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**“A FLAME FROM THE FIRE THAT IS
BURNING THE WORLD”:¹
EDWIN MUIR, WAR, AND HISTORY**

Margery Palmer McCulloch

The 2014 centenary of the outbreak of World War I brought with it many new assessments of that momentous conflict, in cultural as well as political studies. Among these was *From the Line: Scottish War Poetry 1914-1945*, the first comprehensive collection of Scotland’s contribution to war poetry, edited by David Goldie and Roderick Watson.² This collection brought together poetry arising out of two twentieth-century world wars, providing an important opportunity to compare the specific contexts which gave rise to the poetry in each period as well as the nature of the poets produced by the two conflicts. One aspect which strikes the reader immediately is the greater number of contributors in the World War II selection who became major figures in the Scottish poetry landscape as compared to the selection from the 1914-18 conflict: G. S. Fraser, Robert Garioch, George Campbell Hay, Hamish Henderson, Sorley MacLean, Edwin Morgan, Alexander Scott, Sydney Goodsir Smith, Douglas Young are all represented here, as opposed to the earlier selection where perhaps only Marion Angus and Violet Jacob, who wrote about the human loss resulting from the war from a home front perspective, and Charles Murray, who was an early pioneer in a more ambitious use of the Scots language in poetry, have a firm place in the Scottish poetry canon. Other World War I contributions, primarily from the front line and communicating forcefully both the horror of the war situation and the resilience (sometimes ironic or humorous) of the

¹ Neil M. Gunn, review of Edwin Muir, *The Narrow Place*, *Scots Magazine*, 39:2 (May 1943): 163.

² David Goldie and Roderick Watson, eds., *From the Line: Scottish War Poetry 1914-1945* (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2014).

combatants, appear to have been written by men made poets by the war experience itself, although some like Neil Munro and John Buchan had a reputation as writers in other areas.

Surprisingly, Hugh MacDiarmid, who spent much of World War I with the Royal Army Corps in Salonika, does not feature in the World War I selection, and this may be because, as the editors comment, “memory, pain and inspiration show no respect for time . . . so it is not surprising that some poems took longer to come to the surface” (Goldie and Watson, xi). This was certainly the case with the Edwin Morgan extract in the 1939-45 grouping, from his volume *The New Divan* published in 1977, as it was also in the wider British context with the Welsh poet David Jones’s *In Parenthesis*, inspired by Jones’s experience as a serving soldier in World War I, but not published until 1937. In MacDiarmid’s case, however, the effect of what he experienced working in the army hospital in Salonika is perhaps communicated indirectly through the mental destabilisation depicted in early short stories such as “Café Scene” and “A Limelight from a Solitary Wing,” both from *Annals of the Five Senses*, published in 1923 under his family name of C. M. Grieve. Similarly, MacDiarmid’s contribution in the 1939-45 grouping is at a distance, the extract with its references to Himmler and the German context of the time being taken from his long work *The Kind of Poetry I Want*, published in 1961, with its wide range of references and contexts.

Edwin Muir, who played a significant part in the Scottish literary revival initiated by MacDiarmid in the post-1918 period, did not serve in World War I, having been rejected for the army on the grounds of poor health. He is therefore also absent from the 1914-18 selection, although his 1943 poem “The River” with its disturbing imagery of the human consequences of a continuous history of warfare is included in the 1939-45 grouping. Muir’s autobiography *The Story and the Fable* (1941) and its later expanded version of 1954, *An Autobiography*, both include an incident where he unsuccessfully attempts to enlist in the army after the outbreak of World War I, but his memories of that early period in later autobiographical writings characteristically deal not with the experiences of war, even from a home-front perspective (as one finds with Sydney Goodsir Smith’s poetry of World War II), but with his own continuing attempts to overcome the personal trauma of his family’s misguided emigration from the agrarian Orkney Isles to industrialised Glasgow in the early years of the century, and, socially, with the sense of dislocation he observed in the wretched lives of slum dwellers in the impersonal, capitalist world of the Second City of the Empire. In contrast, and as the

quotation from Neil M. Gunn in the title of this essay suggests, in relation to World War II and conditions in the post-1945 world, Muir as poet became an involved commentator on war and its recurring presence in human history. Muir's approach to the theme of war was, however, an oblique one. Rather than dealing at first hand with personal experience of war, either on the battlefield or on the home front, Muir saw war as a continual and futile destructive presence in the cycle of human development. And for him, the term "war" extended also to the class war, the struggle of the slumdweller at the bottom of society to survive in a social and financial system which seemed designed to prevent that survival, and to political or religious systems that could not tolerate freedom of thought.

