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## Notes and Documents: John Galt; David Lindsay's Voyage to Arcturus; Edwin Muir

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## Notes and Documents



### JOHN GALT'S CANADIAN EXPERIENCE: THE SCOTTISH STRAIN

"Vertical Mosaic" is a phrase happily adopted by many critics and historians to explain the quality of Canadian life. "Mosaic" refers to the notion that the individual pieces, the ethnic groups and sub-groups, tend to hold their shape, keep their colour, rather than to melt and meld into "One Nation, Indivisible." "Vertical" alludes to the fact that certain groups tend to move to high positions in every sort of scale--political, economic, artistic, social. Scottish "pieces" in the Canadian mosaic have always figured high in the vertical pattern.

The Scots came early to Canada, bound for the fur trade, exploring and exploiting the harsh northland: Mackenzie, Simon Fraser, MacTavish, Simpson and McGill. Then a second wave of Scots came in the early nineteenth century for less swashbuckling adventures, making land, setting up machine shops and printing presses, working as early journalists, clerks and salesmen. Even when the Scottish groups no longer predominated at immigration points, Scottish tastes and values seemed so to have permeated Canadian life that a Scottish colouring still tinges the Canadian mosaic.

I would like to pick up one rather gritty bit of Scottishness from that mosaic. This is *Bogle Corbet*, a novel published in 1831 by John Galt. Examining it, we may illuminate many

qualities both Scottish and Canadian.

In the early nineteenth century, John Galt appeared to rival Walter Scott. His *Annals of the Parish* represented one of the two worlds of Scotland: the Lowland community, Presbyterian, decent, rather sentimental, of necessity parsimonious, practical and rather opportunistic. It is a world respectably poised against the other Scottish realm, the world of the Highlanders. Galt's *Autobiography* refers specifically to his intentions. As against Sir Walter, he says, he writes "theoretic biographies," eschewing incident for verisimilitude. His main ideal, he says, is "to embody facts and observations collected and made on actual occurrences."<sup>1</sup>

*Bogle Corbet* is one of those "theoretic biographies." It was written after Galt had been in Canada and it was designed "to show what a person of ordinary gentility has really to expect in emigrating to Canada."<sup>2</sup> In it a middle-aged emigrant leads a group of Paisley weavers to Nox on the river Slant. He founds a city, cuts roads, corrals a schoolteacher, builds a mill for the community, and quietly adjusts to the problems of isolation and monotony in the Canadian bush. In real life, John Galt had come from the Lowlands to London and thence to the Canadian colony in 1826. Canada in the 1820's offered a welcome homeliness to the thousands of Scots emigrating in post-Napoleonic years. These were colonists cleared from Scotland not by Highland feuds or landlords' selfishness, but by economic shifts from a hand-loom economy to an early industrialism. Many were lured by schemes such as that of Galt's Canada Company: schemes in which landless agricultural workers or unemployed craftsmen ("operatives") offered their labour as down payment for land. Galt got investors to put money for supplies into his scheme; talked the Government into ceding land from crown reserves, and then collected Scottish workers to put their brawn into the bargain, promising them an eventual chance to buy some of the land they improved, the rest to be sold for the company shareholders' profits.

In his novel, Galt shows his hero as leading a group of impoverished craftsmen up the river St. Lawrence, along Lake Ontario to York, then to the mouth of the "Debit" river, and hence sixty miles inland. These are not pilgrim fathers, actuated by religious or political ideals. "Money, the want of it, or to get it, is the actuating spring, whatever may be the pretext of intending emigrants of the middle ranks" (233); thus Bogle Corbet explains the motivations of his group. Bogle Corbet's followers are moderate--perhaps too moderate--in their dreams. One of Bogle Corbet's friends comments, "Their wants were few before they came to Canada, and if they get as good here as what they were used to among the hills and the heather--

and they get far better--ye should no be so unreasonable as to expec' the'll be over industrious anent improvement." (11)

How will such a group of Scottish bodies tackle the wilderness? Bogle Corbet believes in cooperative effort, in the strength of "a bundle of sticks." (33) The group threatens to disintegrate; some of the settlers rebel as soon as they reach Nox. Throwing down the tools with which Bogle Corbet has provided them, they attempt to strike out, every man for himself. But he pulls them together by suasion. They rebel again when, roads having been built, Bogle Corbet insists on selling the now improved land. They argue against his doctrine of communal effort again, over the question of building a mill. This time he makes partial concessions. In other words the plot shows us a bundle of sticks held together, though barely, by a determined leader. Not a heroic leader, but a pawky, hard-headed middle-class manager.

