

1987

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Alistair McCleery

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Recommended Citation

McCleery, Alistair (1987) "The Genesis of The Green Isle of the Great Deep," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 22: Iss. 1.
Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol22/iss1/15>

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Alistair McCleery

The Genesis of *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*



Once Old Hector had talked at a ceilidh about 'The Green Isle of the Great Deep', and though that paradisaical isle had haunted Art for a time, it was readily drowned in the flow of the River.¹

It is difficult to believe that *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* (1944) was not already a half-formed intention in Gunn's mind while he was writing *Young Art and Old Hector* (1942). So much is prepared in the one for the extended allegory of the other. In the earlier collection of linked short stories, originally published monthly in *Chambers Journal* and the *Scots Magazine*, Hector places the judgment of God above the rules of the Revenue bureaucracy; Art demonstrates his skill as a runner and his pugnacity as a fighter; there are teasing allusions to the Green Isle; and Art's constant desire to reach the River, unsatisfied in these short stories, is fulfilled in *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* and through it he lands the salmon of wisdom. In other words, the novel seems the natural artistic and thematic development of the earlier stories.

¹Neil Gunn, *Young Art and Old Hector* (London, 1942), p. 219. All future references to this work will appear in parentheses in the text as YA followed by a page number.

The genesis of *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* is widely attested to: evidence comes from Gunn himself.² In *Young Art and Old Hector*, he had written not a provincial novel, distant from the preoccupation of war and politics, but a book in which the otherwise hypothetical concept of the brotherhood of man was realized through description of the old Gaelic communal culture. Rather, however, than write further adventures of the two characters in the same way, he wished to test their values against the type of totalitarian ideology then prevalent in Europe and against which the Allies were fighting. It was, in many ways, the greatest contribution Gunn could have made to the war effort (greater, certainly, than rejoining the Customs and Excise³). Gunn wrote in his 1946 article:

At the end of the first book dealing with the old man and the little boy I left them heading for the river which the boy had always longed to see. At the beginning of the second book they reach the river, start poaching a salmon, fall through the bottom of the deep pool, and wake up in their Gaelic paradise... This paradise is run on totalitarian lines, and so my problem is set. (p. 5)

When Gunn recollects the origin of the novel, it is in the attempt to demonstrate the strength of the spiritual values inherent in what appears to be a “socially dying” community. These values have a significance over and beyond the culture they stem from and Gunn sets out to show their universality, that “the place back home can be turned into paradise and include in its talk the basic problem of a planet” (p. 5). The importance of these values and their application to the world at large remained a constant theme of Gunn’s, one which, for example, dominates his final book, his spiritual autobiography, *The Atom of Delight* (1956).

However, if the novel grew out of a persistent preoccupation with a “true form of communal living” (p. 3) and the immediate impact of war, particularly knowledge of “the techniques whereby the adult mind could be broken down or conditioned and the young mind moulded” (p. 4), pen was actually put to paper as a result of a challenge issued by Naomi Mitchison. She later stated that “Neil wrote *The Green Isle of the Great*

²In “The Novel at Home,” *Scots Magazine*, 45 (April, 1946), pp. 1-5.

³Gunn considered this course of action at the outbreak of the Second World War. In his diary for September 5, 1939, he writes: “Should I offer my services to my old Dept? Went down to Dingwall and Smith, Officer of C and E, suggested I should. I’ll think about it. Have no particular desire to do it and believe we could live well enough on what we have got and what money as I could earn. After all, I have already worked for thirty years, and feel that in the ordinary way I have made my social contribution. Any extra contribution I had hoped to make in writing at my own economic risk” (National Library of Scotland, Deposit 209, Box 1). My thanks are due to the executors of the Gunn estate for permission to consult these papers and to the staff of the NLS for their kindness and assistance.

Deep, one of his best books, specially for me. He told me so afterwards and I felt it as soon as I actually began to read the book."⁴ The challenge was an accusation of escapism and self-indulgence leveled at *Young Art and Old Hector* that in turn typified an ideological gulf between Gunn and Mitchison. The dialogue in correspondence between the two in the 1940s is a philosophical debate between the Anarchist and the Collectivist. Where the one advocated the freedom of the individual to work co-operatively (and voluntarily), the other urged the necessity of central planning and regulation to ensure the effective management of society. This may imply that the discussion took place solely at the level of theory, but it was, as Hart and Pick note,⁵ of vital importance to political decisions then being made that would shape the post-war world. At the national level, the exigencies of war placed much authority in the hands of the civil servants of the Scottish Office, who could use it, under the direction of Tom Johnston, to improve conditions in Scotland. At the international level, while the totalitarianism of Fascism was now discredited, and indeed lives were being lost to combat it, there was still the totalitarianism of Communism—and there was a strong lobby to urge that the brave, new post-war world could be constructed with foundations of brotherhood and plenty only if Europe adopted the blueprints of Marxism as practiced in the USSR.

