, p. 292.

References to accidents, sorrow and child-death seem too specific to the causes of the rift between the Gunns to be coincidental, and it is possible that references to deceits and faithlessness may be a veiled apology for the Margaret McEwen affair. Whilst these personal references are informative, they are not vital to a consideration of the novel, which can be assessed against the themes identified.

The *raison d'être* for Peter Munro commencing his quest in the novel is quoted as being:

> In simple fact it *would* be interesting to find out if among ordinary people there were those moments of penetration, the instant when they went through the boundary, the moment when they saw the crystal water in the well.[39]

So, as with *The Silver Bough*, and indeed Jan Curtis' comment about crossing the bourne, the issue of boundaries between the ordinary world and the supernatural or spiritual world is very much to the fore.

The first person seen by Peter on his journey is a 'wild man' associated in Jan Curtis's essay with the shamanic figure of Celtic tradition, 'the sage wild man who knows the otherworldly secrets of old mythologies.'[40] This person is later identified as Peter Mackay and this initial sighting leaves Munro with an uneasy feeling because:

> There had been something in the fellow's stance, his look, that had come at him with a frightening familiarity. Heavens, for a moment it was as if some double of himself, his doppel-ganger, had looked at him with a 'cold air' from another plane![41]

Peter Mackay lives 'beyond the pale' in the hills and, during his quest, Peter Munro gleans many pieces of information about his namesake. These suggest that he is not as wild as he is made out to be and lead to Munro seeking to cross the boundary into Mackay's world to meet him face to face. This is destined not to happen but their lives

---

[39] *The Well at the World's End*, p. 27.
[40] Jan Curtis, p. 66
[41] *The Well at the World's End*, p. 38.

do converge to an amazing extent. On nearing the end of his journey, Peter Munro sees a lamb that has fallen onto a cliff ledge. As in *The Silver Bough* where history repeats itself but never in exactly the same way,[42] Peter feels an inner compulsion to attempt the rescue as he is aware that the 'wild man' had previously made a rescue in similar circumstances, Peter descends to the ledge but falls and is severely injured, escaping death only because the lamb broke his fall. Although the Christian imagery is not as pronounced as was seen in *Blood Hunt*, the concept of 'being saved by the lamb' is made sufficiently obviously for the reader to register. He crawls to the 'wild man's' cave seeking assistance but the man never returns. It transpires that, at a similar time, Peter Mackay falls down a cliff and attempts to return to his cave but expires *en route* - the *dopple-ganger* motif then becoming particularly apposite.

At the closure of the novel, Peter Munro, having completed his circular journey, recognises that what he was seeking he had, in fact, already got. He is reunited with his wife, in love, in a transcendent conclusion. Symbolically it can be argued that his reunion with his *dopple-ganger* represents a reabsorbtion of his cultural background or, in Jungian terms, the achievement of wholeness by the creation of a balanced psyche, described by O'Neill appropriately, given the title of this final chapter of Gunn's meta-novel, 'The Transcendental Function and the Healthy Psyche'.[43]

Some of the episodes within the novel appear to have been included to give an exciting narrative interlude, but the restoration of the marital relationship of Peter and Fand can be regarded as the main theme of the book. A similar outcome was seen in the first novel allocated to chapter five, *The Silver Bough*, and within *The Well at the World's End* there is a subsidiary relationship that reaches a similar conclusion. A fellow guest at the hotel Peter is staying at is a Mrs Douglas who is at odds with her

---

[42]*The Silver Bough*, p. 96.
[43]O'Neill, p [41].

husband. She is told that the old Gaelic community regarded the herb known as *Mothan*, a form of Pearlwort, as 'the saving plant' that, especially when taken in an infusion with 'water from a still place',[44] can restore substance and goodness.[45] It only grows in one vicinity locally and has the reputation of being a love-philtre. Peter follows and secretly witnesses her finding the plant. Mr Douglas, who has been fishing nearby, also witnesses the act and confronts his wife and, as a consequence, Peter is able to verify the efficacious nature of the remedy - another example of marital relationships being restored. Once again, re-establishing links with the old Gaelic culture have aided the positive conclusion, continuing to emphasise the meta-novel's argument.

In terms of boundaries, both real and illusory, there are many illustrations in this novel apart from the example of the 'wild man' to which reference has been made already. Peter's search for the 'Well at the World's End' is a quest for knowledge but in the wide-ranging conversations Peter has overnight with smugglers in a bothy, the nature of boundaries[46] is discussed. One of the group, Alick, postulates:

> I gather that to reach a point on the way to the well you have to go through the human boundary. All the points lie beyond that boundary. Therefore the well lies beyond it, and by the time you get there you yourself must be totally beyond the boundary?[47]

Peter's response, exhibiting the difference between the analytical and the intuitive, is:

> It's not a very good syllogism. For example (a) one may be able to go in and out the boundary as, in childhoods' song, one went in and out the window, and (b) one may discover once one has gone through the boundary that the boundary, like the window, is transparent - or even

---

[44]*The Well at the World's End,* p. 197 - a comment that seems to refer back to the crystal clear water of the well.
[45]*Ibid.* p. 197.
[46]One that will be even more pertinent in the consideration of *The Other Landscape*.
[47]*The Well at the World's End*, p. 133.

> isn't there. To one who has gone through the boundary, the boundary may be an illusion.[48]

Peter's growing knowledge, often associated with the crossing of boundaries, is usually prefaced in the novel by his thoughts turning to his wife so, in a very real sense, Fand, appropriately as she is 'the well at the world's end', is the key to his growing wisdom.

In the examples of the acquisition of knowledge expounded in this novel, a contributory factor is shown as being the re-establishment of links to one's Gaelic roots, as with the herbal lore conveyed to Mrs Douglas. One episode has Peter, in company with an old friend, Cocklebuster, and his dog, inspecting a wood as a possible shooting venue. They find that, like the garden in the, supposedly autobiographical, Spanish holiday story,[49] the wood is singularly out of time. There is no bird song and they fear the dog has lost her sense of smell. As Peter says: 'you would think life had deserted the place.'[50] This comment is put into a wider perspective after they leave the wood as:

> Presently Peter began to hear something. And then, as if suddenly waking up (he had let go) in paradise, he became aware of bird song. His opened eyes roamed among leafy branches, oak and ash and elm and even a beech, a beech with drooping foliaged branches gracious and widespread, like the skirts of the woodland mother, the ancient matriarch, the first and only goddess. Small birds flitted and twittered, and here and there from green depths bits of song aspired or tumbled down. Suddenly he remembered the old woman [a widow] peeping out from the low door. She had been left behind. And he knew that he would never forget that glimpse of her, that sensation of a whole way of life left behind, peeping from its last door. He was stirred profoundly and knew also that this wood had been left behind, that somewhere nearby there would be a big house with no one peeping from its door, silent, lintel stones askew. And in this curious light in which he saw all these things with a clear certainty, he wondered: are we chasing the birdsong from the face of the earth?[51]

---

[48] *Ibid.* pp. 133 - 134.
[49] Neil M. Gunn, 'In a Spanish Garden', in *Argosy,* Vol. 12, No. 4, pp. 97 - 104.
[50] *The Well at the World's End*, p. 163.
[51] *Ibid*. p. 172.

Gunn's meta-novel is both a celebration of the values, skills and standards of the ancient Gaelic community and a warning of how important a continuation of these standards is to a healthy future for the Highlander. It is, therefore, appropriate that whilst these qualities are depicted as dying they are not yet dead and, consequently, the passing of the birdsong is not yet a fact.[52]

One of the themes of the meta-novel is 'The Man Who Came Back' and the impact that they can make for good. In one episode in this novel Gunn contrasts the activities of two villages, Badenscro and Portessan, whose approach is very different. Badenscro's culture is depicted as now being based on commercial poaching - as opposed to for the pot - and the receipt of Governmental handouts, whilst the villagers of Portessan, had communally invested their war gratuities in a new fishing boat; this latter, more positive, response, being clearly preferred. On an associated theme, following the work of the Crofters' Commission (in which Gunn himself played a part), changes were made to the crofting lands and, as Peter starts his homeward journey, he views the crofting lands in positive terms, noting:

> Landlords could not burn them out now, but other disintegrating forces were at work, as he well knew, and heaps of ruins were not difficult to see where the houses and byres stood so snugly. He himself had started out from ruins. But man would come back. And the greater the devastation of this fruitful earth, the more remorseless and farflung the bloody hunt, the more certain that he would come back *here*. The little fields, coloured with crops, the grazing cattle, a woman walking inside a wooden hoop carrying two buckets of water from a well, a man mending a roof, a boy rushing after a puppy dog, a trundling cart. Then he did a thing which he could never have conceived of his doing before; he blessed that little community.[53]

The importance of Peter's intuitive action in the above passage is confirmed by the later comment:

---

[52]Dr. M. P. McCulloch suggests that the silent wood may be a plantation linked to a new forestry scheme that had not yet got the ecological structure to support wildlife. If this were a plantation of non-indigenous species then the symbolism of lost contact with roots would be equally strong.

[53]*The Well at the World's End*, p. 262.

> By blessing the community you bless yourself.
> Conversely, by destroying the community you destroy yourself.[54]

Once again, as so often in the consideration of Gunn's meta-novel, reference is made to the importance of maintaining and preserving, albeit in a form amended to meet the requirements of the modern world, the skills, standards and values of the traditional Gaelic community to which Gunn was heir. As if to underline his thoughts, Gunn goes on to say:

> Who *did* make up these yarns that were like myths? Out of what wisdom were they drawn? Oddish, indeed. Would one call it a precipitate, after the chemist, or a distillate, after Jock the smuggler?[55]

It can be assumed that these last comments are self-referential, and that his opting for the distillate over the chemical shows a preference for the spiritual - for the intuitive over the analytical.

In *The Well at the World's End,* Peter Munro conducts a circular tour, an epicyclic journey of his own, through his Gaelic heritage and returns to his wife, having gained wisdom and understanding as a result. In both this novel and *The Silver Bough*, Gunn's concern has continued to be the regeneration of the individual, increasingly seen in terms of the spiritual, *via* exposure to traditional myth and culture assisted by love, the creator. The need to cross or eliminate boundaries will continue to be important in the final novel in this section.

The Other Landscape, the final novel in this section and thus the last contributory work to the meta-novel, is Gunn's last published novel.[56] Appropriately, the meta-novel commences with the first and ends with the last of the individual novels so, with this work, the journey ends and the circle is closed. Before considering this book in

---

[54]*Ibid.* p. 264.
[55]*The Well at the World's End,* p. 265.
[56]Excluding the posthumously published *The Poaching at Grianan.*

more detail it is worth enquiring whether it owes its inspiration to Gunn's personal life, as was so markedly the case with *The Well at the Worlds End.*

Prime facie evidence suggests that there is little directly autobiographical in this work but it is worth noting that the narrative claims an autobiographical stimulus for the writing of the fictional manuscript, 'Cliffs', the provenance of which Walter Urquhart has been sent to establish. This text tells of a storm and shipwreck during which the hero's wife dies. Urquhart knew that there had indeed been a shipwreck on the coast, during which Menzies' wife had gone into early labour and died from a haemorrhage, so he assumes the writing drew on his personal loss. Menzies is horrified by this assumption and tells Urquhart that 'Cliffs' was written at his wife's suggestion at a time when his musical compositions were making little impact on the London publishing scene. He agreed to write the story but, conscious of his current lack of commercial success, he felt that 'to write it *for* her would be worse than failure should the magazine reject it; to write it *about* her would be his ultimate tribute to her' - like *The Well at the World's End*, a piece of fiction written as a tribute to a wife.[57]

The evolution of the structure of the manuscript story 'Cliffs' is given by Menzies and is worth comparing with that of the short story 'Tragedy into Dream'. Whilst considering how to approach the piece of writing Menzies had a vivid dream of his wife, 'Annabel sitting on a grassy mound by a cliff-top' whilst, far below on the rocks his own dead body lay impaled.[58] Later Menzies came to believe that this dream:

> would serve his purpose admirably because it would permit him to express what the woman felt when her man was gone. And it would allow him to express it with a dream's vividness - if he could. But as it was only a dream Annabel would not be affected. [. . .]
> But for balance there would have to be what the man felt about the woman when she was gone. Of course! Because that was the whole intention of writing the piece. But he couldn't have another dream.

---

[57]*The Other Landscape,* p. 107.
[58]*Ibid.* pp. 108 - 109.