Unlike contemporaries such as T. S. Eliot and Hugh MacDiarmid, Edwin Muir came to late maturity as poet. Self-educated, largely through reading the *New Age* magazine edited by A. R. Orage, he struggled throughout the 1920s and early 1930s to find a poetic form that could communicate the ideas he had in his imagination, especially those which attempted to rediscover his lost past and reconnect it with his present. And mingled with these personal themes of loss—often communicated in his early poetry through the biblical myth of the Fall and expulsion from the Garden of Eden—were social and environmental themes which attempted to communicate the sense of a dislocated world which remained with him from his early Glasgow experiences and which seemed increasingly present as the 1930s progressed. He wrote, for example, in *Variations on a Time Theme* of 1934:

How did we come here to this broken wood?
 Splintered stumps, flapping bark, ringwormed boles,
 Soft milk-white water prisoned in jagged holes
 Like gaps where tusks have been (*CP* 51).³

The speaker asks himself:

Where did the road branch? ...
 Or did we choose, and if we chose
 Did we choose idly ...
 Can we build a house here, make friends with the mangled stumps
 And splintered stones, not looking too closely
 At one another? (*ibid.*).

³ Page numbers for *CP* in the text are to Peter Butter, ed., *Complete Poems of Edwin Muir* (Aberdeen: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1991).

On the other hand, while he was still struggling to find a suitable poetic form for the ideas in his mind, Muir was developing his writing capacities in prose directions during the interwar period: through his copious literary reviewing and critical work, and perhaps even more fruitfully through his writing of two semi-autobiographical novels, the historical *Three Brothers* and the contemporary Glasgow-set *Poor Tom*, his biography of John Knox, and his exploration of Scotland's divided communities in *Scottish Journey*. There were also his translations, with his wife Willa, of the fiction of Franz Kafka and Hermann Broch and other German-language writers; and finally there was the writing of the first version of his own story, the autobiographical *The Story and the Fable*, published in 1940. While such comments about Muir's early poetry and interwar prose writings may seem to have little to do with a proposed topic of Edwin Muir, War and History, it is important to realise that it was these early, and in some cases, apprentice publications, with their thematic involvement with cycles of disruption and disunity which enabled Muir to develop the mature poetic voice we hear in his World War II and late post-war poetry, where his persistent themes of personal and social dislocation of various kinds were transformed into the wartime and post-war exploration of what he described in his autobiography as "the single, disunited world."⁴

Muir had been increasingly conscious of the dangers facing Europe as the 1930s progressed. His translation, with his wife Willa, of Hermann Broch's *Die Schlafwandler* (*The Sleepwalkers*) was published by Secker in 1932. This was a book which appeared to envisage the downfall of Europe as earlier predicted by Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (*The Decline of the West*), and both Muirs had found its translation a disturbing as well as linguistically challenging commission. In 1932 also, the Muirs went as official Scottish delegates to the P.E.N. annual conference in Budapest where the atmosphere of apprehension and political intrigue caused them to believe, in Willa's words, that "Broch had come nearer the truth than we thought and that Europe was indeed getting ready to break up."⁵ Hermann Broch himself came to the Muirs' home in St Andrews as a refugee after the annexation of Austria by Hitler in 1938. Broch had been arrested and imprisoned for the offence of joining Thomas Mann (who was at that time safely in Switzerland) in writing a protest letter to the League of Nations, and his presence in St

⁴ Edwin Muir, *An Autobiography* (London: Hogarth Press, 1954; repr. 1980), 194.

⁵ Willa Muir, *Belonging* (London: Hogarth Press, 1968), 152.