*Bogle Corbet* thus represents the continuing Scottish interest in cooperative effort, an interest growing perhaps from the clan, and reinforced by the enclosing geography of the glens. The quiet but widespread persistence of socialism and of cooperatives in Canada perhaps suggests that this notion remained acceptable (perforce, perhaps) to later dwellers in the Canadian provinces.

A second story thread concerns Bogle's friend Captain Campbell Dungowan. Dungowan is welcomed to Nox by Corbet and invited to remain as a magistrate; he agrees and further suggests that to have "a quieter order of society" a military discipline should be established. "You must not only have a Captain," he says, "but subalterns, sergeants and corporals." (73) This military note is another part of the Scottish strain. Scots' military history, including their involvement in mercenary wars, was a by-product of poverty as well as of loyalty to embattled causes. Pleasure in military precision and discipline remains a paradoxical part of Highland wildness, and respect for the military remains part of the Canadian mosaic, tied to a continuance of what Professor Frye calls the "garrison" quality<sup>3</sup> in Canadian life.

Captain Dungowan, incidentally, appears in the sub-plot of the novel not only because of his military actions but because of his clannish Campbell pride. The rather creaking melodramatic story of old Mrs. Paddock and her bastard grandsons is unravelled when Captain Campbell recognizes and justifies the pride of his long-lost kinswoman. English observers have always been quick to comment that the Scots haven't all that much to be proud of, but the answer from Scots has been echoed in Canada: "Here's tae us! Wha's like us?"

In the main plot line concerning Bogle Corbet's family life,

the hero manifests another Scottish obsession. He wants to supply education for his children, and provide it he does after travelling to Niagara to find a schoolteacher. That insistence on education had characterized the poorest places in Scotland. The eighteenth-century Scottish ideal was "a school in every clachan, a college in every town,"<sup>4</sup> and Edinburgh and Glasgow, St. Andrews and Aberdeen Universities had all been open to any boy who could pack enough oatmeal to last him through the winter. Very soon after John Galt's stay in Canada, a fellow Scot, John Strachan, began the establishment of a school and university system in Ontario. Faith in schooling would remain a prominent characteristic of Canadian life, implemented by school systems long dominated by Scots. In the novel Corbet's rather hectic search for a schoolmaster leads him to consider the aristocratic Colonel Jocelyn, the feckless James Foddie, a Cambridge graduate who rhapsodizes at Niagara Falls, and finally a very nice young man called Pomfret who comes back to Nox and settles into the job of educating the settlers' children.

Next to the school comes the kirk. Bogle Corbet brings a succession of preachers to his village, according to all but the Methodist, Fagotter, a warm welcome. Fagotter's welcome is cold: he is dumped into the mill-race. (In real life, John Galt gave three prime town sites to the Roman Catholic, the Church of England, and the Presbyterian churches in the town of Guelph.) Perhaps the proliferation of seceding groups in Scotland had prepared Scots to live more or less happily with a variety of churches in each village. And perhaps the continued multiplicity of churches still visible in small towns in Canada, perpetuates that church-centered but tolerant vision.

The kirk, the school, the warm and bustling home life, the rollicking treatment of drunkenness, all these obvious and familiar staples of Scottish Lowland life appear in *Bogle Corbet*. A more subtle and more important element, also attributable to the Scottish heritage, is the acceptance of a hard life in the face of an obviously more attractive alternative. Scots have always known that the road to prosperity and ease led out of Scotland; but it has been a matter of pride to resist the highroad. Similarly, the emigrants in Nox are shown as carefully weighing the values of a land less prosperous, less smiling than its neighbour. When the group first arrives at Quebec, one of the families leaves Bogle Corbet to make for the United States. Eventually they return rather subdued; but throughout the story we hear of members of the association being attracted to that preferable place, New York State. Maybe it's Presbyterian fatalism or dogma of justified suffering

that keeps most of the emigrants in Nox, however. And of course not all Americans are properly receptive to the Scot's notion of his own superiority. One immigrant returned from the States mentions that he "Ay [made] adversaries by threeping that Glasgow was a braver town than Rochester; which among friends will no be denied...but the Yankies are a real upsetting folk."