> That would be creative bankruptcy So he would have to find another device.[59]

Ultimately, after thinking over the various ideas he decided:

> They would *both* be on the ship, returning to the land of their hearts' desire. [. . .] The ship is cast on the rock and broken up. It is everyone for himself now, so he is all for her, to save her, not to lose her. The desperate struggle with the sea. The crawling onto the rock that the rising tide would drown, but not before he told her, in defiance and tenderness, her head in the shelter of his heart, that he would be with her, and that if they got separated he would find her, that nothing would stop him, here or hereafter, nothing ever.[60]

The inference to be drawn from these quotations is that the final shape of the story, 'Cliffs', involves both parties in an actual shipwreck in which both drown.

'Tragedy into Dream' involves the dream sequence of the wife sitting on the cliff top and seeing the body on the rocks. In this story, as in Menzies' original approach, the wife dies, her body is laid out in their cottage, and is visited by the husband. The quotation from 'Cliffs' in the novel is taken from the dream sequence part of 'Tragedy into Dream', suggesting that the final manifestation of the plot involving a joint drowning may not have been fully adopted. The events of Menzies personal tragedy, as told in *The Other Landscape*, parallel those of 'Tragedy into Dream', except that the earlier work makes no mention of pregnancy, labour, or even the wife's cause of death.

The concept of writing of the death of a husband and wife, whilst both are alive, as a tribute to the love they feel for each other does seem somewhat bizarre but parallels exist between the stories and the lives of the Gunns. In 1931, when 'Tragedy into Dream' was written, Gunn may have felt let down by the publishing establishment who were sceptical about *The Lost Glen*, a work only published because of the success of *Morning Tide*. Daisy, at around that time, may have needed some reassurance about Gunn's affection following one of the series of miscarriages his biographers believe

---

[59] *Ibid.* p. 109.
[60] *Ibid.* pp. 110 - 111.

she suffered or possibly because she was pregnant with the child she eventually lost. Likewise, in the 1950s, when *The Other Landscape* was published, Gunn was not receiving the critical acclaim that he had done earlier, and the fact that the death of the wife is then specifically related to the loss of a child may be relevant. The date of Daisy's miscarriage is thought to have been either in 1931 or 1932. There is a passage inserted into the narrative of *The Other Landscape* where the narrator tells the reader about Annabel's early life, facts not known by Urquhart at the time of his meetings with Menzies. From this it is apparent that the child Annabel lost was, in fact, their second child, a first having been stillborn as a result of a motor accident. The case for an autobiographical link is strengthened by this insertion of a double child loss into the re-told story.

Moving away from the autobiographical, in *The Other Landscape*, the transition from the regeneration of community towards a personal and spiritual regeneration that has been noted in section four continues to be in evidence. The concept of history repeating itself 'but not in the same way' that has featured in the other two novels in this final section appears even more strongly in this work where it is given the descriptive title 'recurrence', of which Menzies states:

> The theme of a storm and a wreck I had dealt with in London. I wrote the music for the film. The theme persisted, recurred. Remarkable this recurrence. For example, there was first the actual doomed ship and the storm, what is called 'the real thing'; then there was the acting of the real thing for the film; then my music for the acting; after that we came here and the theme suffered a sea change into music as an art [he was writing a 'Cliffs Symphony']. [. . .] Then it starts all over again. There is a new storm and a new doomed ship. But this time there is a difference. For example, those who are doomed are different. Recurrence has this seeming variety. Yet what recurrence is a recurrence of does not change. **In the region of shadows you have to make contact, if you can, with what you realise does not change**.[61]

[61] *The Other Landscape*, p. 98. My emphasis.

With regard to history repeating itself, throughout the meta-novel there are many instances where, *via* his various protagonists, Gunn makes an assertion of what may be assumed to be his personal belief that the vibrant life once enjoyed in the Highlands will return, but not necessarily in the same way.

In a literary sense there is a further element of recurrence at work in this final chapter of the meta-novel. The first chapter contained the individual novels *The Grey Coast, The Lost Glen* and, surprisingly, *Second Sight.* This last chapter, and especially this last book, contains a recurrence of the themes explored in the first chapter. 'Second Sight', and the conflict between the analytical and intuitive mind which that novel introduced, feature strongly, as has been indicated above in the comments about recurrence. Specifically, Menzies' dream of his own death, and the device of writing of his wife's death, prove to be examples of 'Second Sight'.

The action of *The Other Landscape* takes place, principally, at two main *loci*, Menzies cottage and the village, and especially its hotel. The action that takes place at the hotel is, in a very real sense, a re-run of that in *The Lost Glen.* There is a retired English officer, an ex-diplomat, staying at the hotel who, like Col. Hicks in *The Lost Glen,* treats the gillies as personal servants. As with the former novel, a verbal confrontation is engineered between Major Thornybank and Lachlan, the gillie. Urquhart, as an observer, muses:

> My discomfort was turning to anger and this should have astonished me because any anthropologist could hardly have hoped for a nimbler display of two cultures in conflict.[62]

However, unlike *The Lost Glen*, the gillie in this novel, while exhibiting the linguistic traits of his race and culture, refuses to be cowed, and remains uncowed throughout the novel. Indeed later in the novel a row develops between the Major and Lachlan

---

[62]*The Other Landscape*, p. 16.

culminating in the gillie leaving his client and returning home. In retaliation, the Major stages his own 'drowning' by removing the cork from the boat's bilge and allowing it to float out into the loch and sink assuming, correctly, that Lachlan will be accused of sabotaging the boat. However, the ruse fails and Lachlan redresses the balance towards the end of the novel when the Major, who has a predilection for lighting numerous candles from the ex-embassy stock he keeps in a trunk, sets his room alight. Lachlan notices the blaze and, with other gillies, mans the fire hose and extinguishes the fire with gusto, dampening the Major's ardour in the process. A far healthier response than the self-destructive action of Ewan strangling Col. Hicks in *The Lost Glen*.

In his Scots Magazine article of September 1945, Gunn bemoans the fact that the Highlands are losing population due to emigration because of a lack of belief in the prospect offered by jobs in the area.[63] This article is a return to the theme of the 1943 film script, 'Blue Print for the Highlands'. The difference between the situation in the books featured in chapter one and those in the final chapter of the meta-novel is that the indigenous population have developed a belief in themselves, and are not cowed by the invading southrons.

As before, the efficacy of Gaelic culture, tradition, and song and the maintenance or re-forging of links with a national heritage play an important role in the positive outcomes described.

Once again, as with the other novels allocated to this chapter, boundaries and circularity are very much in evidence. Urquhart talks of the other landscape of the novel's title as 'a landscape behind the physical one I looked at'.[64] This is the same concept as the Spanish garden that was 'out of time' in *The Well at the World's End*. In

[63]'Belief in Ourselves', *Scots Magazine,* Vol. 43, No. 6, (September 1945)
[64]*The Other Landscape,* p. 68.

The Other Landscape, Gunn extends the idea to 'the other conversation' and 'the other metaphysics', a continual shifting of boundaries between different levels or versions.[65] In this exercise, the intuitive is all important. Gunn gives an example of 'the other conversation' that illustrates the point admirably. He says:

> Consider normal talk or conversation. I meet a man for the first time and have a few polite words about the weather, the crops, the stock exchange, football coupons, or whatever it may be, and leave him, thinking: that's a decent fellow. I have the same conversation with another man and leave him, thinking: I wouldn't trust him as far as I could throw him. So behind the words another silent conversation must have been going on, 'the other conversation', that for each is the important one.[66]

Furthermore, these intuitive assessments are not to be taken in isolation, rather they interrelate one with another or, as Gunn puts it 'the landscapes interpenetrate'.[67] It is clear that Menzies increasingly operates and thinks on these 'other' planes which, because they lack the tangible landmarks that are usually used to underpin thoughts, Urquhart finds difficulty in coping with confidently. In Menzies' case it is clear that what 'does not change' is his wife, who occupies the 'region of shadows' and provides him with a 'spectral bollard' to which he can moor.[68] However, the single-minded quest Menzies is making to try to understand God's different system and re-connect to Annabel, smacks of the commitment contained in the shipwreck model for 'Cliffs', that 'he would find her, that nothing would stop him, here or hereafter, nothing ever'.[69]

In his dream and in wrestling with the plot of his story, Menzies has a premonition of the tragedy to come. As pure speculation, given that Gunn had possibly written autobiographical elements into the re-told story, it is at least possible that Gunn had similar feelings and premonitions about his own wife. She was older than him, and

---

[65] *Ibid.* p. 68.
[66] *Ibid.* p. 68.
[67] *The Other Landscape,* p. 68.
[68] *Ibid.* pp. 71 - 72.
[69] *Ibid.* pp. 110 - 111.

was to pre-decease him, an event described by his biographers as 'the greatest loss'.[70] Later, did Gunn, like Menzies, seek cerebrally for Daisy on another plane? After Daisy's funeral, Pick records:

> Neil said suddenly, with the air of asking only a general question: 'Do you think there is survival after death?"
> I knew that no 'comforting' answer would do. I had to speak from the depths. I think I said: 'The first self goes out like a candle, but Daisy was all essence, and if essence survives, she must.' I still believe that. The night after I got home, very tired, I woke suddenly from a dream and it seemed to me that Daisy was laughing, as if telling me something. I wish I had told Neil this, but I don't think I did.[71]

If there is any substance in this speculation, Gunn's quest would doubtless be aided by the mental disciplines of Zen, in which he interested himself in his later years.

One subject discussed between the Major and Urquhart, prompted by Menzies' experiences and his quest, was that of God's existence. As has been reported before, Gunn is certainly not an aficionado of organised religion but he seems less dogmatic when considering God as a power. In *The Atom of Delight* he devotes a chapter to the question 'Does God Exist?', at the end of which the reader is left believing that Gunn thinks he does, as a power.[72] In Urquhart's conversation with Menzies, it seems that the only explanation for tragedies like the death of Annabel is that, 'if there is a God - *he must have a different system*'.[73] The view is expressed that two forces are at work, symbolised as God and the Wrecker, and that the Wrecker is God when he wrecks, good and evil in one.[74] This does rather presuppose a human viewpoint and the 'different system' may be capable of a different solution. The Major, later, refers to 'the two-faced. Janus'.[75] The comment is clearly intended to refer to the combination of

---

[70]Hart and Pick, p. [263].
[71]*Ibid.* p. 268.
[72]*The Atom of Delight*, pp. 245 - 252.
[73]*The Other Landscape*, p. 70.
[74]*Ibid.* p. 200.
[75]*Ibid.* p. 200.

good and evil in the one identity but it is pertinent to note, especially in the light of the issues being debated in this concluding chapter, that Janus is:

> 'the god of good beginnings,' which are sure to result in good endings.[76]
> - and:
> the god of gates, whose principal shrine at Rome was closed in time of peace, twice or thrice only, it is said, during seven centuries.[77]

With the themes of boundary crossing that have been seen in this last grouping of novels, Janus, the god of gates and good beginnings and endings, seems an ideal deity. Prior to Urquhart leaving the hotel for his third and final meeting with Menzies he asks the Major if he would like to accompany him - an offer that was declined. The reason Urquhart ascribes to his invitation is that there are:

> stories in everyone; and when I asked the Major to come with me I had probably been moved by the weird notion that all stories should meet in one story.[78]

This is a particularly important comment, given that *The Other Landscape* is not only the last novel Gunn wrote but also the final novel quoted within the retrospect he was to pen later. The retrospect draws all Gunn's stories into one story, and it is fascinating that this concept seems to have been in Gunn's mind even as this last novel was being written.

In his work *A Celebration of the Light*, John Burns sees the relationship between Menzies and Urquhart as being similar to that between a Zen Master and his student. Menzies is depicted as being much further 'on the way' than Urquhart, who struggles to understand the ideas that Menzies has been seeking to assimilate. This concept of Menzies acting as a role model for the younger man may also extend to relationships

---

[76]Edith Hamilton, *Mythology: Timeless tales of Gods and Heroes*, (Boston, Mass.: Mentor, 1953), p. 45.
[77]A. R. Hope Moncrieff, *Classic Myth and Legend,* (London: Gresham, Circa. 1910), p. 52.
[78]*The Other Landscape*, p. 294.

with women. For Menzies, the relationship with Annabel is the single most important feature in his life. Annabel was a local girl and a Gaelic speaker. She was well versed in the lore and culture of her people, factors which, as has been repeatedly shown, are vital to the establishment of a balanced psyche. Urquhart, whilst staying at the hotel, meets Catherine, Lachie's daughter, who is working there as a chambermaid during the summer. She had been a friend of Annabel with whom she shared a similar background, and later Menzies himself. Urquhart's advances are somewhat tentative and it is not until after Menzies tragic death that they really come together.