Andrews made the Muirs aware of the treatment of the Jews in Austria, ranging from the “pettiness” of notices on benches and in gardens saying “No Jew may sit here” to transportation to concentration camps for no other reason than being a Jew.⁶ Muir worked hard with his London friend Sydney Schiff and other colleagues in the south to help Broch obtain a visa to enter the UK, which then enabled him to emigrate to the USA. Muir wrote in his diary at this difficult time:

The Munich days have come and gone. Hermann has left for America.... Yesterday Hitler marched into Prague, and he is installed now in the Hradčany. The Prague policemen keeping order with tears running down their cheeks. I have read the newspapers until I am tired out. I do not know what to think of Chamberlain’s speech. Willa said, “Britain’s only policy is to keep the Stock Exchange going.” Women weeping in Prague. Many suicides, mostly among the Jews, who are being driven out from there too.⁷

On the outbreak of war, the Muirs’ income from translating from the German not surprisingly dried up, and like his fellow Scottish poet Hugh MacDiarmid Edwin Muir was not trusted by the government in London to contribute to the war effort through his writing talents. While MacDiarmid was sent to the shipyards, Muir found himself stamping ration books in the Dundee Food Office until he was rescued by H. Harvey Wood of the British Council and employed in Edinburgh organizing lectures and cultural entertainments for the Foreign Houses established in the city. This was certainly a promotion from the Dundee Food Office, but, more importantly, it kept Muir in contact with refugees and foreign servicemen in Edinburgh and so with the conduct of the war in Europe.

Muir’s first war poems appeared in his collection *The Narrow Place*, published in 1943 and reviewed by the novelist Neil M. Gunn in the *Scots Magazine* in May of that year. For Gunn, this new collection of poems “has caught a flame—from the fire that is burning the world.” While he found that Muir’s previous work had “at its best ... always been spare and austere,” he commented also that “occasionally one had the strange feeling that Muir could not get life’s sure outline until years of death had fixed it permanently.” In contrast, in these new poems Muir “frequently deals with life in its living moment in the world of to-day.”⁸ And war was

⁶ Edwin Muir, *The Story and the Fable* (London: Harrap, 1940), 252.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 255, 257.

⁸ Neil M. Gunn, as in n. 1 above, 163.

very much a main part of the “living moment” at that time. Muir’s 1943 war poems deal with the destruction caused by war and the ultimate futility of war, as well as its cycle of recurrence in human history. “The Wayside Station,” for example, with its initially enigmatic despondent mood and imagery, comes to a close with the image of the “lonely stream ... leap[ing] the gap of light” as it “starts its winding journey /Through the day and time and war and history” (*CP* 96)—and there are no commas in that long last line to separate out the items: “day and time and war and history” have become one. In “The River,” the stream moves on through history to show repeated patterns of destruction caused by war:

The stream flows on
 And shows a blackened field, a burning wood,
 A bridge that stops half-way, a hill split open
 With scraps of houses clinging to its sides,
 Stones, planks and tiles and chips of glass and china
 Strewn on the slope as by a wrecking wave
 Among the grass and wild-flowers (*CP* 97).

Another early 1940s poem, “The Refugees,” raises the question of responsibility that Muir would return to in the later poem “The Good Town,” written out of his post-war experiences in Prague. In “The Refugees,” the speaker comments:

A crack ran through our hearthstone long ago
 And from the fissure we watched gently grow
 The tame domesticated danger,
 Yet lived in comfort in our haunted rooms (*CP* 98).

Just as many people in the later interwar period especially were ignorant of or paid little attention to rumours about the treatment of Jews in Europe, or about the problems of peoples still displaced as a result of treaty agreements at the end of World War I, so in Muir’s poem those living comfortably in settled conditions look on without involvement or full understanding:

We saw the homeless waiting in the street
 Year after year,
 The always homeless,
 Nationless and nameless,
 To whose bare roof-trees never come
 Peace and the house martin to make a home. (*Complete Poems*, p.98)

In their un-personalized, generic nature, such images transfer readily to crises of emigration and displacement throughout history and re-inforce Muir’s view of war as a repeated cycle in human life. In contrast, a poem such as “The Rider Victory” from Muir’s collection *The Voyage* (1946),

points to the ultimate futility of war in its image of the sculptured Rider Victory reining his horse "Midway across the empty bridge" where "In front the waiting kingdom lies" (CP 139). Yet although "The bridge and all the roads are free," the victory achieved would not appear to lead forward:

But halted in implacable air
Rider and horse with stony eyes
Uprear their motionless statuary (*ibid.*).