In 1944, Gunn wrote to Mitchison opposing Johnston's plans to introduce a strengthened Herring Board to oversee and control Scottish fishing:

And when you accuse me of anarchism, do you mean the anarchism of Kropotkin or just individual chaos? There's a mighty difference. That the herring fishermen should be in a co-operative is anarchism. That they should be run by a State Herring Industry Board is—what? I have always been a socialist all my life and still am, but I have always been aware of the servile state.⁶

This specific concern was voiced by Gunn in 1935 when, in a *Scots Magazine* article, he condemned the bureaucracy of the Herring Industry Board which was insensitive to local conditions and needs. The voyage which led to *Off in a Boat* (1938) also gave Gunn the opportunity to investigate at first-hand the nature and consequence of the decline in the fishing industry: "the facts, encountered everywhere, of depopulation, of disappearing crofts, of half-ruinous fishing villages, of young men refusing to go to sea—except as deck hands on summer yachts or trading

⁴Naomi Mitchison, "A Self Interview," *Studies in Scottish Literature*, XIV (1979), pp. 40-1.

⁵See F.R. Hart and J.B. Pick, *Neil M Gunn: A Highland Life* (London, 1981), p. 179.

⁶Gunn to Mitchison, June 9, 1944, in National Library of Scotland Accession 5813.

vessels.⁷ But even by 1937 Gunn is also aware of the positive elements in Gaelic culture which can be drawn on to ensure its survival. He is indignant that there should be a campaign, inspired by officialdom, to replace the Scottish system of family-owned boats by the English system of company-owned boats. The advantages of the Scottish system are stressed in terms anticipating the later argument with Mitchison.

For though the Scottish system was built on the national love of individualism (stigmatised by some of our country's critics as her fatal bane in these days of capitalism or totalitarianism) yet this individualism always worked towards the family and communal good. This is a fact that cannot be too clearly emphasised. Within it, indeed, lies the suggestion of any contribution Scotland might make to world affairs today, for all her ancient institutions do show this concern for the rights and initiative of the individual coincident with the larger concern for the community.⁸

As is apparent from even that extract, Gunn's "anarchism" had a strongly nationalist aspect. For Gunn, the essence of nationalism was "to love your own land, from which you draw your deepest inspiration."⁹ More often than not, however, nationalism implies an attitude to those who do not belong to that nation. Indeed, the nature of nationalism is frequently framed by response to those external to the nation. It can be chauvinist, although attachment to one's own nation does not in itself lead to a desire to deprive others of similar rights. The motif recurs throughout Neil Gunn's writing that nationalism, in this sense of a love for one's own land, does not create conflict. Moreover, and more importantly, nationalism is for Gunn a potent counter to uniformity. He wrote in 1931:

The small nation has always been humanity's last bulwark for the individual against that machine [of standardisation through centralised government], for personal expression against impersonal tyranny, for the quick freedom of the spirit against the flattening steamroller of mass. It is concerned for the intangible things called its heritage, its beliefs and arts, its distinctive institutions, for everything, in fact, that expresses it. And expression finally implies spirit in an act of creation, which is to say, culture.¹⁰

Gunn, in fact devoted his 1939 article, "Nationalism in Writing: Is Scottish Individualism to be Deplored?", to this thesis that nationalism ensures individuality against the forces of conformity and uniformity. In this anticipation of the theme of *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*, Gunn

⁷"One fisher Went Sailing..." *Scots Magazine*, 27 (Sept., 1937), p. 416.

⁸"The Family Boat: Its Future in Scottish fishing," *Scots Magazine*, 27 (June, 1937), p. 172.

⁹"The Essence of Nationalism," *Scots Magazine*, 37 (June, 1942), p. 172.

¹⁰"Nationalism and Internationalism," *Scots Magazine*, 15 (June, 1931), p. 188.

insists that maintenance of a separate Scottish identity is part and parcel of the retention of individual identity.¹¹ Unpopular though this stance may have been during the war years, Gunn did not cease from stressing the need for a separate Scottish identity—while acknowledging also the need in the war effort for the unity of all Britain.