The ending of this novel is not a particularly satisfactory one. The characterization of Menzies is so strong that the reader tends to regard his death as marking the real end of the story. This, however, is not the case and the final chapter of the novel advises the reader that, shortly after she graduated from the University of Glasgow, Catherine married Walter Urquhart. It goes on to tell of their return to the Highlands, two years later, where they, and their new baby boy, stay with Catherine's parents. This is a return to their homeland, and a modest start on re-population. The hotel is installing electricity to take advantage of the coming hydro-electric plant and the landlord, when asked whether he thought a new day was dawning for the Highlands, responds 'More light'.[79]

As with the two other novels in this section, *The Other Landscape*, features a positive ending involving a satisfactorily established marital relationship. The idea that Douglas and Annabel Menzies may, in a sense, have been role models for Walter and Catherine Urquhart is strengthened by the fact that one task that they undertake on their return is to pick flowers from the garden at the Menzies' cottage to put on their joint grave.[80]

---

[79] *The Other Landscape,* p. 317.
[80] *Ibid.* p. 318 Here the description states the grave is now surmounted by a headstone comprising:

Now that the individual novels in this concluding chapter have been reviewed, an assessment of Gunn's achievement can be made. This will be done with particular reference to the meta-novel structure that has been identified, and will draw on the other disciplines identified at the outset, namely Comedy, Jungian Analytical Psychology and Zen.

The comedy of transcendence and light

> a low rounded piece of local rock which we had had dressed on one side to take the simple incised inscription: DOUGLAS AND ANNABEL MENZIES.

To add some credence to the speculation that Gunn, like Douglas Menzies, may have had some premonition about his own wife's death, it can be said that the description of the headstone given in this quotation describes exactly the one Gunn selected for Daisy after her death some eight years after the publication of *The Other Landscape*, and which now lies over their joint grave in Dingwall cemetery.

This thesis has been concerned with an examination and evaluation of Gunn's own retrospective assessment of his novels. This introduced the idea that his individual novels formed part of a greater whole, 'that all stories should meet in one story';[81] consequently, the concept of a meta-novel, which is explicitly set out in the retrospect, carries Gunn's express authority.

Gunn's retrospect also rearranged the novels into a non-chronological order. As has been noted earlier, Francis Hart used the rearranged order in his own work on Gunn, notably *The Scottish Novel*, seemingly without being aware of the chapter headings Gunn had allocated to the new groupings. Without the chapter headings, the new order is puzzling and, whilst it has Gunn's authority, has little meaning in isolation. It is the chapter headings allied to these new groupings that provide the key to the concept of the meta-novel. This re-arranged order of the novels, set within the structure of a series of chapters, each with their own title, purports to be a novel in its own right, a novel that, from the evidence of the chapter headings, transcends the individual novels of which it is comprised.

The title of the final chapter, under discussion here, is 'Conclusion: The Comedy of Transcendence and Light', so it is apparent that Gunn felt that his novels, thus re-grouped within the meta-novel structure, had achieved a positive conclusion. Having come to the end of the detailed analysis of the meta-novel's various chapters, it remains to decide whether the meta-novel can be shown to be coherent in its own right and whether the expectations of this thesis have been realised.

It has been said of Gunn that he never wrote the same novel twice, that each was very different so, if Gunn's collected novels are viewed as a single meta-novel, it must be acknowledged that continuity through characters cannot be established. Of all twenty, only two, *Young Art and Old Hector* and *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*,

---

[81] *The Other Landscape*, p. 294.

employ the same individual characters, and it will be recalled that these two are separated one from the other by the regrouping exercise. No individual characters are, therefore, common to the meta-novel. However, certain symbols and archetypes have appeared throughout the meta-novel which, it can be argued, provide continuity within the combined work as quasi-characters. Among these have been the male and female principals, the wise old man, the mother, and the *Puer* archetype. Recurrent symbols include the salmon of wisdom and the hazel nuts of knowledge, whose roots are deeply embedded within Celtic mythology and culture and associated with rebirth and regeneration. In turn the salmon's cyclical journeys can be associated both with 'The Man who Came Back' motif and the epicyclic journeys involved in the central developmental part of the structure of the meta-novel. Running through the meta-novel has also been the conflict between the analytical and the intuitive mind, and these attributes take on an archetypical nature as a result.

Dr. Lorenz Jung, the grandson of Carl Gustav Jung, wrote to Gunn's literary executor in 1985 informing him of his grandfather's admiration for *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* telling him 'My grandfather had the highest esteem for the book and wanted one of his pupils to work out an analysis of the archetypical contents.'[82] At the time this analysis never took place but Lorenz Jung carried out such an assessment later. Accompanying his letter was a short paper in English entitled 'The Archetype of the Puer Æternus in Our Time' giving a summary of his thoughts on *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*.[83] In this paper he mirrors Gunn's concerns with the analytical and the intuitive when he writes:

---

[82]Lorenz Jung, 'Letter to John Gunn', (Unpublished letter dated 5.12.1985, in the possession of Dairmid Gunn).

[83]Lorenz Jung, 'The Archetype of the Puer Æternus in Our Time', (Unpublished paper, undated, in the possession of Dairmid Gunn).

> Because of our collective, too one-sided dependence on natural sciences and the overwhelming priority for logical thinking, we are falling into an increasing split between the Ego and the Self. Outwardly, as well as inwardly, relationships become sparse, so we find a devastation of our culture on one hand, and a loss of individuality on the other.[84]

In Jungian terms, the one-sidedness caused by a concentration on logical, analytical thinking at the expense of the intuitive has caused a rift between the conscious and the unconscious, the ego and the shadow, that has resulted in the self being displaced from its ideal position at the mid-point of the psyche, where it 'serves as the channel for creative exchange between the two realms [conscious and unconscious]'.[85] Dr. Jung goes on to say:

> Gunn's clear-sighted novel makes it obvious that the collective social problems of our time will only be solved when the single individual is transformed by the very means of the positive aspects of the Boy.[86]

Even though Lorenz Jung was writing about only one novel, it is fascinating that the interpretation he offers reflects the concerns of the meta-novel and associates what Gunn refers to as analytical and intuitive responses with the Ego and the Shadow. Wholeness will only be effected when this split between the Conscious and the Unconscious is repaired and the Self restored to its ideal position. This transformation relates to a single individual and reflects Gunn's increasing concentration on the individual rather than the community that has been reported. In this regenerative task, Jung suggests, the Boy will have a part to play.

Following such a line of argument, the cohesion of the meta-novel can be viewed as being achieved through its consistent symbolic and archetypal references, its quasi-characters, rather than through continuing characterization. Developing this argument, it can be asserted that those of Gunn's characters displaying one-sided analytical or

---

[84]*The Archetype of the Puer Æternus in Our Time.* p. [1].
[85]Timothy R. O'Neill, p. 29.
[86]*The Archetype of the Puer Æternus in Our Time*, p. [1].

intuitive mental attitudes are archetypal personifications of the Conscious and Unconscious and thus form an integral part in the plot structure of the meta-novel.

It has been postulated that the structure of the meta-novel follows that of comedy in which, typically, the opening, set in the real world, identifies the problems being encountered. This is followed by a developmental part, often 'out of time', where remedies are found before returning to the site of the opening where a resolution of the problems as a result of the developmental part, takes place - often accompanied by weddings, as symbols of reconciliation. The meta-novel is also seen as being in tripartite form with chapter one forming the opening, chapters two to four representing the developmental part and chapter five comprising the conclusion so, structurally, it follows the pattern of comedy, an association alluded to in the title of the final chapter, 'Conclusion: The Comedy of Transcendence and Light'.

Writing specifically about Shakespeare, E. J. Allman in her book, *Player-King and Adversary*, writes:

> For the Player-Queen, the imperfect is the material for art, mutability the ground for play, and play the music that opens the spirit to eternal harmony. Like all Shakespeare's constructive players, Portia forms, from within the drama that she inhabits, the shape it ultimately takes - the shape of comedy, which is the shape of human redemption.[87]

This quotation supports the suggestion that, like the situation disclosed in the first section of the meta-novel, imperfection is the starting point on the path to 'human redemption'. It also indicates that the shape of the work is determined from within the narrative by the players. In the case of the meta-novel these players are the quasi-characters which have already been mentioned.

In the structure of the meta-novel, the opening and the conclusion are also set in the same area of space and time but with the latter displaying a redemptive outcome.

---

[87]E. J. Allman, *Player-King and Adversary: Two Faces of Play in Shakespeare*, (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1980). p. 154.

The opening chapter of the meta-novel comprised the three novels *The Grey Coast, The Lost Glen* and *Second Sight*. All of these novels are set in the Highlands of Gunn's own time (i.e. c. 1930) and portray crofting communities occupying marginal land, with their income having to be supplemented either by fishing or by working for the tourist industry as gillies for the sportsmen shooting on the hill or as hotel workers. They are bleak novels whose emphasis is on the negative state of mind engendered in the characters by the Highlands themselves. The area is in almost terminal economic decline; the work on the land and the sea is hard and relatively unrewarding. The local inhabitants are depicted as being in thrall to their wealthier neighbours from England who tend to treat the area as a private Raj. There is a sense of almost unremitting gloom in these works that set out to portray the 'reality' of the Highland experience, rather than the fictive rural romance of the Kailyarders.

The appearance in this group of *Second Sight* is surprising because it was written much later than the other two and, as was suggested at the end of section one, may reflect Gunn's response to reports of brain washing in the immediate pre-war period, causing him to give the individual primacy over ideology and to introduce the conflict between the analytical and intuitive mind as a root cause of the problems highlighted in his opening chapter. This novel is set in a shooting lodge and, among its characters, are two Englishmen who display opposing mental attitudes - one is strongly analytical, the other intuitive, thereby introducing two of the meta-novel's main quasi-characters, representing the Conscious and Unconscious. As will have been noted from the quotation from Dr. Jung referred to earlier, a one-sidedness as a result of a concentration on the logical and scientific can lead to 'a devastation of our culture',[88] and the loss of contact with one's roots, especially the Gaelic roots of the Highlands, is

[88]*The Archetype of the Puer Æternus in Our Time,* p. [1].

a theme that recurs throughout Gunn's work. He argues that this lost contact needs to be remedied as part of the quest for wholeness. One of the local inhabitants has the gift, or curse as he sees it, of 'second sight' and he has precognition of the death of one of the sportsmen. Even though he was a completely innocent party, the unsettling effect of his 'gift' on the tourists led to him leaving the Highlands.

The three novels allocated to the concluding chapter, *The Silver Bough, The Well at the World's End* and *The Other Landscape*, are all set in similar locations to those of the first chapter, similar crofting areas are involved, and similar occupations followed. There is even a return to the phenomenon of 'second sight' in *The Other Landscape*, which in many ways is *The Lost Glen* revisited. But in these final novels there is a very much more positive feel, suggesting that the constant quasi-characters, who move the narrative of the meta-novel forward, have concluded their redemptive comedy. However, it is necessary to see whether the changes do depend on the finding of 'that which was lost' as a result of the series of epicyclic journeys undertaken in the developmental part.

The first epicyclic journey, explored in chapter two, invited the reader to view the problems identified in chapter one through the eyes of a boy. This demonstrated that the Highlands were full of colour, and not at all 'grey' as suggested by *The Grey Coast* - the grey vision of adults being caused primarily through anxieties over the economic situation and the extremely hard work that had to be undertaken. What was needed was to recover the boy's 'sight' in adulthood, something that Gunn believed passionately could be done. As Lorenz Jung pointed out, the Boy did have a part to play in the regenerative process. There is certainly evidence in the final grouping of novels that the locals had learned to view things more positively - even their

relationships with the incoming tourists are less subservient; colour was back. As Munro states in *The Well at The World's End*:

> But do or think what he would, the colour note from the meadow, the sun yellow, persisted in haunting him, as though at any moment some further essence of it would be revealed; what Alastair the shepherd had called the *something*. And wasn't that what he had set out to find? Even biologists, after analysing the human brain, were coming to the conclusion that man evolved by *seeing* things in a new way. Artists who mattered had never believed anything else . . .[89]

The lesson of the first epicyclic journey has, then, been learned and has played its part in the positive conclusion to the meta-novel.

The second epicyclic journey, which explored 'The Highlands as History', serves a dual purpose. It first explains the causes of those contemporary issues that had an historical source, like the infamous 'Clearances'. By so doing it helps reunite Highlanders with their own history, rather than the version of English history taught in schools. Secondly, through the quest in this epicyclic journey, the reader is able to see the influences that have impacted on the Highlands over time. The areas highlighted are: the coming of Christianity; the Viking incursions; the Highland Clearances, and the rise of the herring fisheries in Caithness and Sutherland. Although some of these issues are disasters, when viewed retrospectively, it can be seen that, over the three time frames involved, it is possible to see that adverse changes at one point can lead to benefits later. A millennium after the Viking raids of *Sun Circle*, which introduced new elements to the gene pool, Gunn describes in *The Silver Darlings* how Roddie and Catrine brought together the Viking and the Celtic elements of the community under self-reliant leadership. Over the intervening period the genetic legacy of the Viking had become established in the tribe and exhibited itself in the seafaring skills of the post-Clearance fisherfolk. Without these qualities the plight of the cleared population

[89] *The Well at the World's End*, p. 101.

would have been even worse, and survival in doubt.