(209) This reminds us of still another part of the Scots tradition--the pleasure of self-mockery. Galt's comic vein, like the vernacular irony of Burns, remains ingrained in the Canadian sense of humour, a humour which we are told serves us as a defence against the great grim powers--natural and political--that surround Canadians.

Bogle Corbet in his quiet self-mockery is the first of a long line of Canadian anti-heroes. Middle-class, middle-aged, given to mild elation and to equally mild melancholy, he is a very unromantic alternative to the American Adam. One has only to think of Galt's other great literary rival and contemporary, James Fenimore Cooper, to realize just how Scottish and Canadian Bogle Corbet is. Cooper's characters represent either the high-class gentry, or the new free wild frontiersman. Galt's hero is a middle-class townsman, moderate and unromantic.

Into *Bogle Corbet*, then, Galt wove many of the threads that would remain as a recognizable part of the Canadian fabric: cooperative effort, militarism, pride, moderation, humour, focus on education, sentimentality. The book is very Canadian; and it has been very much ignored. Why? Because it is autumnal, and dour, rather depressing in its story of bush realities. We may know that life is not romantic, but we do like to read romances even if we are too inhibited to live them. We miss in *Bogle Corbet* any trace of a love story. Urseline is a bad-tempered, good-hearted, middle-aged woman. Probably better to live with than Flora MacIvor or the Bride of Lammermoor or Cooper's genteel maidens; but not as much fun to read about. In general John Galt's honesty did not please his contemporary audience in Canada. Will it come to its own in the current wave of interest in early Canadiana? Such honesty rarely gets a hearty welcome in any period. John Kenneth Galbraith tells the story of returning to his home country, that part of south-western Ontario, not far from Guelph, which he had described in *The Scotch*. On his return he sensed hostility and asked "But isn't it all true?" The answer was "Who wants to hear the truth about a place like this?"

Certainly John Galt's contemporaries in Canada didn't want to hear the truth as he told it; they preferred to read the work of his Canadian contemporary John Richardson. They preferred to read in *Wacousta* of a really romantic Scot--who com-

bines the role of savage warrior and demon lover, as he swoops and whoops through the wilderness. But *Bogle Corbet* does tell the truth, based on Galt's actuality. The book remains the record of an important part of the Canadian Mosaic: the Scottish strain. To return to the point with which I began, we might turn that phrase "the Scottish strain" into an explanation of the upward mobility of the Scots. Being a Scot in Canada is indeed a strain, as Margaret Laurence will tell you, or Alice Munro, or Graeme Gibson, or Hugh McLennan. Or John Galt.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *The Autobiography of John Galt* (London, 1833), II, 209.

<sup>2</sup> *Bogle Corbet, or The Emigrants* (London, 1831), I, 2. All subsequent references to *Bogle Corbet* refer to volume III. Page numbers are inserted in parenthesis following each reference. A new edition of the Canadian section of the novel has been issued in the New Canadian Library Series by McClelland and Stewart, edited and with introduction by Elizabeth Waterston, 1975.

<sup>3</sup> Northrop Frye, "Conclusion to *A Literary History of Canada*," *The Stubborn Structure* (London, 1970), p. 289.

<sup>4</sup> The ideal was enunciated by John Knox, "Book of Discipline," *Works*, ed. David Laing (Edinburgh, 1864), p. 209.