Muir's war poems from the earlier 1940s are prophetic of the situation he found in the Czech capital of Prague when he went there as Director of the British Council Institute in 1945, immediately after the ending of the war. In his autobiography he describes the conditions he found as he drove with a colleague through Belgium and Germany to Czechoslovakia:

When we reached Germany there seemed to be nothing unmarked by the war: the towns in ruins, the roads and fields scarred and deserted. It was like a country where the population had become homeless, and when we met occasional family groups on the roads they seemed to be on a pilgrimage from nowhere to nowhere.⁹

He adds, in images that reinforce his earlier idea of the continuing cycle of war throughout human history:

Few trains were running; the great machine was broken; and the men, but for the women and children following them, might have been survivors of one of the medieval crusades wandering back across Europe to seek their homes. Now by all appearances there were no homes for them to seek (*ibid.*).

In 1945, Muir arrived in a Prague which was in a state of hiatus between the wartime occupation by the Nazis and the impending communist Putsch which took Czechoslovakia into the Soviet sphere of influence. Prague had been the first European city visited by the Muirs in the early 1920s, when Edwin's contract with the American *Freeman* magazine enabled them to give up their work in London and embark on the exploration of a Europe which had up to that point been what Willa described as "an imaginary region, a never-never-land, for our knowledge of it was gathered from books."¹⁰ When, in 1921, they arrived in Prague in the newly independent Czechoslovakian republic, they found a city "sizzling with hope and experiment and enthusiasm," where the letters of

⁹ Muir, *Autobiography*, as in n. 4 above, 251.

¹⁰ Willa Muir, as in n. 5 above, 54.

introduction to the playwright Karel Čapek and his painter brother Josef which they had brought with them from London enabled them to enter into the centre of Prague's rich theatre culture.¹¹ Now, in the wake of World War II, that early Prague seemed the "ghost of a vanished age," as Franz Kafka had commented about the disappearance of the old Jewish Ghetto of the city in an earlier time.¹² The Muirs had heard nothing about Kafka in that earlier visit, despite the fact that *Das Schloss*, the book they would be the first to translate into English in 1930, was both begun and abandoned unfinished during the year of their stay in the Czech city. There was a gulf between the two cultures in Prague—between the world of the Czech Čapeks and that of the German-speaking Jewish Kafka—of which they were unaware. Yet, ironically, it was a Kafkaesque city of Prague which awaited them when they returned to the city immediately after the end of the World War II.

In their journals and published writings about their post-war residence in Prague, both Muirs document the gradual emergence of the Prague community from the oppression of wartime occupation before this new freedom is once more lost when the Czechs are absorbed into the Soviet sphere of influence after the February revolution of 1948. Edwin wrote in his autobiography about the period immediately after the communist Putsch:

The old stale fears were back. No one opened his mouth in the trams. No one said "God damn the government," knowing that he would be arrested if he did. No one dared to tell what he really thought, except in his own house or to a friend he could trust. No one telephoned if he could help it, though in a very short time people knew by the slight diminution in the volume of the sound when the line was being tapped. And men at last became suspicious even of their friends.¹³

Despite the stress which this second sojourn in Prague brought, especially to Edwin in his role of Director of the British Institute, it also produced, in his *Labyrinth* collection of 1949, some of the best of his late poetry. Although he had known nothing of Kafka during his first stay in Prague between 1921 and 1922, Muir had immediately experienced a strong sense of affinity with Kafka's writing when he by chance came

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

¹² Franz Kafka, quoted by Gustav Janouch in *Conversations with Kafka, Franz Kafka and Prague: Franz Kafka Museum Guide* (Prague: Mucha Museum, 2010), 11.

¹³ Muir, *Autobiography*, as in n. 4 above, 267.

across *Das Schloss* in the late 1920s and recommended it to his publisher Secker as a book for possible translation. The Muirs' translation of *The Castle*, the first translation of Kafka into the English language, was published in 1930; and working with the translation of several other Kafka texts during the 1930s and early 1940s was one of the important influences in the maturing of Edwin's own poetry.

This influence can be seen in his Prague poem "The Interrogation" (*CP* 172-173). Seamus Heaney described the poem as anticipating "by a couple of decades the note which would be heard when A. Alvarez began to edit his influential Penguin Modern European Poets series in the late 1960s, a note as knowledgeable as it was powerless to survive with any sort of optimism in the light of what it knew."¹⁴ Muir's poem begins:

We could have crossed the road but hesitated,
 And then came the patrol;
 The leader conscientious and intent,
 The men surly, indifferent,
 While we stood by and waited
 The interrogation began (ll. 1-6).