The Silver Darlings, the triumphant story of opportunities grasped, would never have happened at all but for some of the earlier disasters. Gunn left the story at the height of the boom, a boom that had finished long before the book was written, as was made obvious in the first chapter of the meta-novel. The import of this device is to leave the reader in no doubt that this great success story had been achieved by the folk themselves which, done once, could be done again.

In the meta-novel's final chapter, seafaring skills remain embedded in the people's experience, and are in evidence throughout all three of the concluding novels. The most explicit depiction comes in *The Well at the World's End* with the description of Old Malcolm bringing his boat back under sail through a storm. In the same novel it is clear how stability has been reestablished when Peter Munro, scanning the vista of crofting lands and thinking of the improvements in land tenure for the crofters, comments; 'landlords could not burn them out now'.[90]

The third epicyclic journey, set out in chapter four, has a cultural focus and the message is very clear, that it is necessary to reconnect to one's roots. Earlier, in *The Drinking Well*, Gunn identified that:

> When the normal man is down and out, he not only loses respect for the existing economic dispensation, he loses respect for himself. Once get him into that condition and his creative faculties are affected. Others must do things for him now. He has lost initiative for he has lost two fundamental things: first, belief in himself; second, belief in that traditional pattern of life which being his could alone help him. If that is true of the individual, it is true of the group, and so finally of the nation.[91]

---

[90] *The Well at the World's End*, p. 262.
[91] *The Drinking Well,* p. 179.

The traditional pattern of life features very strongly in the culturally focussed quest. It is the strength of the traditional Gaelic culture that was Hector and Art's birthright that aids them in their defiance of the administrators in *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* - even God is on their side! In all the books devoted to 'Escapism Validated' a similar emphasis is laid on this traditional pattern of life, exposure to which aids the regenerative process. This third epicyclic journey also explores the conflict between the analytical and the intuitive (the Conscious and the Unconscious) in the greatest detail. It establishes that only through the amalgamation of the two elements, together with love the creator, can wholeness be achieved.

In the concluding section, *The Well at the World's End* sees the principal protagonist going on his own epicyclic journey in search both of living elements of the traditional pattern of Gaelic life and culture, and of wisdom. He returns to where he set off, closing the circle, and is reunited with his wife who, he now realises, is 'The Well at the World's End' he has been seeking. During his journey, his exposure to the living Gaelic culture of his ancestors, helps to restore the balance between Conscious and Unconscious and to reinstate the Self to its ideal mid-point position.

The Silver Bough and *The Other Landscape* both foreground the clash between the analytical and the intuitive and, at the end of both individual novels, the issue is resolved through a coming together of the elements, in each case in a marital type union. In *The Silver Bough* this confluence, under the influence of the traditional pattern of Gaelic life as exemplified by the Silver Bough borne by Sheena - and deeply rooted in Celtic myth, is between Anna, Sheena's mother, and Donald Martin, Sheena's father - a blending of the analytical and the intuitive in love. It is also, as with Peter Munro and Fand, a restoration of the family unit. Although, as discussed earlier, the ending of *The Other Landscape* is technically less satisfactory, it also ends with a

marriage, this time between the narrator Walter Urquhart and the chambermaid at the Highland hotel, Catherine. Strong links with Gaelic culture and song run through all the novels in the concluding chapter, and Catherine is seen as both intuitive and in touch with her own heritage so, again, there is a positive reconciliation of the analytical and intuitive at the end. Douglas Menzies, the central character of *The Other Landscape*, is the one gifted with 'second sight', mirroring the novel in the opening chapter, who has precognition, *via* dreams, of both his wife's and his own death. After his wife Annabel's death in childbirth he becomes reclusive and seeks, through deep meditation, to understand how such tragedies can be permitted by a beneficent Deity. Menzies' exploration of this 'Other Landscape' forms the basis of the discussions between him and Walter Urquhart at their various meetings. He returns to the community briefly to rescue two occupants of a boat caught in a storm and later falls to his death, exactly as his dream foretold. The death of this strongly drawn character brings about a false sense of closure, but the true ending lies with Walter and Catherine, who are, in a sense, heirs to Douglas and Annabel's legacy, and their marriage and return to the Highlands.

It should be acknowledged that this redemption has been of the human individual and not of the human community which is where Gunn's journey seemed to start. The pervasive motif of 'The Man who Came Back' has faltered as the meta-novel's narrative has progressed. Initially, it had been argued that, like the symbolic salmon, the Highlander should leave home for the furtherance of his studies but then return to aid the regeneration of the community. Practical pointers to how this could be achieved were contained in Gunn's *Blue Print for the Highlands* yet, increasingly, the focus of the meta-novel, possibly reflecting Gunn's apparent pre-war disillusionment with political ideologies, turns to the individual and his personal regeneration.

Although this seems at first sight to be inconsistent, Gunn believed that change would come through the individual, as indeed 'The Man Who Came Back' motif suggests, and he probably came to believe that his aims for community regeneration would be achieved by such enlightened individuals; indeed he would no doubt place himself in that category. It has already been noted that he spent much of his time campaigning for hydro-electric power and he was closely involved in the Crofting Commission, with its improved land tenure provision. As an authority on whisky, he was also employed at Tormore as consultant for the first new Highland malt-whisky distillery to be built since the war. He gave advice on possible water sources and was obviously closely involved in promotional matters as he wrote a film script entitled 'The Story of Tormore'[92] drawing attention to the new opportunities that the venture would bring. He also wrote, anonymously, a piece entitled 'The Long John Story' which appeared in the distillery's first brochure.[93] Undoubtedly this new distillery brought employment and prosperity to the area and Gunn would have argued that, as a man who came back himself, he had played a part in that contribution to the regeneration of the area.

When the methodology for this thesis was set out in the Introduction it was suggested that insights into Gunn's meta-novel could be achieved by considering it within the contextual framework of comedy, Jung's Analytical Psychology and Zen. The comedy aspect has been discussed above and has included reference to some of Jung's ideas, but is now appropriate that his ideas and theories are considered in a little more detail.

---

[92]Neil M. Gunn, 'The Story of Tormore', (Unpublished film script dated 24.11.1960 but with an attached Shooting Script dated 1958).

[93]Neil M. Gunn,'The Long John Story', (Glasgow: Long John Distilleries, 7.10.1960). A copy of this story which formed part of the publicity brochure for the new distillery is thought to have been buried in a 'time capsule' under the building when it was formally opened.

In his commentary on Jung, Anthony Storr comments, 'Jung was, throughout his life, preoccupied with the problem of reconciling opposites within himself'.[94] He goes on to say:

> Towards the end of the first World War, Jung began to emerge from his period of mental upheaval. Like other creative people emerging from a mid-life crisis, he achieved a sense of acceptance and finality. His phantasies, which by then he had begun to draw and paint, altered in character. Instead of images of persons, Jung became preoccupied with abstract, circular patterns, often divided into four or some multiple of that number. These patterns, which, as he later discovered, were similar to those used for meditation and known as mandalas in the East, seemed to symbolize his achievement of a new balance within his own psyche; a balance in which there was some reconciliation between the opposing forces that had been tearing him apart. The journey towards this new integration came to be known as the process of individuation; and the mandala patterns in which it was expressed symbolized a new centre within the psyche which was neither conscious nor unconscious but partook of both. This centre Jung named the Self.[95]

In achieving the shape of 'human redemption', which Allman associates with 'comedy', a reconciliation of opposites is needed. In the case of the meta-novel, this reconciliation is between the analytical (or Conscious) and the intuitive (or Unconscious). As O'Neill argues, such a reconciliation:

> allows the compensating elements of the psyche to join in wholeness, linked by the transcendental function of the Self. The anima and the façade of the persona are thus made less powerful, allowing the ego and shadow to coexist as representatives of their respective realms. The Self has emerged ('been realized') as the new midpoint of an integrated personality, the pathway from light to darkness. The psyche is united and balanced, one-sidedness finally resolved. [96]

In the meta-novel it can be seen that the quasi-characters, the continuing archetypal and symbolical forces, themselves an integral part of Jung's thinking, have been instrumental in achieving the reconciliation that is comedy. This same reconciliation

---

[94]Anthony Storr, *Jung*, (London: Fontana, 1973), p. [80].
[95]Storr, pp. [80] - 81.
[96]O'Neill, p. 39.

can be viewed in Jungian terms as the achievement of a balanced psyche. Of individuation, the process that Jung saw as leading to the achievement of a balanced psyche, O'Neill comments:

> The process of individuation requires the emergence of the anima [that stands behind the shadow] as a conscious personification, since persons may be more easily dealt with than things. Confrontation with archetypal figures serves two purposes: it reduces their powerful intrusions into consciousness (dreams etc.) without repressing them still more forcefully and thus worsening the problem, and it makes their stored libido available for healthy activities on both sides of the conscious-unconscious border.[97]

Storr claims that individuation is Jung's major contribution to psychology, and one that 'is essentially a process which takes place in the second part of life. Moreover, it is an esoteric process which engages only the few.'[98] In the books allocated to the final chapter, some of the principal characters can be seen to be striving for just such an inner balance. This is especially true of Peter Munro in *The Well at the World's End* who is seeking to achieve a balance and meaning in his own life. As was pointed out when the individual novels were being discussed, Peter Munro and his wife Fand share much common ground with Gunn himself and his wife, Daisy. At the time he wrote this novel, Gunn was himself in the second part of life, as he was when he wrote both his spiritual autobiography *The Atom of Delight*, with its concentration on the inner self, and the retrospect that gave rise to the meta-novel.

F. L. Radford and R. R. Wilson, in their essay 'Some Phases of the Jungian Moon: Jung's Influence on Modern Literature', discuss the immense contribution that Jung has made in terms of the construction of literary character. The model that is increasingly being used to establish characters is a psychological one. They write:

---

[97]O'Neill, p. 39.
[98]Storr, p. 81.

> In modern literature, psychological models [for the construction of characters] have commonly been derived, though seldom rigorously, from psychoanalysis. The impact of psychoanalysis on literature has been massive (it may be seen in the thriller as well as in virtually all surrealistic productions) but its peculiar force has been to provide the postulate of unconscious mental processes.[99]

They argue that, in this process, the influence of Jung has been huge. They go on to say:

> In modern literature, Jung's influence shows most emphatically in the significance which has been attributed to myth and in the stressing of certain aspects of his psychological theory, such as the concept of the archetype and the problem of individuation, that have only a tangential significance within the generalized psychoanalytic system. Jung's interpretation of myth as both a universal (and interconnected) body of concepts *and also* a projection of inherent mental activities, themselves also universal, provides the first touchstone of his influence. His view of myth as possessing psychological roots - and thus projecting a correspondence between the interior and the exterior, the individual and the universal - has affected many aspects of modern culture including literature.[100]

It seems quite clear that Gunn is among the modern writers to have been affected by Jung's theories. He has used Celtic myth extensively in his work, has developed archetypes and has personified, in a Jungian way, the Conscious and the Unconscious. He has demonstrated a belief in the collective unconscious which, like the anima, lies embedded within the unconscious. In a one-sided psyche where, as Lorenz Jung put it, there is an 'overwhelming priority for logical thinking', contacts with one's roots, and the collective unconscious, are broken to the detriment of the individual. In reaching a positive conclusion to his meta-novel Gunn is not only achieving the regenerative structure of comedy but is also reaching a satisfactory conclusion in terms of Jungian psychoanalysis, namely a balanced psyche. In the conclusion's chapter heading, in addition to his reference to comedy, Gunn refers to transcendence and light. In the

---

[99]F. L. Radford and R. R. Wilson, 'Some Phases of the Jungian Moon: Jung's Influence on Modern Literature', in *English Studies in Canada*, Vol. viii, No. 3, September 1982, p. 312.
[100]Radford and Wilson, p. 313.

meta-novel, the term transcendence can and does have associations, some of which relate to Jungian theories. Apart from the transcendence of the meta-novel over the individual novels of which it is comprised, the restoration of the self to its proper place and function within the psyche is described as being a transcendent function.

In the quotation from Storr given earlier, Jung's diagrammatical representations of the reconciling of opposites in his own psyche were seen to be the same as Eastern mandalas, although he did not know that at the time. Like Gunn, Jung was later to take a great interest in Eastern thinking and he wrote commentaries on some works, including *The Secret of the Golden Flower*.[101] This shared interest in the philosophies of the East makes a convenient introduction to the final discipline, that of Zen.