#### THE STRUCTURE OF A VOYAGE TO ARCTURUS

The remarkable variety of disagreements among critics of David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus* invites comparison with the old story of the blind men and the elephant. One critic finds that "it is sex which interests the author"<sup>1</sup>--another sees the book

as "a stupendous ontological fable; a metaphysical 'Pilgrim's Progress',"<sup>2</sup> while yet another asserts that it is not "an allegory in the sense that 'Pilgrim's Progress' is," that it is "vividly real but frighteningly incomprehensible."<sup>3</sup> Kingsley Amis, who did not like the book,<sup>4</sup> agrees with J. B. Pick, who did, that the novel "cannot be interpreted consistently in a necessary and coherent order."<sup>5</sup> Even Eric Rabkin, who seems to regard the book as something of a favorite, finds in it a "mad rush from episode to episode..." and "utterly unjustified leaps from physiology to physiology, from sense to sense, and from mythology to mythology"<sup>6</sup> while Jack Schofield, perhaps alone among the critics of this work, demonstrates any hint of understanding of the structure which provides Lindsay's novel with an internal logic quite in keeping with its final statement.<sup>7</sup> If these critics had all been aware of this underlying structure, perhaps they might still have disagreed in their assessments, but at least their readers would not suffer the uncomfortable suspicion that each critic read a different novel.

Professor Schofield, in his article, "Cosmic Imagery in *A Voyage to Arcturus*," has done an admirable job of pointing out, among other things, the significance of several of the dichotomies in Lindsay's novel: the relationships between the tower on Earth and the tower on Muspel, between Crystalman and Surtur, and between Maskull and Nightspore. More importantly, he has shown the relationship between Branchspell, "the same kind of sun as our own, lighting man's road," and Alppain, which "lights God's road." However, a clear understanding of the intricate structure of Lindsay's novel requires a closer examination of this last dichotomy.

The primary colors produced by Branchspell are those produced by our sun, but Lindsay provides each color with an allegorical significance: "So here you have another illustration of the necessary trinity of nature. Blue is existence...Yellow is relation...Red is feeling."<sup>8</sup> The term "existence" in this trinity can be read to cover a range of meanings from the purpose of an individual's existence in this life to a cosmic vision of the universe. The term "feeling" can be read to cover a range from the simple, passive reception of sensory impressions to actions based primarily on self-interest. The term "relation" then can cover the whole range of attempts at integration of feeling and existence, that is, the move from acting out of self-interest toward acting in the interests of the cosmic order. Viewed in this way, the trinity of feeling, relation, and existence forms the framework on which Lindsay constructed his novel.

First, Lindsay includes three worlds in the novel. Earth, where we have only one sun (corresponding to Branchspell), is

the world of feeling, where men act primarily out of self-interest. Lindsay gives enough information about the characters present at the seance to remind us of this characteristic of our world. Tormance, where we find two suns, is the world of relation, where men are tormented by their dual nature, where the realm of feeling is seen in relation to that of existence. Muspel is lit by no sun; all light, all existence, begins in this final world, the world of existence. The novel, then, is the story of Maskull/Nightspore's journey from the world of feeling through the world of relation to the world of existence.

During this journey, Maskull undergoes a corresponding series of three rebirths. The first rebirth, Maskull's arrival on Tormance, thrusts him, like a newborn infant, into a world where he is completely helpless, and where everything, even his sensory impressions, is entirely new to him. His task at the point of this rebirth is to deal with his sensory impressions, his feelings. The second rebirth, after the vision of his death in the Wombflash Forest, awakens him to a fuller understanding of his predicament and of what his role can be. He recognizes that his past concern with himself has been an error, as evidenced in his interview with Dreamsinter: "I ought not to have asked about myself, but about Surtur" (p. 154). His concern from this point is to be his relationship to Surtur. The third rebirth, following the actual death of Maskull, confronts Nightspore with the ultimate realities of existence. On descending from the tower on Muspel, Nightspore, however pessimistically, accepts his role as a part of that ultimate struggle which, in fact, is existence.

The most important and most complex trinity is composed of the lives to which each of the rebirths leads. In addition, each of the first two lives also comprises a trinity: the three days which make up each life. The concerns of Maskull's first life are revealed by his new organs: the breve, through which he receives the thoughts of others; the poigns, through which he can understand all living things; and the magn, by which love is increased. These organs fill Maskull with sympathy, understanding, and love for all life; and acting on these feelings, he accepts Joiwind and Panawe's simplistic view of life. He is told that Tormance, like Earth, has one god and one devil, and the god is called Shaping or Surtur, and that "the world is good and pure" (p. 56). All this, of course, is suggestive of Earth, the world of feeling.