This double allegiance masks a dilemma for the nationalist like Gunn, or more broadly, for anyone who, again like Gunn, underlines the importance of individual freedom so heavily. In a crisis such as a war, or in circumstances with which the resources of the individual cannot cope, some sort of collectivism seems inevitable. The problem is that collectivism makes the destruction of the individual's independence seem just as inevitable. Gunn solved this difficulty by highlighting the spirit of cooperation typical of the community of his childhood in which "the social structure was so simple that it didn't consciously exist."¹² Hardships beyond the capability of the individual to mitigate became the responsibility of the community at large. The community was self-sufficient; it owed much of this to its isolation but that isolation did not in turn lead to insularity. Through its emigrants, its sailors, and its soldiers, the community was aware of the "outside world" (AD p. 117) and, accordingly, the strength of its own values. Gunn postulates that these values may have grown out of the clan system, "with its devotion, mutual trust and social warmth" (AD p. 119). This was the real betrayal of the Clearances: that the man, regarded until then as chief but merely *primus inter pares*, should exert his legal but not moral right to evict his own clansmen, his family, from the clan lands. However, the existence of the clan system was not necessary for the survival of the spirit of cooperation among the people themselves. "You cannot rub out the whole way of life of a people by manipulating the powers in a charter, not unless you rub out the people themselves" (AD p. 119). That way of life, according to Gunn, was based on the interaction of individual independence and mutual cooperation; "independence which brings dependence on oneself was not directed against any other but, on the contrary, respected a similar independence in all others" (AD p. 119); the spontaneity of cooperation that "came from an absence of compulsion by one neighbour over another" (AD p. 120). *The Atom of Delight* contains several instances of this. When a man is laid out with the rheumatics, the younger men of the community take over his work for him and are rewarded by the communal

¹¹"Nationalism in Writing: Is Scottish Individualism to be Deplored?" *Scots Magazine*, 31 (July, 1939), pp. 275-82. An expanded version of these arguments is found in the present author's Introduction to *Landscape and Light: Essays by Neil H. Gunn* (Aberdeen, 1987).

¹²*The Atom of Delight* (London, 1956), p. 117. Future references to this work will appear in parentheses in the text as AD followed by a page number.

entertainment of a ceilidh. Peat-cutting is carried out by a band of neighbors, all working on one another's peat-bank. This is not a primitive form of communism; each man owns his own peat-bank and is independent of his neighbor, but all share the duties in a task that takes two or three men to work a bank efficiently. It is a tragedy when an old woman of the community has to be taken away to the Poor House; it is a "dark shadow implicating everyone, as if in some mysterious way they were all to blame" (AD p. 121).

This could all too easily be summed up as the wistful idealization by the older man of his childhood environment. That it was not, and that Gunn believed in this combination of individual freedom and mutual cooperation with some conviction, can be shown in two ways. Firstly the theme of cooperation recurs, as already indicated, throughout Gunn's writing, both factual and fictional, and is not, therefore, the product of a nostalgic old age. Secondly, there is evidence from other than Gunn's writing that individual independence and community cooperation do lie at the heart of Gaelic social organization. R.J. Storey, discussing, in 1982, the socio-economic factors which led to the Highlands and Islands Development Board sponsoring a programme of community cooperatives, singles out as a striking characteristic "the relative egalitarianism of Hebridean society."¹³ This comment echoes both the crofters' spokesman who in 1884 told the *Scotsman* "we have no leaders; we are all leaders"¹⁴ and the sociologist who in 1973 was surprised to find in Highlands and Islands communities an absence of the normal pyramidal social structure. Egalitarianism and cooperation are facets of the same structure: "the relatively egalitarian social system of the Highlands makes action possible only when it is generally desired and agreed."¹⁵ It is a question incapable of resolution whether economic necessity makes cooperation such a noteworthy feature of these communities or whether economic necessity simply reinforces an impulse to cooperation inherent in the people; either way it is clear that it has ensured the survival of crofting system despite all the vicissitudes which assail it.¹⁶ A former chairman of the Crofters' Commission can conclude that values and practice in Highland

¹³R.J. Storey, "Community Co-operatives—A Highlands and Islands Experiment" in J. Sewel and D. O'Carroll, eds., *Co-operation and Community Development* (Galway, 1982), p. 72; see also Alison McCleery, "The Persistence of Co-operation as a Theme in Marginal Development," in the same volume, pp. 8-21.

¹⁴*Scotsman*, November 19, 1884.

¹⁵Adrian Varwell, "Highlands and Islands Communities" in M. Broady, ed., *Marginal Regions* (London, 1973), p. 73.

