1-1-1969

Jane Duncan's Friends and the Reachfar Story

Francis R. Hart
University of Virginia

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you by the Scottish Literature Collections at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Studies in Scottish Literature by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact dillarda@mailbox.sc.edu.
FRANCIS R. HART

Jane Duncan's Friends and the Reachfar Story

Published in the autumn of 1967, My Friends the MacLeans is the fourteenth in a projected cycle of twenty or more novels, a lively Recherche du temps perdu enjoyed by addicts as old-fashioned Scotch "character" fiction, while conceived by Jane Duncan1 as a Künstlerroman as complex in form as it is "popular" in narrative texture. The fourteenth was published eight years after the first (My Friends the Miss Boyds), but planning and composition began long before 1959 and have proceeded more slowly. No volume undergoes final revision without reference to drafted successors. The novels echo and overlap in perhaps more variants of relativity and incremental repetition than even a Durrell or a Browning ever dreamed of. Unity of theme has evolved from the start — any thematic catalogue of the first-written My Friend Mariel would attest to that. More volumes are in manuscript. The reservations of urbane Clydeside reviewers — "There are no signs she will ever stop!" — are lost in the hosannas of the New Janeites. Meanwhile, the reflective devotee may look back from the moral and epistemological complexity of My Friends the MacLeans and trace figures in the carpet of the growing Reachfar Story.

The carpet metaphor is Jane Duncan's. For her heroine-autobiographer Janet Sandison, each plot and each "friend" make a thread. The whole

1 Various ideas and interpretations attributed to Jane Duncan in the course of this essay derive from several conversations at her home on the Cromarty Firth during the summer of 1967. Her novels could have no more sophisticated and sature a commentator than herself. The novels, published in England by Macmillan and in the U. S. by St. Martin’s, appeared as follows: My Friends the Miss Boyds (1959); My Friend Mariel (1959); My Friend Monica (1960); My Friend Annie (1961); My Friend Sandy (1961); My Friend Martha's Aunt (1962); My Friend Flora (1962); My Friend Madame Zora (1963); My Friend Rose (1964); My Friend Cousin Emmie (1964); My Friends the Mrs. Millers (1965); My Friends From Craigton (1965); My Friend My Father (1966); My Friends the MacLeans (1967). Page references are to the first editions, except in the cases of Martha's Aunt, Madame Zora, and Cousin Emmie, where I have had to cite "Pan" paperback editions. The fifteenth, My Friends the Hungry Generation, appeared late in 1968, after this essay was completed.
JANE DUNCAN AND THE REACHFAR STORY

rug is Reachfar. The Reachfar of place and time was the small hill farm of Janet's grandparents on the Black Isle of Ross-shire. Through a succession of partial exiles or losses, Janet grows in the memory of the life, the law, and the youth that were Reachfar. But even in the childhood years of The Miss Boyds Janet learns that the forces of history and the unpredictable influences of friends such as the reckless, pathetic Miss Boyds have doomed the idyllic Reachfar of place and time. From her first horror at the gift doll as a "dead baby," from her first glimpse of the sexually frantic Miss Boyd with the soldier in the quarry, Janet has lost Reachfar. The novels record a succession of losses, but each new loss or exile produces a deeper sense of fidelity to the stability, the moral and social order, that Reachfar had been. The central pattern is the elegaic paradox of Tennyson's In Memoriam: the very exploration of loss gradually transforms the beloved into a reality of permanent power. Space and time become transcendently one in memory. The actual cutting loose — the sale of Reachfar when Janet is in her forties and far away — must be painful. "Reachfar, for me," she recognizes, "had been 'always', a thing that was ever there and never changed" (My Friend My Father, 228). Yet in supposing it so, she had ignored the lesson Reachfar taught: "One wants to believe that everything lasts forever, but it doesn't" (My Friend Madame Zora, 76). "Life is one long process of change" (114), and only the final loss permits the final possession of a Reachfar immutable in memory and vision.

This final step is seen in various contexts in the most recent four "Friends": The Mrs. Millers, the Friends from Cairston, My Father, and The MacLeans, where Janet realizes that "in the way of anybody or anything that is much loved, Reachfar was part of myself and although, now, it no longer belonged physically to my family and me, it belonged to me in a fashion far deeper and truer than it would ever belong to anybody else" (MacLeans, 138). The volumes all trace the evolution of Reachfar as a complex personal symbol of both change and permanence. They all dramatize the autobiographical quest Janet describes as her first six years in the West Indies: "all my time in the island until now had been spent in struggle to return to the world I had known before" (MacLeans, 146). Of this struggle, the symbol is generated and an artist-hero is born.