On his second day, Maskull begins to deal with the relation between his feelings and his existence in this life of feeling. He awakens to find his organs transformed; he now has a sorb, which shows him his surroundings only as objects of his own needs, and a third arm, which is a further evolved magn. While

on the first day his will was passive and he was content with his sensory impressions of the world around him, on the second day his will asserts itself. He now begins to function on the basis of the relation between his feelings and the objects around him. In his interaction with Oceaxe, Crimtyphon, and Tydomin, Maskull begins to exercise his will over others and to experience others exercising their wills over him. When he meets Spadevil, Maskull's sorb is transformed into two probes, which intensify and alter his other senses. The effect of this transformation is that while Maskull is still concerned with the relationship between himself and the objects around him, he no longer sees objects according to how they can serve his ends, but according to how he can serve theirs. When Cactice later destroys Maskull's left probe, he sees both these modes of perception as false. The second mode, that of sacrificing oneself for another, is "a cloak under which we share the pleasure of other people" (p. 145) and therefore it is still action in one's own self-interest. Despite the fact that he finds himself repulsed by everything in the world, he has made some progress; he is told that Surtur and Shaping are not the same entity. Maskull has spent his second day in the life of feeling exploring the relation between his feelings and the world around him.

Awakening on the morning of his third day, the existence segment of his life of feeling, Maskull finds his third arm nerveless and his probe replaced by a third eye. The use of this eye is not discovered until he is again reborn the following day. During this third day, however, the first mysteries of his own existence are revealed: he is given the vision of his death and told the purpose of his journey. After the vision, he falls "in a faint that resembled death" (p. 154).

When he wakes on his fourth day, Maskull is reborn into his second life on Tormance. This life corresponds to the relation component of the trinity, hence the function of his third eye: "By adding a third angle to his sight, every object he looked at stood out in greater relief. The world looked less *flat*--more realistic and significant...he seemed somehow to lose his egotism, and to become free and thoughtful" (p. 156). He also finds his third arm no longer of use so he discards it. Now for the first time he has some knowledge of his purpose as well as his feelings and he begins to try to integrate them. This first day of his second life, like the first day of his first life on Tormance, is spent discussing his new world with a couple who feeds him and sets him off on his way into the world. This time, however, Maskull does not passively accept his sensory impressions; he tries to relate them to his new knowledge, to decide what is real, that is, what really exists,

and what is false (pp. 164-167).

On the fifth day, the second day of his life of relation, Maskull visits Swaylone's Island and, as during the corresponding day in his first life, Maskull's will asserts itself. Here, however, his will acts on the lake, on the physical world of Shaping, by "trying to create physical shapes--and, above all, one shape, that of Surtur" (p. 184). So, while he is again concerned with acting in relation to the world around him, Maskull is no longer acting solely on the basis of his own desires, but rather on the basis of what he perceives his purpose to be.

On the sixth day, the third day of his second life on Torrance, Maskull reaches Matterplay and sees for a moment through the eyes of Digrung. The new organs which he produces in Matterplay, six new eyes, clearly demonstrate both the relation aspect of this second life and the existence aspect of this third day. The six eyes literally enable him to perceive "two worlds simultaneously" (p. 195). The added world, with its green sparks trying to escape from smothering clouds, corresponds to what is seen from the Muspel tower: existence.

In Threal, Maskull's perception of what is real and what is false is tested. Maskull loses the last of his new organs on entering this underground world where the trinity is reversed and men struggle away from their goals. "Existence is Faceny's world, relation is Amfuse's world, feeling is Thire's world" (p. 213). Here Shaping's world is existence, and reaching toward the creator is feeling, exactly the reverse of what Maskull has been learning through experience. As a result of this reversal, Corpang finds in his search for God that "the first stages are richer in fruit and more promising than the later ones. The longer a man seeks Thire, the more he seems to absent himself" (p. 215). On contemplating the three Colossi, Maskull begins to experience one by one the realms of feeling, relation and existence according to Thire, but with the coming of Muspel-light, the statues die; Maskull is not deceived.