¹⁶See Adam Collier, *The Crofting Problem* (Cambridge, 1953).

communities serve to strengthen one another. James Shaw Grant writes: "It seems clear that the sense of belonging, of identity satisfies a fundamental human need. The communal element in common grazings is a cold, legal fact, the sociability of the fank has its rewards, greater than the economic return from the sheep handled."¹⁷ Neil Gunn himself served from 1951-4 on a Commission of Enquiry into Crofting Conditions under the Chairmanship of Principal T.M. Taylor of Aberdeen University. The Report of the Commission begins with a statement of the premise upon which it is based, that is, that crofting as a way of life should be maintained: "we have thought it right...to record our unanimous conviction, founded on personal knowledge and on the evidence we have received, that in the national interest the maintenance of these communities is desirable, because they embody a free and independent way of life which in a civilisation predominantly urban and industrial in character is worth preserving for its own intrinsic quality."¹⁸

Throughout the Report, the preservation of the culture and tradition of the crofters is emphasized, and this emphasis is usually accompanied by a corresponding stress upon cooperation and self-help. The Report describes the organization of crofts: "Most crofter holdings are congregated in townships. The typical croft is not a self-contained unit" (p. 16). Much of the township land is held in common by the crofters and its care depends upon the cooperation of the crofters. Often the attention of the Commission was drawn to the fact that drainage and fencing problems could not be solved by the individual crofter acting on his own but demanded communal action. The third and final conclusion of the whole report is to the point: "The crofters themselves, or at least a majority of them, must be prepared to cooperate" (p. 88). The note of egalitarianism is also sounded strongly throughout the findings of the Commission: "The crofter calls no man his master" (p. 33). Yet the problem of depopulation of the crofting communities is faced up to and its roots examined. Those communities which are dominated by the old stagnate and sink into a dullness which the young cannot tolerate. This is not an attempt to sweep the elderly away, perhaps to institutionalize them—the "virtue of respect for old age" (p. 42) still retains its power in crofting communities, even if it has declined elsewhere—but it is an acknowledgement that there is a need for a "certain reservoir of vitality in the community" (p. 34). Young people do not leave because the lure of better conditions elsewhere at less effort is necessarily overwhelming or, indeed, because they necessarily wish to: "Highlanders as a rule are not anxious to leave their home

¹⁷J.S. Grant, "The Importance of the Part-Time Holding" in P.G. Sadler and G.A. Mackay, eds., *The Changing Fortunes of Marginal Regions* (Aberdeen, 1977), p. 154.

¹⁸*Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Crofting Conditions, 1954* (Cmd 9091) p. 9. Future references to this Report will appear in parentheses in the text.

communities. They leave home because they have to, and they would be glad to stay if that were possible" (p. 34). The solution is more equitable distribution and tenure of the land (though not public ownership¹⁹) with an administrative body created to safeguard the crofters' interests and encourage their cooperation. How far this would have been endorsed or qualified by Gunn is difficult to assess absolutely, but the degree of his support can be gauged somewhat by his assent to the Report. Principal Taylor could later write to Gunn thanking him for his "sensitive and understanding approach to the whole problem" which "has been reflected in the Report itself and is the main reason for its favourable reception."²⁰

While it might be objected in any discussion of *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* that Gunn's work on the Commission of Enquiry was at a late stage in his career and that the conclusions of its Report represent a much diluted version of the picture contained in *The Atom of Delight*, there is evidence, from the earlier period, of Gunn's belief in the values of "The Community" and of his enthusiasm when he found these values being translated into practical achievements. In 1937 Gunn published an article in which he related the conclusions of a tour of Scotland by the Danish writer, Arne Ström.²¹ Ström had himself been commissioned by a Copenhagen newspaper to write a series of articles on the economic condition of Scotland. Gunn passes on to his readers, by way of contrast, a picture of the economic condition of Denmark. It is a contrast favorable to the Danes. The lesson, Gunn continues by outlining, is that nationalists in Denmark, despite dominance by the Prussians, pioneered a system of cooperation that led to independence and to viability as a small country. "A Denmark defeated and in despair" (p. 97) turned to a nationalism based on an ideal, rather than simple desire for political autonomy: "the ideal was strong, for it was not only based on faith but on knowledge; it was prepared not only with words but with deeds" (p. 97). Where Denmark represents hope, the Highlands reveal "tragedy succeeded by apathy" (p. 99). The basis of the sort of nationalism Gunn was striving for becomes clearer in this article. It was a nationalism which "satisfied the aspirations towards the common good; and when personal needs were thus ordered, it continued organizing these adult schools through which the mind may attempt to realize its spiritual potentialities" (p. 98). Nationalism is the first step towards achievement of individual freedom within the context of a cooperative community; such a social organization

¹⁹There was one note of dissent to the report. One of the Commission's members (but not Gunn) proposed a minority recommendation in favour of the nationalization of the land farmed by crofters.