The accepted commentary on the links between Gunn's work and Zen is John Burns' book, *A Celebration of the Light*. In this Burns acknowledges that, although there are many works of Gunn's that display characteristics of Zen thinking and teaching these were in virtually every case written before Gunn became aware of Zen teaching. This event can be dated precisely to 1953. 'In that year Pick sent him a copy of Eugen Herrigel's *Zen in the Art of Archery*, after its publication in English.'[102] This means that only two of Gunn's books could have been directly influenced by Zen thinking, *The Other Landscape* and the autobiographical *The Atom of Delight*, in which he devoted a chapter to Herrigel's book. Just as Jung's abstract drawings were executed prior to him knowing that such drawings were identical with the Eastern mandalas, so Gunn had completed most of his creative writing by the time he was exposed to Zen. The great attraction he found in the subject, something he perhaps shared with Jung, was that in Zen teaching he found a philosophy that accorded with

---

[101]R. Wilhelm and C. G. Jung, eds., *The Secret of the Golden Flower: A Chinese Book of Life*, (London: Kegan Paul & Co., 1931).
[102]Burns, p. 4.

his own self-generated beliefs. However, it must be noted that, as Gunn's retrospective analysis of his novels was made after the completion of *The Other Landscape*, the meta-novel, being a re-ordering of all his works, was conceived after he had been exposed to Zen.

The novels Gunn allocates to his final chapter are all relatively late novels, novels that Burns views as being 'literally filled with light'.[103] As has been noted, *The Other Landscape* is Gunn's final novel both in his output of individual novels and within the structure of the meta-novel. It is the only novel that can have been directly influenced by Zen as it was written the year after he received Herrigel's book. Burns likens the relationship between Urquhart and Menzies to that of a young Zen monk with his master. From the comments made earlier about the contributory novels to this chapter, it is clear that Menzies was himself searching for enlightenment, a stance that Burns agrees with, but it is equally clear that he is much farther advanced on the Way than is Urquhart and so is able to give guidance to the younger man. Burns believes that the greater serenity exhibited by Menzies at the end is due to the fact that his being recalled by the community to assist in the rescue of Dan McLellan and the hotel guest has assuaged his feelings of guilt over Annabel's death. As Burns puts it:

> This encounter with the same sea on the same cliffs, among the same people he had been with on the night of her death brings home to him the inevitability and impersonality of death, and his character begins to lose the distortion caused by guilt and to take on its natural shape.[104]

The complex and abstruse conversations between Urquhart and Menzies are seen as a Zen-style teaching method involving 'the *koan* system and the *sanzen* interview'[105] with the aim of achieving a 'spiritual awakening, an awakening that can only come about through the adoption of a particular attitude of mind, an attitude of receptivity

---

[103]Burns, p. 170.
[104]*Ibid.* p. 164.
[105]*Ibid.* p. 149.

and passivity, the realisation of the meditative mind', with Menzies merely being a guide to set Urquhart on his Way.[106] The argument for a Zen interpretation is convincing but it is a fact that, throughout his fiction, Gunn has introduced master and pupil type relationships. Excluding the sterile relationship between Kenn and his schoolmaster (*Highland River*), there have been Aniel and the Master (*Sun Circle*), Elie and Dark Mairi (*Butcher's Broom*) and Young Art and Old Hector (*Young Art and Old Hector* and *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*). To a lesser degree Finn and Roddie (*The Silver Darlings*) could perhaps be added to the list. This suggests that, when Gunn did finally come to an awareness of Zen, he saw the methodology as mirroring his own thinking and observation.

'Of all Gunn's novels, it is perhaps *The Well at the World's End* that comes closest to being a "celebration of the light". In the quest for the well, light is a prominent symbol, and the book is executed with such a marvellous lightness of touch that it mirrors perfectly the freedom attained by the central character'.[107] The concluding chapter of the meta-novel requires for its success a change in thinking to reverse the negative 'attitude of mind' inherent in the opening chapter. Understanding, Zen teaches, will come when the subject is approached directly, without conceptual thought and, 'in this attitude of "no-mind" the dualistic sense of separation from the world disappears, and man experiences the freedom and delight inherent in being part of Tao'.[108] It is precisely this attitude of 'no-mind' that was involved in *Zen in the Art of Archery* where Herrigel had to learn to draw the bow, release the shot and hit the target without any conscious thought. The 'I' had not to undertake the act but rather 'It' had to achieve the ends. After three long years, Herrigel was still only part way to achieving his goal when the master, taking pity on him, took him home and *showed* him. Gunn

---

[106]*Ibid.* pp. 147 - 148.
[107]Burns, p. 106.
[108]*Ibid.* p. 109.

was clearly fascinated by the very different concepts involved in this undertaking and gave a synopsis of the book in a chapter in *The Atom of Delight*.[109] Although he recognised that Western methods of archery were very different, he found certain similarities with Herrigel's experience in his own background. Of these, he wrote:

> Perhaps this can even be better illustrated in the case of the shot gun, for here every expert knows that when he is reduced to 'aiming' at the moving object he is off colour or having a bad day. For perfection he must aim without aiming, make all kinds of allowances for speed and distance without consciously making them; and I should not have introduced this illustration if personal experience, too often of a defeatist kind, did not make it apt.[110]

The concept of being shown how to do the task also rang a chord with Gunn. He says:

> Now always - if the suggestion of comparison may be permitted in so exalted a context - this was what happened when the boy of the Strath wanted to tell another boy how to land on the right foot at the stand so that the shot was released and propelled to its farthest distance. The whole process of telling consisted in one remark, 'Watch! I'll show you.'[111]

It is obvious from those two extracts that Gunn found himself very much on the same wavelength as the Zen master, finding examples from his own past in support. A further example where an attitude of 'no-mind' applies, even in the West, is that of love. Speaking of *The Well at the World's End*, Burns writes:

> The whole episode [of Mrs Douglas administering a love potion to her husband] gives Peter a deeper awareness of the meaning of love. Always love is beyond thought. It can never be pinned down by explanations, can never be fixed, because the experience of love is the experience of freedom.[112]

As the discussion has progressed, areas of comparison between Zen thinking and Gunn's work have been identified and, in this final chapter, the comparisons remain valid. The concept of relating directly to nature and things without conscious thought,

---

[109]*The Atom of Delight*, Chapter 18, 'Zen in Archery', pp. 134 - 140.
[110]*The Atom of Delight*, pp. 136 - 137.
[111]*Ibid.* p. 139.
[112]Burns, p. 119.

yielding to the freedom and delight of being part of *Tao*, is central to Gunn's own experience of 'Atoms of Delight', moments of intuitive insight which aided his own personal enlightenment and the achievement of a balanced psyche.

Love has also been seen as one of the key creative elements in reaching reconciliation. In *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* it was included as the fourth and final element in the recipe for restoring wisdom to the Isle where the administrators had divorced knowledge from wisdom, the head from the heart, the analytical from the intuitive. In his interview with God, Hector established that the natural order of things followed the pattern of the Salmon myth. 'The ripe hazel nuts of knowledge fell into the pool and the salmon of wisdom ate them. And was made the wiser for the knowledge he ate. It is the natural order. There is no other. [. . .] The pool was everyman's pool in the river of life.'[113] This progression is a description of the gaining of human experience. Finally, after talking of knowledge and wisdom, the third element was added, magic, 'which is the scent of the flower, the young feet of the runner, and the deep smile in the face.'[114] To this trio God suggests a fourth and final element - the creator, love.

In creating a coherent meta-novel with the structure of comedy, Gunn has gone full circle - much as Peter Munro does in *The Well at the World's End* - starting and finishing at the same place, the Highlands of his own time. The enlightenment and wisdom gained by the players during the epicyclic journeys of the developmental part of the book make the positive conclusion possible. The tripartite structure accords neatly with that of comedy and comparisons with Jung and Zen add insights without detracting from the original conclusions. Regeneration and the restoration of wholeness inherent in both comedy and Jungian psychology is fully reflected in the

---

[113]*The Green Isle of the Great Deep*. p. 243.
[114]*Ibid*. p. 245.

meta-novel. Transcendence is evident in the inclusive vision of the meta-novel, where all the individual novels play their part in the greater structure which becomes more than the sum of its respective parts, in the restoration of the self to its central position within the psyche, and in the achievement of individual enlightenment as a result of the cultivation of Zen style meditation, or 'Atoms of Delight' with their flashes of intuitive light. It is clear from a number of late articles that Gunn had reassessed his 'Atoms of Delight' as a consequence of his exposure to Zen, and clearly saw them as steps on the way to enlightenment. Of his experiences, he writes in one such article, 'Light':

> My variety of light is a light of wonder, of gaiety, of laughter, that is so marvellous that all ordinary things are born afresh, both on the face of the earth and inside the human noddle. That exaggerates, of course, what glimpses of light I may have had, but at least it suggests a distinction between the quiet, still light of an ethical acceptance and the vivid, flashing light of living-ness, the extra intensity that irradiates life and being, that indeed seems to bring life to being for the first time. Some Easterns speak of being 'born again' - *that* degree of intensity.[115]

The final chapter not only brings the meta-novel to its positive conclusion but also attests to Gunn's personal experience of enlightenment, which has informed its very construction. The conclusion is very appropriately subtitled: 'The comedy of transcendence and light'.

It is submitted that Gunn's theoretical construct of a meta-novel can be seen to be a coherent narrative, and one which arrives at its planned positive conclusion. However, it remains to consider whether his life's work, in this rearranged format, achieves the aims that he appears to have set himself at the beginning of his career and, perhaps equally important, to assess how the insights gained from an examination of the meta-novel, as set out in the retrospect, change a reading of the individual novels. This

---

[115]Neil M. Gunn, 'Light', in *Point* No. 3 (Summer 1968), p. 4.

examination will be undertaken in the next section entitled 'Closing the circle' after a brief re-appraisal of the novels allocated to the meta-novel's final chapter.

Re-appraisal

Each of the individual novels, of course, remains perfectly valid as a stand alone work. It is in matters of emphasis that the insights are to be discovered. From the plot structure of the meta-novel it becomes abundantly clear that one of the principal strands of this final chapter is that of re-establishing links to one's cultural roots. Such a message was clear in *The Well at the World's End* where it was stated as being part of Peter Munro's quest. It was, perhaps less obviously, also apparent in *The Silver Bough* where stories from Celtic mythology appear and where, through the medium of the archaeological element, the past is revisited. It becomes apparent, following the argument of the meta-novel, that the re-establishment of links with the cultural past have proved crucial. Once again, it is through the untrammelled vision of a child that regeneration is achieved. Here not so much the eternal boy but rather the eternal girl, in the person of Sheena. The cultural links are not so well defined in *The Other Landscape* although they are there to be found when approaching the novel from the new standpoint suggested by the meta-novel. Both Annabel and Catherine are depicted as being deeply rooted in the traditions and culture of their people and it is these women who provide solidity and continuity for their respective spouses. It was Annabel who had suggested the writing project to Douglas and who had toiled secretly to earn a little extra money to enable them to remain in their Highland environment. Even after her tragic death she remained the 'Spectral Bollard' that provided some degree of certainty during Douglas's exploration of 'The Other Landscape'. Catherine and Walter's relationship has many of the hallmarks of that between Annabel and

Douglas with, in each case, the woman being the principal link with the culture; indeed in *The Well at The World's End*, the woman Fand proved to be the object of the quest.

Looked at in this way, the role of Gunn's female characters in this chapter can be seen to be crucial and is worthy of further comment. As Ian Grimble commented:

> He [Gunn] found from his study of anthropology, from his study of his own society, from his study of comparative religion and mythology that it was women, always, who with their traditional lore, with their loyalties and steadfastness who actually kept society together.[116]

Throughout all of his novels, Gunn depicts women, especially his archetypal Highland women, as being the mortar that binds the structure of society together. However, at the end of his meta-novel exercise, Gunn has created a positive conclusion that depends to a large extent on the feminine. Sheena has taken the place of the eternal boy in creating the positive outcome in *The Silver Bough*, Catherine is 'The Woman Who Came Back' in *The Other Landscape* and who is beginning the task of renewal, and in *The Well at the World's End*, Fand takes on the mantle as well as the name of a Celtic Goddess.

The cyclical nature of Gunn's vision is reflected in the structure of the meta-novel where the conclusion sees a return to the setting of the opening chapter. This positive conclusion is achieved following the series of epicyclic journeys forming chapters two to four and a further cyclical structure appears at its most marked in the concluding chapter. In the trio of novels allocated to this chapter, the meta-novel structure draws attention to the motif of history repeating itself, but never in the same way; the process is even accorded a name in *The Other Landscape*, that of Recurrence. In the examples featured in this last chapter, the later version of the history tends to be more positive

---

[116]*Neil M. Gunn Memorial Lecture*, pp. [11] - [12].

and this seems to reflect Gunn's optimistic vision. This will receive further consideration in the following final re-assessment 'Closing the circle'.