Both symbol and artist should be approached, however, through more obvious and "popular" facets of Jane Duncan's art. For to be fair to the fiction one must be fair to the addicted New Janeites and recognize its place in a Scottish tradition always avowedly "popular," from John
Galt to Eric Linklater. Two ambiguous truisms characterize her popularity. First, one hears she is a "born story-teller": that is, she sees persons, places, events in terms of anecdotal or legendary potentiality and builds them into tragicomic plots with facility and colloquial vividness. Second, she is a "local novelist"—the conservative recorder of threatened values in an intensely localized Scottish ancestral place. The actual identity of place is, as with the counties of Trollope, Hardy, and Faulkner, much less important than its essential fictive locality. Indeed, for Jane's Janet, place and story are interdependent parts of a single hereditary reality. Her vision of character and event, like her mode of narrative, is rooted in a traditional childhood locale—the village (Achraggan), the croft (Reachfar), the lawgiving matriarch MY GRANDMOTHER, and "the oldest of all my friends, that great teller of stories," Uncle George. We should begin, then, with story and place, move on to ideas of character and relationship, and finish with the Reachfar Story as the growth of an artist.

Jane Duncan, Honors M.A. in Literature (Glasgow), acknowledges two original inspirations, Shakespeare and Proust. But her perennial fascination with the "interconnectedness of things" (Emmie, 200) we should call Dickensian, with all the risk that label implies for novels mostly remote from Dickensian fantasy. For Janet, the interconnectedness, like other essentials of human destiny, is ambivalent. It is fascinating and terrifying, reassuring and menacing. It can be the "feeling of all life having led up to this one instant of completeness in the 'here' of space and the 'now' of time" (Zora, 68). It can also be the invading "sense of the terrible interconnectedness of life" (Macleans, 136), the sense that the tragedy of Linda Lee (Martha's Aunt, 204) "started away back God knows when!" Fittingly, Janet finds it both bewildering and amusing to take the arbitrary first step of "beginning" another story, selecting and refocusing the components of life to constitute a new "autonomy"; "A story, they say, has to have a beginning, a middle and an end, but I defy anybody to say where any story that is about life had...

It was Eric Linklater who, during a talk at his home in Easter Ross in July, 1967, suggested that Jane Duncan belongs to a Galt tradition. Himself no "regionalist," Linklater has adapted numerous traditional Scottish motifs to the service of his own very popular novels. See my "Region, Character, and Identity in Recent Scottish Fiction," The Virginia Quarterly Review, Autumn, 1967, pp. 597-613. The problem of "popularity" remains unsolved and a major distraction in discussions of many major Scottish authors, including Scott, Stevenson, and Barrie, resulting in vague charges of traditionalism, escapism, and sentimentalism, et al. Cf. mv "Reviewing Hay's Gillespie," in Studies in Scottish Literature, II (1964), 19-31.

its beginning. One has to choose some arbitrary point" (Sandy, 2). Most of the stories refocus the same components: peripheral events are explored in full foreground complexity; persons supposed stable and definite shift into problematic centrality. Most of them, arbitrary in beginning, end as progressive revelations of interconnectedness, with climaxes of sensational resolution: an earthquake, a violent death, an inheritance. All three of My Friends the Mrs. Millers, equally involved with the West Indian color problem, are assembled at last in Janet's house.

Plot in The MacLeans culminates in stunning coincidences of interconnectedness. Janet's trouble here, as in the other St. Jago novels, derives from her repeated collisions with the codes and decorums of a colonial world she can never accept, and from her often delusive attraction to persons ostensibly "queer." Plot traces the breakdown in ignorance and distrust of a network of seemingly stable relationships, Janet's sad rediscovery that neither persons nor relationships can be stable, her resort for reorientation to "Reachfar" stability in memory, her growing in knowledge of the "truth" of other persons, and the building of new-old relationships out of that truth. Plot perfectly exemplifies the definition of the novel proposed by Jane Duncan's favorite American critic, Lionel Trilling: it plays the problem of knowledge against a background of shifting social manners and orders. Action is everywhere dominated by the problem of knowledge. Knowing others: "Janet, how much do you know of Marion MacLean?" I felt suddenly angry. 'Nothing,' I said snappishly. 'What does anybody know of anybody, come to that?'" (204) Knowing oneself: "It is essential to me to know my own truth or where I stand and I would like you to recognise that truth too" (60). The problem is complicated by social instability: "I felt that the ground was shifting beneath my feet as the whole picture of Paradise social relationships broke up and changed perspective before my eyes" (78). The action is played out in the flamboyance of colonial St. Jago, where white men live lives of anachronism and unreality, and history parallels in its own destructive process the mysterious force that dooms personal relations to ignorance and instability.