²⁰Sir Thomas Taylor to Neil Gunn (nd), quoted in Hart and Pick, p. 325.

²¹"A Visitor from Denmark," *Scots Magazine*, 27 (May, 1937), pp. 96-101.

would lead to the second step, the opportunity for the individual to rediscover a sense of wholeness within himself. In the achievement of Denmark, Gunn saw the practical vindication of what others might dismiss in his own writings as impractical idealism. Indeed, rather than undermining his views, the War itself also seemed to substantiate them. For Gunn, as it seems for the Danes, nationalism, egalitarianism, and cooperation became real in the life of the community rather than remaining hollow watchwords for theorists. Gunn began with the example of the childhood community and *from* it gained the values which could hold true for the country as a whole.

If Gunn's support and elaboration of communal cooperation drew on his knowledge of Gaelic culture then it was the antagonism of Naomi Mitchison to these ideas which led him to articulate them in the most expressive way he knew, that is, in the form of a novel. That she had somehow acted as the catalyst to the book's creation was apparent on the first reading to Naomi Mitchison herself:

But you've laid down a challenge which I feel bound to take up. I think first, all the same, I ought to say what you no doubt know already, that it's a damn good piece of writing...but it is in effect the anarchist case. Now insofar as it is saying that power corrupts, that's fine. I think it also says purely intellectual power corrupts, the worst thing is the power of the bureaucrat, the planner at headquarters.²²

The implied criticism, that Gunn is anti-intellectual and the novel akin therefore to the blood-and-soil writing of such as Knut Hamsun, is invalid. Gunn is concerned to demonstrate the cruelty of the intellect when divorced from human qualities such as love and compassion. Purely intellectual power is destructive and negative. But where Gunn called for the rekindling of the spirit of the community within each individual, Hamsun's alternative to the moral degradation of the new world is denial of reason and civilization, both their good and their bad aspects. The therapy is first highlighted in *Growth of the Soil* (1918); its closing paragraphs emphasize the absorption of the peasant in an instinctual relationship to his land; Isak is "an elemental figure, the symbol of Man at his best";²³ he is also a vegetable. Frustrated in his attempts to retain individuality in a living community, the Hamsun character submits his individuality and his freedom to the forces of nature. This unthinking acquiescence to superior force found easy translation to a reverence for the political power of Nazism. The rejection of the intellect became rejection of individual responsibility and submission to the mass-ideas of blood and race. Escape from social involvement led to loss of whatever is distinctly human and spiritual. Neil Gunn never became the novelist of

²²Mitchison to Gunn (nd, but early 1944?), NLS Dep. 209, Box 18.

²³W.W. Worster, "Knut Hamsun," *The Fortnightly Review* CVIII (1920), p. 103.

authoritarianism as Knut Hamsun did. Gunn's constant concern for the freedom of the individual and his self-realization in society contrasts with Hamsun's portrayal of the submergence of self in instinct and nature. Where Gunn reminded the reader of man's place in nature, Hamsun glorified submission to the elemental forces of nature, detested all that was not suffused with his mystique of blood and soil, and denied individual responsibility as he preached blind obedience to authority. Hamsun despaired of personal fulfillment within a community of men and offered as an *alternative* to this community loss of self in nature. Gunn's nationalism had as its object regeneration of individual *and* community.

To sum up, if Gunn worked actively, in this interwar period, for nationalism, then it was because he saw it fostering a spirit of individual freedom and ultimate fulfillment. This was no protofascism or crypto-Nazism, nor should it suggest that he took rather a lofty view of politics; his record of his involvement in the 1931 election, as well as the testimony of such as John MacCormick, should undermine that assumption.²⁴ Nor did Gunn feel that cultural nationalism should hold itself aloof from the struggles of politics: political nationalism and cultural nationalism could not be divorced. Scotland needed cultural bodies, such as a national theater, through which writers could express the nation's essential self.²⁵ Writers needed the context of independence to provide them with the freedom for individual creation. There could be no vital culture, in Gunn's view, without a correspondingly strong sense of political identity.

It was to Ireland, rather than to the continent of Europe, that Gunn turned to find an example of what might happen in Scotland. Political independence would stimulate cultural flowering. In 1938 he published an article (using the pseudonym of Dane McNeil) on Douglas Hyde's nomination as President of the new state of Eire.²⁶ The nationalism that produced the new state had also created the situation in which a Gaelic scholar, rather than a party hack, had been appointed as the country's leader. Here was proof that nationalism had resulted neither "in war nor material aggrandizement" but in "social and spiritual achievement" (p. 177). Comparison is made with a Scotland that hitherto "denying her own tradition, has looked to London for all things" (p. 178). The comparison is obviously to Scotland's discredit. Upon the foundation of Hyde's nomination, Gunn again proposes the thesis that "our inheritance of

²⁴See the present author's "Writers Come to the Aid of the Party," *Scotsman*, October 31, 1981.