Before he can leave the world and the life of relation, Maskull must assert the true nature of his existence by proving first his mastery of his own feelings, second, his mastery of his relation to the world around him, and finally, his recognition of the purpose of his own existence. The first is demonstrated by his confronting and triumphing over the "waking nightmare" (p. 240) of his own passion. The second is demonstrated by his kissing Sullenbode and transforming her, and Maskull demonstrates the last by his fascination with the display of Muspel-light to the exclusion of all else. He wants "to spring up and become incorporated with the sublime

universe which was beginning to unveil itself" (p. 259). Sullenbode understands, leaves, and perishes.

The loss of Sullenbode robs Maskull of all sense of purpose and he can no longer continue on the path to Adage. By abandoning all feeling, he leaves the world of relation. He wanders down the Mornstab Pass to meet Krag, Gangnet, and, with the dawning of the seventh day, the inevitable death which releases Nightspore from Crystalman's world. Confronted with the healing spectacle of existence seen from Muspel, Nightspore accepts rebirth to enter into the struggle between Muspel and Crystalman: his third life.

This trinity may apply with equal success to other aspects of Lindsay's novel. For example, each of the seven days could be divided according to the trinity, and the three levels of allegory, personal, social, and archetypal, which Schofield suggests<sup>9</sup> seem also to fit into the structure of the trinity. Certainly Lindsay applied it elsewhere: to length, breadth, and depth (pp. 180, 213), to music (pp. 180-81), and, of course, to the primary colors of Alppain: jale, blue, and ulfire (p. 238). But more importantly, the disturbing ending of the novel may be better understood through the use of this trinity.

Lindsay is not suggesting in this novel that we worship pain or that God is pain. He is suggesting, however, that pain has a certain important spiritual function. Pleasure seems to be a single phenomenon. We aim for it consistently in ways direct and indirect, physical and mental, emotional and spiritual. But, like Arcturus and the Arcturian god (which at first also seem each to be a single entity), pleasure is actually a duality; it contains its opposite. The Arcturian legend has it that Krag "dogs Shaping's footsteps everywhere, and whatever the latter does, he undoes. To love he joins death; to sex, shame; to intellect, madness; to virtue, cruelty; and to fair exteriors, bloody entrails" (p. 177). So pain (Krag) permits pleasure (Shaping) to be viewed in perspective (relation). Thus, pain serves as a constant reminder that our feelings are not what matter in this world, and that furthermore, recognition of this fact "is only the first stage of the journey; though many good men imagine it to be the whole journey" (p. 166). While Krag sets Maskull on his journey, it is neither Krag nor pain which keeps him on the track; he follows the drumming, which, unlike pleasure and pain, is not of this world but of another.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Brigid Brody, "Rare Books," *New Statesman*, 65, (June 14, 1963), p. 905.

<sup>2</sup> E. H. Visiak, "The Arcturan Shadow," *Notes and Queries*, 178 (March 20, 1940), p. 225.

<sup>3</sup> Roger Lancelyn Green, *Into Other Worlds* (New York, 1957), pp. 180-81.

<sup>4</sup> Kingsley Amis, "Adventures on a Distant Star," *New York Times Book Review*, Nov. 24, 1963, p. 60.

<sup>5</sup> J. B. Pick, *The Strange Genius of David Lindsay: An Appreciation* (London, 1970), p. 4, as quoted by Jack Schofield in "Book Review--*The Strange Genius of David Lindsay*," *SSL*, 10 (July 1972), p. 61.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Rabkin, "Conflation of Genres and Myths in David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus*," *Journal of Narrative Technique*, 7 (1977), p. 155.

<sup>7</sup> Jack Schofield, "*Cosmic Imagery in A Voyage to Arcturus*," *Extrapolation* 13 (May 1972), pp. 146-51, and "Book Review," *SSL*, 10 (July 1972), pp. 59-61.

<sup>8</sup> David Lindsay, *A Voyage to Arcturus* (New York, 1968), p. 238. Subsequent references to this edition appear in the text as page numbers only.

<sup>9</sup> Jack Schofield, "Book Review," *SSL*, 10 (July 1972), p. 61.

## KING LEAR IN EDWIN MUIR'S PROSE WRITINGS

From his earliest prose writings to his last Edwin Muir used *King Lear* as a touchstone against which to judge other literary achievements.<sup>1</sup> But for a period of more than twenty years

Muir's interest in *King Lear* seems more pressingly personal; and he draws upon Shakespeare's play in a variety of ways in his prose writings to enable him to apprehend and clarify his own overriding concerns: the nature of man, and his relationship with the animal world.