CLOSING THE CIRCLE

A final overview

When Gunn prepared his retrospect - probably in the early 1960s - he was able, like Tom Mathieson in *The Serpent*, to look back over his life with the benefit of hindsight. He was also able to review his writing career and assess his achievements as a novelist for, whilst there would be further journalism undertaken, he had by this time said 'Goodbye to Books'.[1]

It is ironic that this reassessment was prompted by a feeling of irritation caused by Eric Linklater's assertion that only one novel could be written about the Highlands, because this led to Gunn's inclusive vision of his published novels as a coherent single work - even if, by so doing, he conceded Linklater's point. The single work, or meta-novel, established by Gunn's retrospect has been examined in detail during the course of the thesis and it has been shown to have its own internal coherence and substance. The concept of the meta-novel shows how Gunn, retrospectively, saw all his novels combining in a single work with regeneration as its aim.

The thesis has considered how Gunn's positioning of his individual novels within the structure of the meta-novel, enables the reader to re-appraise the novels as individual works. It is inappropriate that these findings be repeated at this point but, as a generalization, the position of each individual novel within the overall plot structure of the meta-novel serves to draw attention to those constituent elements that Gunn considered especially important in progressing the narrative towards its positive conclusion. In many cases the text so highlighted would not normally have been accorded the importance that Gunn's re-ordering now attaches to the narrative.

As with many novelists, Gunn's work has been commented upon by critics over the years. In these studies a recurring criticism has been made of many of the novels'

---

[1]The title of Chapter 16 of Hart and Pick's biography.

conclusions, which are seen as being contrived or structurally inadequate, often because of Gunn's apparent desire to achieve a positive ending that is not really supported by the narrative; some adopting a *deus ex machina* device to achieve the desired result. As individual works of fiction, the books could often be improved structurally by allowing the work to end tragically. The re-appraisal possible as a result of Gunn's retrospect does, however, demonstrate that these, often flawed, positive conclusions contain the crux of the message that he sought to introduce into the meta-novel. This insight has the effect of completely reversing the criticisms that have been levied. Far from being botched add-ons, these positive conclusions contain the kernel of their novels' message. The criticism should, therefore, be that, if the given conclusion is where Gunn wanted the book to end, then he has failed to develop the book adequately to achieve his aim. Each of Gunn's novels remains, of course, an individual novel in its own right and consequently this finding does not, of itself, invalidate the commentaries that have already appeared. Rather it enables the novels to be re-visited with an eye, additionally, to their position within the meta-novel's coherent structure. In this way the flawed material is elevated to the position of importance accorded it by the retrospect: In a sense 'the stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner'.[2]

From a literary point of view, the retrospect can be seen to have afforded valuable insights into both Gunn's novels and his thinking. It shows that, despite their disparity, the individual novels can be seen as contributory volumes to a 'Novel of the Highlands'. It has also been shown that this 'Novel of the Highlands', whilst essentially a 'virtual' novel, has a coherence of its own. What remains to be done is to consider whether the aims this thesis ascribed to Gunn as the motivation for him

---

[2]Psalm 118. 6.

embarking on a writing career, were achieved.

To summarise, amongst the stimuli for Gunn's embarkation on a literary career were: an inherent ability in the craft of writing, coupled with an ambition to be successful in that craft; a financial motivation; a desire to promote Gaelic culture and tradition; a deep distress over the economic and cultural decline of the Highlands; and a wish to be a part of the Scottish Renaissance Movement with its emphasis not only on a cultural and political nationalism but also on the realistic representation of contemporary Scotland.

Gunn's ability as a writer is not really in doubt. He successfully published twenty novels, won the James Tait Black Memorial prize, had books selected as 'Book of the Month' recommendations, proved to be a successful journalist and was commissioned to write documentaries for broadcasting on the BBC. This assessment is supported by Alistair McCleery in his introduction to *Landscape and Light*, where he writes:

> Neil Gunn's place as the foremost Scottish novelist of this century seems assured. Most of his work is in print, or in the process of being republished; that work is the centre of much critical attention, both from within Scotland and without; the major novels are standard texts in many schools and centres of higher education.[3]

It can safely be asserted that the aim of literary success was achieved.

It was suggested that some of Gunn's early short stories may have come about as a result of rivalry with Maurice Walsh to seek to sell their respective stories. As Gunn's work progressed, other factors assumed equal or greater importance but the financial motivation remained constant. This is especially true after 1937 as, at this point, he resigned his position with the Civil Service and from then on had to maintain himself solely on the income generated by his writing. It is noticeable that, after 1937, the

---

[3] *Landscape and Light*, p. 1.

amount of his journalism increased dramatically - thus generating income to live on while he worked on novels. As he maintained himself very satisfactorily throughout his life, the financial aim can be regarded as having been achieved.

One of Gunn's initial aims was assumed to be a championing of Gaelic culture and language. Despite some dissenting voices, it has been shown in this thesis that Gunn earned the reputation of being the novelist in whom Gaelic culture found a voice; certainly his works, especially the meta-novel, celebrate Gaelic culture fulsomely. However, from a practical point of view Gunn, as a non-speaker, was ill equipped to support and promote the Gaelic language. This failure takes on a greater significance when it is understood how closely Gunn saw the re-establishment of cultural links to ones roots as integral to regeneration. Because of this link, which emerged from a study of the meta-novel, this aspect of Gunn's aims will be re-visited shortly.

Gunn's response to the economic decline of his home area undoubtedly was a major stimulus in developing his writing skills and he worked tirelessly to improve the lot of the Highlander both through his writing and privately. He was active in politics for most of his life, both socialist and nationalist, and it can be safely assumed that he initially saw improvements coming to the Highlands from direct political action. His novels, couched in English and thereby reaching the widest audience, commenced by drawing attention to the reality of the Highlanders' plight, in the realist fiction of the Scottish Renaissance. It has been deduced from the study of the meta-novel that Gunn's faith in politics as a principal instrument of regeneration was dealt a severe blow. This change of heart can be dated to about 1939 and is linked to the disturbing reports of brain-washing at Stalin's show trials. The destruction of the individual for the greater good of the whole was something he could not accept, and led to his

increasing concentration on the individual as the instrument for change and to a growing concentration on the conflict between the analytical and the intuitive.

The first chapter of the meta-novel, which contains Gunn's two earliest, and most bitter, published novels, was entitled 'The locality of the Highlands as a state of mind', drawing attention to the mental constituent of the problem. An article Gunn wrote for the Scots Magazine in September 1945, 'Belief in Ourselves' has been referred to earlier but this, again, draws attention to the mind set of the Highlander and a closer examination of that work casts some light on the shifting emphases in the meta-novel. In this article he recites what he considers to be necessary for Highland regeneration:

> We all know the ingredients by this time as we know the words of an old song: crofting, hill sheep-farming, sea fisheries, hydro-electric development, afforestation, appropriate light industries, transport and so on.[4]

This list covers many of the issues raised in his *Blue Print for the Highlands* of 1943, but goes on to record:

> But there is one thing that is always missing, one all-important matter which the paper economists forget, and that is the general lack of belief among the Highland people themselves in the future of their own land as a place where life could be lived interestingly and well.[5]

The causes of this lack of self-esteem will be returned to shortly but, for the present, it is instructive to look at the results of this lack of self-belief. In this article Gunn writes of how, in England, fishing boats were often run by shore syndicates rather than the Scottish practice of the boats being owned by the fishermen themselves. When it was suggested that they should emulate the English practice 'they shook their heads. They just did not believe the thing could be done. Impossible.'[6] Despite the fact that similar

---

[4]*Belief in Ourselves*, p. 424.
[5]*Ibid*. p. 424.
[6]*Ibid.* p. 425.

enterprises had been achieved in Norway, South Africa and the Soviet Union, Gunn argues that his own countrymen lacked the faith to copy them.

From the evidence of the 'Belief in Ourselves' article, it is quite clear that, through the medium of his novels, Gunn sought to combat the problems and to point the way towards a physical regeneration. Following his comments in the article about fishing syndicates he goes on to talk of the success story of a group of crofters in Caithness who had bonded together and formed a sheep club that had proved financially successful. They, collectively, owned 1500 sheep, had paid off all their loans for initial setting up costs, and now employed three shepherds. This real-life example was followed up by the suggestion that cattle could be reintroduced into the economy.

These are just the sort of projects that Gunn sought to promote and it is no coincidence that the following year, 1946, he published *The Key of the Chest* in which Kenneth Grant ran just such a sheep club for the village community, which employed Dougald MacIan as its shepherd. *The Drinking Well* followed in 1947 and this is the one where a land improvement scheme was postulated, involving cattle as well as sheep along the lines laid down in the much earlier model set out in *The Grampians Desolate*. Gunn was deliberately using his books to try and encourage ideas of self-belief leading to regeneration.

In 'Belief in Ourselves' Gunn concludes by saying:

> In all this there is one thing that particularly interests me, and that is that I should like to see the new energy and impetus provided by the Highlanders themselves, by those who derive from the old traditions, the old race, so that what was distinctive and fine in our culture, our ways of life and behaviour, might continue. But vital statistics show that this will have to be done soon or it will be too late. Emigration is a remorseless way of getting rid of the best. And a dwindling population adds ever new ruins to the old ruins in the glens.[7]

[7] *Belief in Ourselves*, p. 427.

As a writer, Gunn's role is, perhaps, restricted to that of educator. However, if the perceived aim of economic regeneration was expected to be achieved as a direct result of his literary efforts, and if success or failure was to be evaluated by reference to changes in the Northland, then one must question the level of success achieved. Although the retrospect was prepared some fifteen years after the date of the 'Belief in Ourselves' article it is true to say that little has altered. Hydro-Electricity has made an entrance but the re-invigorating of small fishing harbours to provide them with cold stores, as envisaged in *Blue Print for the Highlands*, has not occurred.

When the historical chapter was discussed the structure of *The Silver Darlings* was considered. The way in which the novel ended while the herring fisheries were at their height was seen as creating a very positive ending demonstrating that this success had been achieved by the people themselves and, by implication, could be done again. It was suggested that, in the structure of the meta-novel a similar device might be in evidence. It will be recalled that at the end of *The Other Landscape* the village was about to see the benefit of electricity` and Sam Mor, when asked 'You think a new day is dawning for the Highlands?', replied 'More Light'.[8] The meta-novel with its positive conclusion stops short of the present, it stops when all the positives remain open and, in this respect, the meta-novel must be regarded not so much as a record of what has happened in the Highlands but rather as an expanded 'Blue Print for the Highlands'.

Turning to the causes of the lack of self- belief spoken of above, Gunn wrote in an earlier article, appropriately called 'The Gael will Come Again':

> The language, tradition, and nurture of the Gael sufficed in those days, and would have sufficed in these, if they had not been interfered with from outside. I am not now referring to tourists' tips nor charity's tinned meats [. . .]. The root cause is deeper and more desperate. It [the Saxon 'enemy'] struck at language, at honour, at livelihood, at

[8] *The Other Landscape*, p. 317.

> tradition, at their arts and amusements, in a way that for stark brutality is without parallel in modern Christendom [. . .].[9]

As the meta-novel has explored the causes of the attitude of mind that so beset the Highlander of Gunn's day, all of these aspects have been mentioned. Here, the blame is set fairly and squarely against the Saxon and, whilst other contributory factors were identified when the meta-novel was being evaluated, the list is comprehensive. The result of such a many-pronged attack was inevitably to cause a rift between the Highlander and his roots, a principal cause of his attitudinal problems. A restoration of links to ones roots, culture and traditions was put forward by Gunn, in the meta-novel, as a necessary prerequisite of the regeneration he sought to encourage.

Earlier in the thesis, reference was made to correspondence between Gunn and Naomi Mitchison in which there seemed to be a suggestion that the work of Bishop Grundtvig in Denmark may have had more benefit for his country than Gunn's had for his. It will be remembered that Bishop Grundtvig was instrumental in establishing the Danish Folk High Schools. These taught 'Danish history, language, and literature, and Danish social conditions', and these subjects were taught in the vernacular.[10] These schools, which were nationalist in concept, drew their pupils principally from rural areas and were run as non-state establishments. As a result of their assimilation of Danish culture and tradition, and because of their facility in the language, the pupils 'felt' Danish. The reuniting of South Jutland, then ruled by Germany, with Denmark owed much to the Folk High Schools. Many who voted positively on the reunification question 'felt' Danish due to the knowledge of Danish history and culture they acquired as pupils of the High Schools.