²⁵See "Nationalism in Writing: The Theatre Society of Scotland," *Scots Magazine*, 30 (Dec, 1938), p. 194.

²⁶"President of Eire: The True Value of Tradition," *Scots Magazine*, 29 (June, 1983), pp. 177-80.

culture and high ideals of freedom" owe much "to the small community or nation" (p. 178).

It is to Ireland also that Gunn turns when he explains the genesis of *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* in the letter to Naomi Mitchison quoted above.

In fact I wrote *The Green Isle* right off, just because an old friend of mine in Ireland, who has mostly for company now his little grandson, was so affected by what he considered the inner truth of *Young Art* that he said I mustn't leave them at the River. So I didn't.²⁷

This may just be Gunn's reluctance to let an adversary, albeit a friendly one, score a point off him, but it also seems to me to be a sign of the book's more complex origins. Its basic thought appears elsewhere in Gunn's writing; it is implicit in *Young Art and Old Hector* which demands a sequel; Mauric Walsh suggested the necessity of such a sequel; the dialogue with Naomi Mitchison and the context of the times set the agenda. The attribution of the novel's inspiration to Naomi Mitchison twenty years later is a rationalization after the event.²⁸ *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* grew out of Gunn's deepest concerns and his perception of the wisdom in Gaelic culture.

The novel itself begins in the realistic world of *Young Art and Old Hector* and the scene of neighbours gathering to hear the news of Hector's cow is skillfully used to introduce the topic of concentration camps and the mind-destruction which goes on within them. The sequence of events in the rest of the book is anticipated in the reference to Art's ability to escape such torture through his speed, and in Hector's recollections of his own age and mortality²⁹ as in the previous book—on the occasion of the Gauger's search when he brought a chill into the conversation by expressing the wish not to die in prison (YA p. 192) and also at the close when he remarks to Art that the next visit to the river will be his last (YA p. 249). The two novels are bound together both through these references and common characters, and also through a common theme of the free spirit of man: "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 p. 13). The new techniques of brainwashing rob a man not only of his personal identity—the numbers in

²⁷Gunn to Mitchison, June 9, 1944, NLS Acc 5813.

²⁸The chief source, perhaps, in later criticism, for Gunn's attribution of the inspiration of the novel to Naomi Mitchison is a letter from Gunn to Tokusaburo Nakamura (nd, but 1965?), in NLS Dep 209, Box 19.

²⁹*The Green Isle of the Great Deep* (London, 1944), p. 13. Future references to this work will appear in parentheses in the text as GI followed by a page number.

Zamyatin's *We*, the Alphas, Betas and so on of Huxley's *Brave New World*—but also of his spiritual self, the totality of his being, something that according to Jung “to the perpetual vexation of the intellect remains unknown and not to be fitted into a formula.”³⁰ The introductory chapters integrate the two novels, set out the major theme of *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* itself, and also prepare some of the mechanics of the plot. The relationship between Tom and Morag is highlighted as is the fact that Tom receives newspapers. In the second chapter, Art and Hector find a scrap of newspaper on the way to the river; Hector suspects that there is someone else about but they move on. At the end of the novel, it is in fact Morag and Tom who have been on a clandestine picnic nearby who rescue both Art and Hector from drowning. I think that it is important to stress this for it would be all too easy to disregard the great craft with which Gunn has constructed the novel, and indeed to view it as a loosely flowing, symbol-packed fantasy. We are to take the significance of the Green Isle seriously and it must therefore be placed in a context from which its symbolism derives naturally. Art picks real hazel-nuts and Hector poaches a real salmon.