Muir's second novel, *Poor Tom* (1932), the title of which obviously suggests an indebtedness to *King Lear*, opens with the betrayal of a young man by his brother (cf. Edmund's betrayal of Edgar), and centres on the struggle between them: between Tom Manson who is in subjection to his animal needs and Mansie who refuses to acknowledge them. To articulate the conceptions of man embodied in the two brothers, Muir draws on the pattern of clothes imagery in *King Lear* which functions to describe and judge various definitions of man:<sup>2</sup> for instance, Oswald, whose humanity extends no further than his fulfillment of his social role, is condemned by Kent: "a tailor made thee" (II.ii, 55-6); Tom the naked beggar is addressed by Lear thus: "Thou art the thing itself; unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art" (III.iv, 108-10); and Lear himself, who momentarily identifies the outcast Tom with true humanity, cries: "Off, off, you lendings! Come, unbutton here" (III.iv, 111). Two descriptions from *Poor Tom* should make clear Muir's debt to the clothes imagery of *King Lear*. The "clumsy brute" Tom, with his overpowering instinctual life, "his low passions" (*PT* 42), is bewildered and trapped by the conventional proprieties of city life, which are symbolised throughout the novel by clothes:

Certainly it seemed a queer arrangement that young fellows courting should go about for years with their senses aroused under their clothes and pay no more attention to it than to a slight physical inconvenience....But no doubt they got used to it; perhaps it was a normal drawback of love that had to be accepted with the rest...bow ties neatly in place, every button fastened, trousers creased.

(*PT* 26)

In opposition to Tom the "disinfected" Mansie embraces propriety as the mark of humanity and cultivates a fantastic purity (*PT* 124):

A spot of dirt on his sleeve was enough to make him unhappy....Clumsiness in others annoyed him; so that whenever Tom returned at night with another wound, the sight of the bloody bandage smeared with oil and grit angered him...and somewhere in his mind the

words took shape: "Great clumsy brute!"...To live and dress quietly was simple enough....He liked his suits to be of a soft shade of fawn, his neckties to be quiet. (PT 33)<sup>3</sup>

Significant reference to *King Lear* can also be found in other of Muir's work of the period. Even in a context where one would not expect to find mention of a Shakespearian play, in a discussion of the unemployed in the travel book, *Scottish Journey* (1935), Muir uses a statement from *King Lear* on the relation between human and animal needs as a moral touchstone against which to judge those who quibble over the minimum financial help that might "reasonably" be given to the unemployed: "O, reason not the need: our meanest beggars/Are in the poorest things superfluous:/Allow not nature more than nature needs, /Man's life's as cheap as beast's...But for true need,/You heavens, give me patience, patience I need!" (SJ 136, *King Lear*, II.iv, 265-70). Allusion to *King Lear* also appears in Muir's poetry of the period; "The Fall," *Journeys and Places* (1937), invokes *King Lear* in the lines, "My fall was like the fall that burst/Old Lear's heart on the summer sward," and, in "The Wheel," *The Narrow Place* (1943), the line "Nothing can come of history but history" is an unnoticed echo of Lear's "Nothing will come of nothing" (I.i, 92).

In the context of Muir's preoccupation in the 1930s with *King Lear* it should not surprise us that even in Muir's autobiography, *The Story and the Fable* (1940), Shakespeare's play is not absent. Indeed it is in the autobiography, during a discussion in the opening chapter of man's relationship with nature, that Muir's concern with *King Lear* becomes wholly overt: he argues that Goneril, Regan and Cornwall are "merely animals" (the autobiography, according to Muir, was an "attempt to find out what a human being is"):<sup>4</sup>

But when man is swallowed up in nature nature is corrupted and man is corrupted. The sense of corruption in *King Lear* comes from the fact that Goneril, Regan, and Cornwall are merely animals furnished with human faculties as with weapons which...they have stolen, not inherited. Words are their teeth and claws, and thought the technique of the deadly spring. (SF 59-60)