---

[9]Neil M. Gunn (Writing as Dane McNeil) 'The Gael will Come Again', *Scots Magazine*, Vol. 14, No. 5, (February 1931), p. 325.
[10]F. Skrubbeltrang, *The Danish Folk High Schools* (Copenhagen: Det Danske Selskab, 1947) p. 12.

It is regrettable that, possibly as a result of the Saxon attack itemized in 'The Gael will Come Again', Gunn never felt able to develop his knowledge of Gaelic, without which a venture such as Bishop Grundtvig's could not be achieved. Although Gunn did much for his homeland both directly and through his writing, which in many ways remains a 'Blue Print for the Highlands', there is some justification for thinking that Grundtvig, in his specialised activity, made a greater impact in Denmark than Gunn in Scotland. Grundtvig was, though, a man for his own time and place. He belonged to an older generation (1783 - 1872) than Gunn, and the rural work force that formed the majority of his schools' pupils was not in evidence in Scotland during Gunn's time making comparisons insidious, quite apart from the language issue.

To return full circle, it will be remembered that, in his first published work, the poem 'Toast', Gunn set out the aspirations of 'The Aspirants' Society' and finished by declaring at the end 'if it seems we have done little - we'll ask Death's pardon'.[11] Gunn's career, reputation and achievements - as well as the achievement of most of his early aims - would suggest that his potential was fully realised and Death's pardon will not be required. He has produced an impressive body of work whose importance is enhanced by the insights afforded by the positive meta-novel. In his comparison of the work of Neil M Gunn and Lewis Grassic Gibbon, Douglas Gifford, after pointing to certain similarities of approach in their respective novels, draws a distinction between the two in the following terms:

> From the achievement of the Scottish Renaissance Neil Gunn emerges as the novelist of regeneration and hope, while Gibbon seems finally to speak of despair. They are the Light and the Dark, the positive and negative of the spectrum of the attitudes of the Renaissance writers.[12]

---

[11]Toast, in *The Apple Tree,* p. 1.
[12]Douglas Gifford, *Neil M Gunn & Lewis Grassic Gibbon*, (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1983). p. 147.

The optimism of Gunn, as evidenced by this comment, is clearly to be seen in the meta-novel as it makes its journey from darkness to light, even the timing of its ending ensuring that it can be seen as a positive pointer to a better future. The concept of recurrence that was so evident in the conclusion to the meta-novel is one that Gunn clearly holds dear. Time after time he asserts that the Highlands will again see life and occupation; history will repeat itself, but not always in the same way. However, at the time of him writing the retrospect, and indeed even at the time of his death, this new life, this regeneration, was still at some unspecified point in the future. Continuing self doubt has delayed the regeneration he worked so hard to achieve, but his literary achievements remain a potent pointer to a positive future.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY TEXTS - THE PUBLISHED NOVELS OF NEIL. M. GUNN

Blood Hunt (London: Faber, 1952)

Butcher's Broom (Edinburgh: Porpoise, 1934)

The Drinking Well (London: Faber, 1947)

The Green Isle of the Great Deep (London: Faber, 1944)

The Grey Coast (London: Cape, 1926)

Highland River (Edinburgh: Porpoise, 1937)

The Key of the Chest (London: Faber, 1945)[1]

The Lost Chart (London: Faber, 1949)

The Lost Glen (Edinburgh: Porpoise, 1932)

Morning Tide (Edinburgh: Porpoise, 1931)

The Other Landscape (London: Faber, 1954)

Second Sight (London: Faber, 1940)

The Serpent (London: Faber, 1943)

The Shadow (London: Faber, 1948)

The Silver Bough (London: Faber, 1948)

The Silver Darlings (London: Faber, 1941)

Sun Circle (Edinburgh: Porpoise, 1933)

The Well at the World's End (London: Faber, 1951)

Wild Geese Overhead (London: Faber, 1939)

Young Art and Old Hector (London: Faber, 1942)

---

[1]This is the date shown in the book but the actual date of publication was January 1946.

PRIMARY TEXTS - OTHER WORKS BY NEIL M. GUNN

'The Apple Tree', *The Apple Tree*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (June 1918)

The Atom of Delight (London: Faber, 1956)

Back Home (Glasgow: Walter Wilson and Co., 1932)

'Belief in Ourselves', *Scots Magazine,* Vol. 43, No. 6, (September 1945)

'Biographical entry', in *Twentieth Century Authors: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature,* ed. by Stanley J. Kunitz, and Howard Haycraft (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1942)

'Biographical entry', in *Twentieth Century Authors, First Supplement: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern* Literature, ed. by Stanley J. Kunitz and Vineta Colby (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1955)

'The Birdbeast and the Twelve Puppies', *Chambers's Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 594 (September 1941)

'Birdsong at Evening', *Cornhill Magazine*, Vol. 61 New Series, No. 363 (September 1926)

Blue Print for the Highlands (Unpublished: National Library of Scotland, Deposit 209)

'The Boat', in *Scots Magazine*, Vol 28, No. 3 (December 1937)

'Caithness and Sutherland' in *Scottish Country*, ed. by G. S. Moncrieff (Wishart Books Ltd., 1935)

'The Circle', *The Scots Magazine*, Vol. 16, No. 4, (January 1932)

'Convalescence', *Scots Magazine*, Vol. 42, No. 1, (October 1944)

'Dark Mairi' *Scots Magazine,* Vol. 21, No. 4, (July 1934)

'The Dead Seaman', *Scots Magazine*, Vol. 15, No. 4, (July 1931)

(Writing as Dane M'Neil) "Defensio Scotorum: a reply to W. S. Morrison', *The Scots Magazine*, Vol. 9, No. 1, April 1928

'Diary', (Unpublished: National Library of Scotland, Deposit 209)

'The Face in the Pool', (Unpublished: from the address on the typescript, this dates from between 1948 and 1950)

(Writing as Dane McNeil) 'The Gael will Come Again', *Scots Magazine*, Vol. 14, No. 5, (February 1931)

'"Gentlemen - The Tourist": The New Highland Toast', *Scots Magazine,* Vol. 26, No. 6, (March 1937)

'Half Light', *The Cornhill,* Vol. 59 New Series, No. 353, (November 1925)

Hidden Doors (Edinburgh: The Porpoise Press, 1929)

The Highland Clearances: A reflection (Unpublished: BBC Glasgow, 1954)

Highland Night (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1935)

Highland Pack (London: Faber, 1949)

'In a Spanish Garden', *Argosy*, Vol. 12, No. 4, (April 1951)

'La Madeleine: From a Painting by Henner', *Scottish Chapbook*, Vol. 1, No. 7, (February 1923)

'Land and Sea, Twin halves of the mystery', *Scots Magazine*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (November 1940)

Landscape and Light: Essays by Neil M. Gunn, ed. by Alistair McCleery (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987)

'Light', *Point,* No. 3, (Summer 1968)

'The Little Red Cow', *Scots Magazine*, Vol. 34, No. 5, (February 1941)

The Long John Story (Glasgow: Long John Distilleries, 7.10.1960)

Man Goes Alone (New York: G. W. Stewart, 1944)

'The Man Who Came Back (Study for a one-act play)', *Scots Magazine,* Vol. 8, No.6, (March 1928)

The Man Who Came Back: Short Stories and Essays, ed. by Margery McCulloch (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991)

'The Mirror', *Scots Magazine*, Vol. 11, No. 3, (June 1929)

'Mountain Calendar', in *Highland Pack* (London: Faber, 1949)

'My Bit of Britain', *The Field*, Vol 178, No. 4623 (August 1941)

'This Northland', *Prisoners of War News,* Vol. 2, No. 1, (June - July 1941)

'The Novel at Home', *Scots Magazine*, Vol 45, No. 1, (April 1946)

Off in a Boat (London: Faber, 1938)

'Off in the Car', in *The Scottish Companion*, ed. by Rhoda Spence (Edinburgh: Richard Paterson, 1955)

'On Destruction', *Scots Magazine,* Vol. 35, No. 4, (July 1941)

'On Looking at Things', *Scots Magazine,* Vol. 33 No. 3, (June 1940)

'The Outline', *Scots Magazine*, Vol. 18, No. 6, (March 1933)

'The Poaching at Grianan', *Scots Magazine,* Vols. 11 - 13, (September 1929 - May 1930)

The Poaching at Grianan (Edinburgh, Merchiston Publishing, 2005)

Poems and related early work, Collected by C. J. L. Stokoe (Ampthill: Peglet Press, 1994)

'Presents for their Wives' (Unpublished: National Library of Scotland, Deposit 209)

'Preserving the Scottish Tongue: A Legacy and How to Use It', *Scots Magazine,* Vol. 24, No.2, (November 1935)

'Primitives in the Pool', *The Glasgow Herald*, (28th October 1950)

'The Pursuit of Light', *Scotland's Magazine*, Vol. 45, No. 4, (April 1950)

Retrospect of his collected novels, (Unpublished manuscript)

'Ride the Gale', *The Saturday Evening Post*, Vol. 223, No. 25, (16th December 1950)

'Round the Highlands', *Prisoners of War News,* Vol. 3, No. 2, (March 1942)

(Writing as Nial Guinne) 'Scotsman's English', *Pictish Review,* Vol. 1, No. 8, (June 1928)

'The Scottish Literary Renaissance Movement', *Wick Mercantile Debating Society Magazine, Vol 1, No. 1,* April 1929

(Writing as Dane M'Neil) 'Sea and Land - and Finance: The Church's great silence', in *The Healing of the Nation: The Scottish Church and a waiting people.* A Symposium ed. by Rev. J. W. Stevenson (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1930)

Second Sight, the three-act play (Unpublished: National Library of Scotland, Deposit 209)

Selected Letters, ed. by J. B. Pick (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1987)

'Snow in March', *Scots Magazine,* Vol. 29, No. 3 (June 1938)

(Writing as Neil McPhee) 'The Spectre of the Sign-Post', *Pan*, Vol. 9, No. 23 (May 1923)

'The Storm' *The Scots Magazine*, Vol. 22, No. 5, (February 1935)

Storm and Precipice, and other pieces (London: Faber, 1942)

The Story of Tormore, (Unpublished film script dated 24.11.1960 - but with an attached Shooting Script dated 1958)

'Streets', in *Storm and Precipice, and other pieces* (London: Faber, 1942)

'Sun and Moon', *Scots Magazine*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (November 1942)

'Sun and Moon', Dramatisation for radio (Unpublished: National Library of Scotland, Deposit 209)

(Writing as Nial Guinne) 'Toast', *The Apple Tree,* Vol. 1, No. 1, (May 1918)

'The Terrible Ally', (Unpublished: from the address on the typescript, this dates from between 1950 and 1960)

'Tragedy into Dream', *The Modern Scot*, Vol. 2, No. 1, (Spring 1931)

The Water of Life (Unpublished film script: National Library of Scotland, Deposit 209)

'Whisky', (Unpublished: National Library of Scotland, Deposit 209)

Whisky and Scotland (London: Routledge, 1935)

The White Hour, and other stories (London: Faber, 1950)

'The Wonder Story of the Moray Firth', *Anarchy*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (April 1968)

SECONDARY TEXTS

Aitken, W. R., 'Neil M. Gunn: A Bibliography' in *Neil M. Gunn: The Man and the Writer*, ed. by Alexander Scott and Douglas Gifford (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1973)

Allman, E. J., *Player-King and Adversary: Two Faces of Play in Shakespeare* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1980)

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989)

Bennett, Olivia, 'A Place in History', *BBC History Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 11, (November 2001)

The Holy Bible (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955)

Blackie, Tim, and Colin Macaulay, *The Sculptured Stones of Caithness* (Balgavies, Angus: The Pinkfoot Press, 1998)

Blake, William, *Songs of Innocence and Experience: shewing the two contrary states of the human soul* (London: The Folio Society, 1992)

Bramman, J. I., 'The Vikings', in *The Caithness Book*, ed. by Donald Omand (Inverness: Highland Printers, 1972)

———, 'The Age of the Brochs', in *The Caithness Book*, ed. by Donald Omand (Inverness: Highland Printers, 1972)

Brennan, Timothy, 'The National Longing for Form', in *Nation and Narration*, ed. by Homi K. Bhabha (Routledge: London, 1990)

Broom, John L., 'The Novels of Neil M. Gunn', in *Essays on Neil M. Gunn*, ed. by David Morrison (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1971)

Brown, George Mackay, *Vinland* (London: John Murray, 1992)

Bruce-Mitford, R. L. S., '*The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial: A handbook* (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1968)

Burns, John, *A Celebration of the Light: Zen in the Novels of Neil Gunn* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1988)

Caird, J. B., 'Fionn MacColla - The Twofold Heritage', in *Essays on Fionn MacColla*, ed. by David Morrison (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1973)

Campbell, Alexander, *The Grampians Desolate* (Edinburgh: Manners and Miller, 1804)