Art represents the untamed and, because pure, untamable wholeness of man; we need look no further for antecedents than the boy of Wordsworth. The figure of the child, while often a Jungian symbol of self, is also part of a common romantic articulation of “unknown modes of being.” But, in their speculations about his origins, as his exploits begin to take on a legendary quality, the administrators of the Green Isle must seek an explanation of his nature that will account for his elusiveness. One school of thought believes that he is Art itself, a throwback to the period before Art had become Propaganda. Another proposes that he is some reflection of the Arthurian cycle of tales (GI pp. 132-3). Gunn not only outlines playfully the pitfalls of thesis-elaboration and makes a serious point about the corruption of artistic integrity when it lends itself to some creed or doctrine external to the act of creation, but also draws our attention to two sources of images of that wholeness: works of art and traditional culture. Wholeness is represented in Gunn's own novels by reference to the traditional culture of the Highlands about which he wrote. Art has wonder, magic—both these terms are used—a spiritual innocence. Hector possesses knowledge and wisdom. Yet these attributes are tested to the limits in him and he must eventually draw on their true spring—knowledge of God that is Love (GI pp. 245-6). Hector is the wise, old man; Mary, the great mother. She supplies the resistance to the mind-enslavement of the Green Isle; she originates in Gaeldom itself and is as learned and as wise as Dark Mairi of Butcher's Broom; but more importantly she is a projection of the anima. As, at the end of the novel,

³⁰C.G. Jung (with C. Kerényi), *Introduction to a Science of Mythology* (London, 1950), pp. 104-5.

Gunn writes of Morag: "she was the only woman among them and life was her concern" (GI p. 254). Robert, Mary's husband, is an echo of Robert Burns; he had been a satiric poet, satire being an ingredient of independence and liveliness, but under the circumstances of the Green Isle he no longer writes; he has acquiesced in the system—his "head" has won—salvaging freedom only for a few around him. Love is identified with suffering for others: Hector suffers to protect those whom he loves; Mary has suffered for the child she loved and lost on earth, and transfers that love to Art and suffers for him; Robert's suffering is limited because he retains much of the essential selfishness of the modern artist. The bureaucrats of the Green Isle do not suffer; they inflict suffering in a clinical, uncaring fashion; in them the desire for knowledge has obliterated wisdom, and love. They are the "shadow" of God; there is, as Jung points out, "no shadow without the sun";³¹ they lack all that He is.

The administrators began their rule by dividing the community so that the strength given to the individual from communal belonging was denied. Hector asks Robert whether the inhabitants had been happy: "Perfectly. A bit crowded here and there, because folk will be clannish. That started it. We had to be spaced out" (GI p. 93). When Hector questions the lack of resistance to these moves, Robert's riposte is damning: "Did you rise against the lairds and the factors and the clergy when they told you that you had to be cleared off your own ancient lands and your homes burnt down?" (GI p. 98). The Highland community had allowed itself to be physically disrupted and moved. Yet what it retained is the spirit of Art and the wisdom of Hector. Hector's wisdom is the lesser of the two as knowledge is less than wisdom itself. When they first arrive in the Green Isle, Art and Hector are told by the Coastwatcher to travel only by day and to stay at one of the Inns overnight. The persona of Hector, the part, in Jungian terms, that society expects him to play, prompts him to the same passive obedience of authority that created the demureness of the Clearances. As they had listened to the Chief, so too there is no reason to doubt the word of those in charge of Paradise. But it is Art's intuition which leads to their travelling independent of road and Inns, eating the forbidden fruit, "the fruit of life" (GI p. 98). When they are both captured, it is Art who escapes and Hector who must face the Questioner. The latter tries to destroy Hector's self, "a primitive integration, a certain living wisdom" (GI p. 154), but finds that Hector's "weakness," a hatred for suffering inflicted on others, is balanced by an equal capacity to accept suffering himself. He hounds and baits Hector until he provokes the resolution of the novel: "Old Hector spoke deep out of his throat: 'I want to see God'" (GI p. 155). The attempt to analyze and rationalize the source of Hector's strength has failed in one respect but succeeded in that Hector

³¹Frieda Fordham, *An Introduction to Jung's Psychology* (Harmondsworth, 1953), p. 50.

summons that source himself. Yet Art, too, by his actions, his speed and resourcefulness, has roused the other inhabitants of the Green Isle to question the regime. And when God does appear, he comes first to Art in the form of the Starter from Clachdrum and learns from Art, through Art's purity and innocence, what has been happening while He has neglected the Green Isle. Art has suffered loneliness and persecution but retained the magic "which is the scent of the flower, the young feet of the runner, and the deep smile in the face" (GI p. 245).

The climax of the novel is Hector's audience with God: the infinite Being of whom all individuals are part. God is a reflection of Hector himself; "the bearded face of the man who awaited him seemed, in that strange moment, to be the face of someone he had seen long ago in a tall mirror at the end of a landing in a forgotten house" (GI p. 238). God speaks to Hector in Gaelic and the first question is an inquiry about the people left at home. This is a God who mirrors Hector's own concerns and background. Hector himself is willing to take the burden of responsibility for the actions of his friends. He still feels that God is subjecting him to an inquisition, an investigation of his past sins, and the guilt of his lie to the Questioner troubles his deep honesty and truth. It is the same argument that he had rehearsed to Red Dougal when defending his illegal distillation of whisky in *Young Art and Old Hector* (pp. 190-1): to break a bad law is not wrong if the motive is an unselfish love for other people. Hector would have told the truth to the Questioner, if that had not placed in great danger Art and Mary. God explains how such bad laws may arise from a desire to do good; "the knowledge of power gives to a good intention the edge of a sword" (GI p. 241). "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" (GI p. 241).