Six years later the ideas and phrasing of this discussion of the play in the autobiography provide the kernel for what is Muir's most extended consideration of Shakespeare's play, his 1946 lecture, "The Politics of *King Lear*." Compare the fol-

lowing extract from the lecture with the above quotation from *The Story and the Fable*:

Nature is not corrupt in itself, nor is man as Shakespeare normally sees him; but when man is swallowed up in nature a result is produced which seems to corrupt both. Goneril, Regan and Cornwall become mere animals furnished with human faculties which they have stolen, not inherited by right. Words are their teeth and claws, and action the technique of the deadly spring. (PKL 19)

"The Politics of *King Lear*" has always been read simply as a critical essay, but in our context it is best viewed, as much as *The Story and the Fable* and *Poor Tom*, as an "attempt to find out what a human being is." The lecture explores what is "needed to make human a creature in human shape" (PKL 13). Muir sets up an opposition between an old generation and a new one: Lear with "his traditional beliefs" has "some knowledge of the moral nature of men," but he is confounded by his daughters who, having "renounced morality as a useful factor in conduct," live "so close to the state of nature that they hardly need to reflect: what they have the power to do they claim the right to do" (PKL 19, 15, 13). Muir makes explicit the contemporary relevance for him of Shakespeare's play in his emphatic assertion of the relationship between "Fascism in Italy and Germany" in the 1930s and 1940s and "the theory and practice by which it was upheld" and the morality of Goneril, Regan and Cornwall (PKL 15-16). To confirm our suggestion that Muir's concern with *King Lear* is not purely academic, it is only necessary to note that the moral vocabulary evolved in the lecture to comprehend the savagery of Lear's daughters is employed by Muir, in the revised and extended version of his autobiography, *An Autobiography* (1954), to make sense of aspects of his own world: of the spurious freedom from tradition which the liberated people of the 1920s claimed to enjoy. Compare, for instance, these two statements:

Goneril and Regan...exist in this shallow present.... Having no memory, they have no responsibility....This may simply be another way of saying that they are evil, for it may be that evil consists in a hiatus in the soul, a craving blank....The hiatus in Lear's daughters is specifically a hiatus of memory, a breach in continuity; they seem to come from nowhere and to be on the road to nowhere. (PKL 17)

The convention of romantic love, the ideal of five centuries, had been discarded in Paris and Berlin and London, and to those who had got rid of it was no longer thinkable, or at best remained a blank area in their minds....They lived in an open landscape, without roads, or a stopping-place, or any point of the compass. (A 228-9)

After *An Autobiography* Shakespeare's *King Lear* returns to its role in Muir's work as a standard by which to judge other literary performances. Perhaps Muir's acceptance of the Christian faith which he records in *An Autobiography* settled for him the question of man's nature, a question which haunts *Poor Tom*, the two versions of the autobiography, and "The Politics of *King Lear*." But it is clear that for a period of twenty years Muir's apprehension of that question draws heavily and crucially, in previously unseen ways, on Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

PHILIP DODD  
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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance: *Latitudes* (New York, 1924), p. 22; *Transition* (London, 1926), pp. 168-9; and the revised and extended *Essays on Literature and Society* (London, 1965), p. 180.

<sup>2</sup> For the most extended account of the clothes imagery in *King Lear* see Robert B. Heilman, *This Great Stage: Image and Structure in "King Lear"* (Baton Rouge, 1948). Line references to Shakespeare's *King Lear* are to the Signet edition edited by Russell Fraser (New York: New American Library, 1963). Page references to the following editions of Edwin Muir's works will be inserted parenthetically in the text using the abbreviated titles indicated below: (PT) *Poor Tom* (London, 1932); (SJ) *Scottish Journey* (London, 1935); *Journeys and Places* (London, 1937); *The Narrow Place* (London, 1943); (SF) *The Story and the Fable* (London, 1940); (PKL) "The Politics of *King Lear*" (Glasgow, 1947), reprinted in *Essays on Literature and Society* (Glasgow, 1949); (A) *An Autobiography* (London, 1954).

<sup>3</sup> Other interesting examples of the clothes imagery in *Poor Tom* are: pp. 12, 14, 22, 40, 41, 80, 96, 147.

<sup>4</sup> *Selected Letters of Edwin Muir*, edited by P. H. Butter (London, 1974), p. 100.