Corkery, D., *The Hidden Ireland* (1924) (Goldenbridge, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1989)

Coveney, Peter, *Poor Monkey: The Child in Literature* (London: Rockliff, 1957)

Craig, Cairns, *Out of History* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996)

———, ed., *The History of Scottish Literature,* 4 vols (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987/1988)

Crawford, Barbara E., ed., *Scandinavian Settlement in Northern Britain: Thirteen studies of Place-Names in their Historical Context* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995)

Curtis, Jan, 'The Legend of the *Geilt* and quest for *Imbas Forosnai* in Neil Gunn's *The Well at the World's End*', *Scottish Studies Review*, Vol. 3 No. 2 (Autumn 2002)

Devine, T. M., *The Scottish Nation: 1700 - 2000* (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1999)

Donnachie, Ian and George Hewitt, *A Companion to Scottish History: From the Reformation to the Present* (London: Batsford, 1989)

Donaldson, Gordon, *Scotland: The shaping of a nation, Revised edition* (Nairn: David St John Thomas Publisher, 1993)

Dostoevsky, F. M., *Collected Works*, 10 vols (Moscow: 1956 - 1958)

Dowden, John, *The Celtic Church in Scotland* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1894)

Dunne, J. W., *An Experiment with Time* (London: A. and C. Black, 1927)

Eliot, T. S., *Collected Poems 1909 - 1962* (1963) (London: Faber, 1974)

La Fay, Howard, 'The Vikings', *National Geographic Magazine*, Vol. 137, No. 4, April 1970

Flieger, V., *A Question of Time: J. R. R. Tolkien's Road to Faërie* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press, 1997)

Fraser, G. S., 'Comments' in *Point*, No. 3 (Summer 1968)

Freeman, John, 'Introduction', to *Man and his Symbols*, ed. by Carl G. Jung, U.S.A. paperback edition (New York: Dell Publishing, 1968)

Gardner, Frank M., compiler, *Sequels*, Fifth edition (London: Assoc. of Assistant Librarians, 1967)

Gifford, Douglas, 'Neil Gunn and the Mythic Regeneration of Scotland: The two great epic cycles', in *Neil Gunn's Country*, ed. by Dairmid Gunn and Isobel Murray (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1991)

———, *Neil M Gunn & Lewis Grassic Gibbon* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1983)

Golding, William, *Pincher Martin* (London: Faber, 1956)

Gray, Martin, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Harlow: Longman, 1992)

Grieve, C. M., *Contemporary Scottish Studies: First Series* (London: Leonard Parsons, 1926)

Grigor, Iain Fraser, *Highland Resistance: The Radical Tradition in the Scottish North* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing Company (Edinburgh) Ltd, 2000)

Grimble, Ian, *Neil M. Gunn Memorial Lecture* (Ampthill: Peglet Press, 1992)

———, *The Trial of Patrick Sellar* (Edinburgh: The Saltire Society, 1993)

Gunn, Dairmid, 'Foreword', to *Wild Geese Overhead* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1991)

———, 'Foreword' to *The Silver Bough* (Glasgow: Richard Drew, 1985)

Gunn, Dairmid, and Isobel Murray, eds, *Neil Gunn's Country* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1991)

Gunn, Mrs M., 'Since the "Forty-Five"', in *The Caithness Book*, ed. by Donald Omand (Inverness: Highland Printers, 1972)

Hamilton, Edith, *Mythology: Timeless tales of Gods and Heroes* (Boston, Mass.: Mentor, 1953)

Hart, Francis Russell, 'Neil M. Gunn: A Brief Memoir', in *Neil M. Gunn: The Man and the Writer,* ed. by Alexander Scott and Douglas Gifford (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1973)

———, *The Scottish Novel: From Smollett to Spark* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978)

———, 'Neil Gunn's Drama of the Light', in *The History of Scottish Literature: Volume 4, Twentieth Century,* ed. by Cairns Craig (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987)

———, 'Foreword', to *A Celebration of the Light: Zen in the Novels of Neil Gunn* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1988)

———, 'Beyond History and Tragedy: Neil Gunn's early fiction', in *Essays on Neil M. Gunn* (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1971) pp.

———, 'The Hunter and the Circle: Neil Gunn's fiction of violence', in *Studies in Scottish Literature* Vol. 1, No. 1 (July 1963)

Hart, Francis Russell, and J. B. Pick, *Neil M. Gunn: A Highland Life,* (London: John Murray, 1981)

Herrigel, Eugen, *Zen in the Art of Archery*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, (London: Routledge, 1953).

Holmes, Richard, 'Introduction', to William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and Experience: shewing the two contrary states of the human soul* (London: The Folio Society, 1992)

Huxley, Aldous, *Brave New World* (1932) (London: The Folio Society, 1971)

Joyce, James, *Ulysses* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968)

Jung, Lorenz, 'Letter to John Gunn' (Unpublished letter dated 5.12.1985, in the possession of Dairmid Gunn).

Jung, Lorenz, 'The Archetype of the Puer Æternus in Our Time' (Unpublished paper, undated, in the possession of Dairmid Gunn).

Kearton, Richard, *With Nature and a Camera* (London: Cassell, 1897)

Kernan, A., '"Ducdame": Shakespearean comedy to Twelfth Night', in *The Revels: History of Drama in English, vol III 1576 - 1613*, ed. by J. L. Barrell and others, (London: Methuen, 1975)

Kotler, Philip, *Marketing Management* (Paramus, NJ, USA, Prentice Hall, 2000)

Kunitz, Stanley J. and Howard Haycraft, eds, *Twentieth Century Authors: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature* (New York: H.W. Wilson Co., 1942)

Kunitz, Stanley J. and Vineta Colby, eds, *Twentieth Century Authors, First Supplement: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature* (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1955)

Leonard, George L, *Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to Cage* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1994)

Linklater, Eric, *The Men of Ness: The Saga of Thorlief Coalbiter's Sons*, The Orkney Edition (London: Cape, 1952)

McCallum, R, 'The Picts', in *The Caithness Book*, ed. by Donald Omand (Inverness: Highland Printers, 1972)

McCleery, Alistair, ed., *Landscape and Light: Essays by Neil M. Gunn* (Aberdeen Aberdeen University Press, 1987)

MacColla, Fionn, *The Albannach* (1932) (Edinburgh: Reprographia, 1971)

———, *And the Cock Crew* (Glasgow: William MacLellan, 1945)

———, *Ane Tryall of Heretiks* (Collieston, Aberdeenshire: Slains, 1962)

———, *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* (Edinburgh: Macdonald, 1967)

———, 'Mein Bumpf', in *Essays on Fionn MacColla*, ed. by David Morrison, (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1973)

———, *Move up John*, ed. by John Herdman (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1994)

McCulloch, Margery, *The Novels of Neil M. Gunn: a critical survey* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987)

———, ed., *The Man Who Came Back: Short Stories and Essays* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991)

MacDiarmid, H., *The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid.* ed. by Alan Bold (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984)

———, 'Book Review of Fionn MacColla's *The Albannach*' in the *Free Man* (1932)

Macdonald, A. M., ed., *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1972)

Mackie, J. D., *A History of Scotland,* Second Edition (London: Penguin, 1978)

Mackenzie, Alexander, F.S.A., Scot, *The History of the Highland Clearances*, Second Edition, altered and revised with a new introduction by Ian MacPherson, M.P. (Glasgow: Alex MacLaren & Sons, 1946)

M'Alpine, Neil, *A Pronouncing Gaelic Dictionary*, Ninth Edition (Edinburgh: MacLachlan and Stewart, 1890)

Macleod, Fiona, *Poems and Dramas* (London: Heinemann, 1923)

MacNeacail, Aonghas, 'Introduction' to, *A Writers Ceilidh for Neil Gunn*, ed. by Aonghas MacNeacail (Nairn: Balnain Books, 1991)

McNeill, F. Marian, *The Silver Bough, Vol. 1: Scottish Folklore and Folk-belief* (1957) (Glasgow: William MacLellan, 1977)

Manlove, Colin, *Scottish Fantasy Literature: A Critical Survey* (Edinburgh: Canongate Academic, 1994)

Mitchison, N., 'Living Around with Neil', in *Neil Gunn's Country,* ed. by Dairmid Gunn and Isobel Murray (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1991)

Moncrieff, A. R. Hope, *Classic Myth and Legend* (London: Gresham, Circa. 1910)

Morrison, Alex, 'Department of Archaeology, University of Glasgow, Occasional Paper No. 3', *Dunbeath: A cultural landscape* (Glasgow: Dunbeath Preservation Trust and the Department of Archaeology, University of Glasgow, 1996)

Morrison, David, ed. *Essays on Neil M. Gunn* (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1971)

———, ed. *Essays on Fionn MacColla* (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1973)

Muir, Edwin, 'A Mature Book', *Scots Magazine,* Vol, 39, No. 5 (August 1943)

Muir, Edwin, *The Complete Poems of Edwin Muir*, ed. by Peter Butter (Aberdeen: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1991)

O'Dell, A. C. and K. Walton, *The Highlands & Islands of Scotland* (London: Nelson, 1962)

Omand, Donald, ed., *The Caithness Book* (Inverness: Highland Printers, 1972)

O'Neill, Timothy R., *The Individuated Hobbit: Jung, Tolkien and the Archetypes of Middle-earth* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980)

Ordnance Survey: Road Atlas Britain (London: Chancellor Press, 2001)

Orwell, George, *Coming up for Air* (London: Gollanz, 1939)

———, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954)

The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, Vol. 2 (Oxford: OUP, 1971)

Pick, J. B., 'A Neglected Major Novel: Neil Gunn's *The Key of the Chest'* in *Scottish Literary Journal* Vol 17, No. 1 (May 1990)

———, 'Neil Gunn and the Eternal Landscape', in *Neil Gunn's Country* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1991)

———, ed., *Neil M. Gunn: Selected Letters* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1987)

Price, Richard, *The Fabulous Matter of Fact: The Poetics of Neil M. Gunn* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991)

Radford, F. L. and R. R. Wilson, 'Some Phases of the Jungian Moon: Jung's Influence on Modern Literature', in *English Studies in Canada*, Vol. viii, No. 3, (September 1982)

Reid, Alexander, 'Neil Gunn's Mysticism', in *Neil M. Gunn: The Man and the Writer*, ed. by Alexander Scott and Douglas Gifford (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1973)

Rowe, William Woodin, *Dostoevsky: Child and man in his works* (New York: New York University Press, 1968)

Said, Edward W., *Orientalism: Western conceptions of the orient* (1978) (London: Penguin, 1995)

Scott, Alexander and Douglas Gifford, eds., *Neil M. Gunn: The Man and the Writer* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1973)

Scott, Alexander, 'Folk Epic: The Silver Darlings' in *Neil M. Gunn: The Man and the Writer* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1973)

Shakespeare, William, *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, ed. by W. J. Craig (London: Oxford University Press, 1926)

Sharp, Alan, *A Green Tree in Gedde* (London: Michael Joseph, 1965)

Skrubbeltrang, Fridlev, *The Danish Folk High Schools* (Copenhagen: Det Danske Selskab, 1947)

Smith, Iain Crichton, *Consider the Lilies* (London: Gollancz, 1968)

Smout, T. C., *A Century of the Scottish People 1830 - 1950* (London: Fontana, 1987)

Spence, Rhoda, ed., *The Scottish Companion* (Edinburgh: Richard Paterson, 1955)

Squire, Charles, *Celtic Myth and Legend Poetry and Romance* (London: Gresham, Circa. 1910)

Stokoe, C. J. L., *A Bibliography of the Works of Neil M. Gunn* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987)

Storr, Anthony, *Jung* (London: Fontana, 1973)

Thompson, Francis, 'Neil M. Gunn: Recorder and Interpreter', in *Essays on Neil M. Gunn*, ed. by David Morrison (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1971)

Townsend, John Rowe, *Written for Children* (London: The Bodley Head, 1990)

Walsh, M. *The Key Above the Door,* 3/6d edition (London: Chambers, 1928)

Watson, Roderick, *The Literature of Scotland* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985)

Whyte, Christopher, 'Fishy Masculinities: *Neil Gunn's* The Silver Darlings', in *Gendering the Nation: Studies in Modern Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995)

Wilhelm, R., and C. G. Jung, eds., *The I Ching or Book of Changes* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975)

Wilhelm, R., and C. G. Jung, eds., *The Secret of the Golden Flower: A Chinese Book of Life* (London: Kegan Paul and Co., 1931)

Wittig, Kurt, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* (Edinburgh: The Mercat Press, 1978)

Wordsworth, William, *The Works of William Wordsworth* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1994)

———, *The Prelude: The four texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995)

Zamiatin, Yevgeny, *We* (New York: Dutton, 1924)