The divorce of wisdom and knowledge produces not only cruelty and sterility but the need to destroy.

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 p. 242).

The spirit of freedom within the individual can be suppressed, but it cannot be quenched; the opportunity for wholeness, for integration of wisdom and knowledge, unconscious and conscious, is available to each individual. Kenn in *Highland River* found it at the lochan at the end of his quest to the source of the River; God tells Hector: "The pool was everyman's pool in the river of life" (GI p. 243). Although Gunn uses symbols (the salmon, the hazel nuts) taken from Gaelic culture, he is not limiting the discovery of self to those who belong to that culture. The

emphasis upon a materialistic philosophy that divides wisdom from knowledge and excludes the former curses modern man to totalitarianism. The solution is to reunite the two in the individual. Jung told Laurens Van der Post that "the Russian problem in the external world could never be resolved without more disaster unless we first dealt with the "Russia" in ourselves."³²

Such a self retains its individuality while not becoming individualistic. A community of such whole people would evolve a form of social organization which nurtured individuality yet produced cooperation, naturally and spontaneously, for such a self consists "in the awareness on the one hand of our unique natures, and on the other of our intimate relationship with all life."³³ Such a community did exist, according to Gunn, in traditional Gaelic culture, practicing freedom and communal brotherhood, sympathetic not only to fellow-beings but to all of nature, finding in its relationship with nature an illustration of "oneness." This community may be in decline, in retreat, but its values are available, through Gunn's work, to all of us. Having achieved the oneness, the wholeness, however, its members find an intimate relationship with God; they find God in man and nature; they realize brotherhood "with all living things and...the cosmos itself."³⁴

Hector and Art reach the Green Isle by drowning (or nearly so). Gunn himself almost drowned in the summer of 1934, towards the beginning of his middle and most vital period. The incident is transmuted, with little modification, into a narrative in *The Well at the World's End*. On the morning after his near-death, Peter Munro awakes to a sense of what is almost euphoria: "It was now that the odd feeling came over me that the stillness itself was holding something, much as the walls held the garden; and in a moment I realized what it was holding was time."³⁵ He has the experience of existing outside time, outside the personal self. Munro continues: "Quite simply, then, I knew with an absolute conviction as I stood at that window gazing out on the old Spanish garden that there exists an order of things outside our conception of time" (p. 148). Like the boy in the stream, by forgetting self in the personal sense, he discovers his true self. The general theme of this quest-novel is that the Green Isle, Tir-nan-Og, whatever it may be called, is attainable in the present, not only in the hereafter. Human reason unaided, the hazel-nuts of knowledge alone, cannot apprehend this state. Munro concludes: "There was nothing at all

³²Laurens Van der Post, *Jung and the Story of Our Time* (London, 1976), p. 22.

³³Fordham (1953), p. 63.

³⁴Fordham (1953), p. 78.

³⁵*The Well at the World's End* (London, 1951), p. 148.

in the ordinary sense “religious” about this experience; but what is astonishing, I think, is that there was nothing personal” (p. 148). This, then, is the final element in the genesis of *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*. Gunn’s own experience prompted him to express the need for modern man to rediscover God in himself. When Jung treated patients suffering from the malaise and neuroses of the zeitgeist, he, too, “found that he seldom succeeded in what for want of a better word is called a ‘cure,’ without enabling the patient to recover his lost capacity for religious experience.”³⁶

The experience itself is clear and forceful, but the act of expressing that experience involves the unending wrestle with the stuff of language. Gunn wrote in *The Atom of Delight*: “finding the words is the old game of approximation” (p. 301). *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* draws on “objective correlatives” from the history and tradition of Gaelic culture. It provides not only an affirmation of the values of that culture, particularly egalitarianism and communal cooperation, not only a vision of the individuated self, of “wholeness” of head and heart, but also an awareness of God, the “transcendent experience of communion with God”—“extracting or creating God out of our delight” (AD pp. 274, 278). The novel represents, with *The Silver Darlings* (1941), the peak of Gunn’s achievement.

Napier College, Edinburgh

³⁶Van der Post (1976), p. 152.