As in "The Refugees" from his earlier collection *The Voyage*, Muir's scenario here is impersonal and begins in *media res*. Neither setting nor speakers are identified, but the potential danger of the situation and its tense atmosphere are powerfully and economically communicated by the short lines and irregular chiming of end-rhymes: "intent/...indifferent" in lines three and four, and "hesitated" in line one with the gap before it chimes with "waited" in line five; the silent beat after "patrol" at the end of the short line two. This slow, psychologically uncertain opening is contrasted with the swift fire of the leader's questioning which follows:

He says the whole
 Must come out now, who, what we are,
 Where we have come from, with what purpose, whose
 Country or camp we plot for or betray (ll. 6-9),

before the pace slows again as the captives see apparently ordinary everyday life continuing not far from where they have been apprehended:

... beyond the hedge
 The careless lovers in pairs go by,
 Hand linked in hand, wandering another star,
 So near we could shout to them (ll. 12-15).

¹⁴ Seamus Heaney, "The Impact of Translation," *Yale Review*, 76:1 (Autumn 1987): 1-14 (pp. 8-9).

The poem ends with two short lines, and one extended line, the rhythmic effect of which is the communication of a sense of being able to bear no more:

We are on the very edge,
Endurance almost done,
And still the interrogation is going on (ll. 19-21).¹⁵

The *imagiste* poem, “The Helmet” (*CP* 168-169. is equally frightening in its human implications:

The helmet on his head
Has melted flesh and bone
And forged a mask instead
that always is alone (ll. 1-4).

The sense of alienation and loss of human identity through warfare is reinforced in this tense poem by its tight four-line stanzas and relentless iambic metre, occasionally switching to trochaic for particular emphasis:

But he can never come home,
Nor I get to the place
Where, tame, the terrors roam
Whose shadows fill his face (ll. 21-24).

Other poems in the collection relate more openly to events unfolding in wartime and post-war Europe. In “The Usurpers,” for example, the speakers are “self-guided, self-impelled and self-sustained,” and feel confident that “Our thoughts are deeds; we dare do all we think, /Since there’s no one to check us, here or elsewhere” (*CP* 176). “The Good Town” dramatises the change from optimistic and trusting interchange to suspicion and fear in an imagined community, and its ultimate message is what Muir himself described as “something that is happening in Europe.”¹⁶ The Good Town speakers pose the question of responsibility, as relevant today as it was in the context of twentieth-century European wars and in the wider historical context, as Muir’s comparison with the Crusades previously quoted suggests:

¹⁵ This poem produced a strong effect when read by the present author, without identifying poet or setting, to a seminar group of international students at the Translation School, Johannes-Gutenberg University-Mainz at Gernersheim, in 2013. Palestinian students, students from elsewhere in the Middle East, black students from London, Russians, Poles, were all convinced that this poem related either to their own experiences, or experiences communicated by their parents. For them, Muir’s poem and his de-personalized imagistic method appeared able to cross time and culture barriers.

¹⁶ Muir, BBC broadcast, September 3, 1952 (quoted in *CP* 344).

How did it come?
 From outside, so it seemed, an endless source
 Disorder inexhaustible, strange to us,
 Incomprehensible. Yet sometimes now
 We ask ourselves, we the old citizens,
 'Could it have come from us? Was our peace peace?
 Our goodness goodness?' (CP 175)

Muir's life-long preoccupation with social disunity and dislocation as well as actual warfare continued to find expression in his post-Prague poetry, especially in relation to the threat of nuclear war which grew increasingly during the 1950s after the use of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He introduced the theme of nuclear war into his poetry in "The Horses," first published in the *Listener* in March 1955, then included in his 1956 collection *One Foot in Eden*. In his late essay "The Poetic Imagination," Muir placed the world created by applied science—a world of "consistent, mechanical progress"—against the world of human beings and human imagination. In the former, machines give birth to ever new generations of machines, and the new machines are always better and more efficient than the old, and begin where the old left off.¹⁷

In contrast,

every human being has to begin at the beginning, as his forebears did, with the same difficulties and pleasures, the same temptations, the same problem of good and evil, the same inward conflict, the same need to learn how to live, the same inclination to ask what life means (*ibid.*).

And Muir suggests that "if only for the sake of preserving the identity of mankind we must cherish that connection with shared human values" (*ibid.*) The survivors in Muir's "Horses" poem have similarly come to recognise how a blind commitment to technology, imaged in the "failed radios" and the "tractors" which "lie about our fields... like dank sea-monsters couched and waiting," has brought about nuclear disaster, although some future hope is offered to them through the appearance of the "strange horses" and the possibility of a return to a "long-lost archaic companionship": "Our life is changed; their coming our beginning" (CP 226-227). It could be argued that this seemingly positive ending makes its fullest impact when it is read alongside a companion poem "After a Hypothetical War," first published in *The Listener* in January 1956 and

¹⁷ Edwin Muir, "The Poetic Imagination," in his *Essays on Literature and Society*, revd. ed. (London: Hogarth Press, 1965), 215-227 (p. 226).

included in the “Last Poems” section of Muir’s *Collected Poems*, first published in 1960, the year after his death. In this later poem, we are confronted not with the possibility of a new, more human-centred beginning for the survivors after a nuclear war, but with “the soil on its perpetual death-bed” and a “chaotic breed of misbegotten things, /Embryos of what could never wish to be” (CP 243). Muir is didactic in neither poem, nor simplistic, as it has sometimes been suggested in relation to his imagistic suggestion of a positive outcome in “The Horses.” Read together, these poems through their respective and contrasting scenarios and imagery open up imaginatively the choices open to human beings as they appeared in the dark days of the Cold War. It is also this question of the need to choose which ends the bleak poem “The Day Before the Last Day” in the “Poems Not Previously Collected” section of his posthumous *Collected Poems* (1960). The speaker in this poem imagines people gathered together on the last day on earth, a “Mechanical parody” of the biblical Judgment Day brought about by behaviour which has led not only to human destruction, but to destruction of

all

That has ever has been, all species and forms ...
Sight and hearing and touch, feeling and thought,
And memory of our friends among the dead (CP 269).

Muir’s original speaker essays a distinct second voice, within whose “hypothetical picture” (l. 17) of this ending to human life is imagined the experience and voice of those facing such an end:

“... they hear no great voice crying,
‘There shall be no more time, nor death, nor change,
Nor fear, nor hope, nor longing, nor offence,
Nor need, nor shame.’ But all are silent, thinking:
‘Choose! Choose again, you who have chosen this!
Too late! Too late!’
And then: ‘Where and by whom shall we be remembered?’”
(*ibid.* 270).

A preoccupation with the dangers of impersonality in human life is a related theme to the theme of war in Muir’s late poetry. In “The Incarnate One” from *One Foot in Eden*, religion replaces war as a source of destruction as the humanity of “the Word made flesh” through the paintings of the Italian Giotto is contrasted with “King Calvin and his iron pen,” which turns “God” into “three angry letters in a book.” On Calvin’s “logical hook ... the Mystery is impaled and bent /Into an ideological instrument” (CP 213). As the poem progresses this “abstract

calamity” in the religious context appears to move in implication beyond religion to include the “cold empire of the abstract man” (*CP* 214) which provided the theme of many of his previous post-war Prague poems. One of his very last poems, “The Last War,” continues this preoccupation with the loss of human values which leads to social and psychological as well as military warfare, envisaging what Muir had in an earlier poem called “the articulate breath” of humanity becoming “now only the lexicon of a dream” (*CP* 193, 257). “The Last War” is constructed in five sections, each of which meditates imagistically on the possible ending of human life and on a common responsibility that human beings have forgotten, or can no longer fulfil:

No place at all for bravery in that war ...
 No way to save
 By our own death the young that they might die
 Sometime a different death (*CP* 256).

The draft of a late unfinished poem, “The Refugees born for a land unknown” (*CP* 271-2), appears prescient of the present-day refugee situation in Europe where desperate people from the Middle East and Africa attempt to escape their war-torn homelands only to be drowned at sea or held captive in their final destinations.

As poet Muir was a late modernist, but that late development coincided with a period in human history of warring inhumanity and the invention of weapons of mass destruction. Significant for us today, that late poetry confirms him as a voice of continuing relevance to our own troubled twenty-first-century times.

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