On the sugar plantation named with intricate irony Paradise, Janet has "known" the MacLeans as "friends" for several years. When she aids their libertine-novelist son Roddy in rebellion and flight, the wrath and scorn of the parents initiate an agonised rediscovery of the in-

* The definition is in "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," in The Liberal Imagination.
definiteness of "character." The phrases are the same formulae that open My Friend Muriel: "I have a friend who, when she tries to explain something that she has said or done, invariably prefaces her explanation with the phrase: 'I am a person like this —' and it was savagely frightening now to discover that, although I had what we call 'known' Rob MacLean for nearly four years, I had no idea what he was 'a person like'" (30). Having 'known' the MacLeans in several prior novels, the reader undergoes the same shock and goes through the same "time which I described in my mind in the words of my childhood as 'the week that the MacLeans got different'" (69). But in Janet's world the shifting of one relationship is the shifting of all. Even Janet and her husband "Twice" cannot understand each other vis à vis the MacLeans, and Janet must learn that "life is too short for two people, even people as close as Twice and myself, to establish total communication" (150). She learns more. The Janet that had said, "The relationships in my life seem to constitute the only importance it has" (Mrs. Millers, 85) now goes further: "I have often thought that I myself have no existence except in the relationships between myself and other people" (MacLeans, 140). Hence, a disintegration of social relationship is a crisis of identity, a personal disorientation that reaches a climax in her husband's illness, Reochfar's sale, and the news of her father's death. The force of the running epigraph from As You Like It declares itself: "But these are all lies. Men have died from time to time and worms have eaten them, but not for love."

In isolated revolt against "the worms of time," Janet turns again to her writing, and thus back to her bond with Roddie MacLean. As the writer plumbs her memory to create new reality, so the woman searches her memory of the MacLeans for a basis for renewal in love. Both are searches of the past for renewed stability; both are ways of rebellion against the terrible mutability in experience and relationship. The ultimate means to understanding is the artist's leap, and the artist seeks the essential impulse in remembered childhood: "To understand someone completely, to be in full sympathy with anyone, we have to be able to translate his experience into our own terms and with the speed of thought I returned in my own mind to the age of eight" (207). Reconciliation follows on the realization that "we don't see people as they really are at all. We make them into reflections of ourselves . . . . Are any of us, I began to ask myself, capable of seeing people clearly as individuals in their own right and not as wish-fulfillments of oneself" (245)? The doubt is an ultimate urgency, and for both artist and "friend" in Janet the only answer that comes is "love" (My Father, 132).
Meanwhile, the MacLeans, having resigned themselves to an end of status and power in Scottish retirement, are reconciled in sudden death by an earthquake.

This is not the first earthquake (see Marita's Aunt). St. Jago is consistently drawn as a place of potential violence. Stunning coincidences, nonetheless, are jarring. Novels beginning with protestations of plotlessness often end with too much "plot." But the familiar defenses of Dickens, Hardy, and others are useful here: coincidence, the accident of interconnectedness, is an essential feature of Jane Duncan's determined universe. "Fate is as good a name as any," says Janet, "for the trouble I get into" (Zora, 51). "We are all links in a chain," chants Madame Zora. "Life would be much simpler if it were not so interwoven" (Monica, 30). It is "the paradox that seems to be at the root of life and to be its main driving force" (Annie, 227) that the most trivially hostile "influence" can be providential, and "every single little thing that happens is a turning point" (Emmie, 197). My Friend Muriel is about "the importance of unimportant things," and its narrator begins "at a loss to understand why such apparently unimportant things should exercise so much influence on one's life" (Muriel, 80, 27). Marita's aunt, as lacking in character as Muriel, poses the same mystery. A tragic history of violence and exploitation finds its ultimate catalyst in her totally negative personality. "If you believe in human personality at all," argues Twice, "it seems to me you have to believe in its having some force, some potential for good and evil" (Marita's Aunt, 164). Without Muriel, Janet would never have met her future husband, and without the despicable stepmother Jean and the superbly immoral trull Annie, she would never have found the courage to defy convention and "marry" an undivorced man by mutual agreement. Had she not met again the flamboyantly obscene Rose at the waterfront, she might have married Alan Stewart, and had the "friends from Cairnton" not turned up in St. Jago when they did, she and Twice might not have survived the terrible separation of his illness.

So strong is what Twice calls the "sense of contingency" in Janet that she finds the very idea of free will an absurdity. Yet she is perversely fascinated by those who live without that sense — those impervious to influence and experience, such as Marita's aunt, Annie Black, the defiant Cousin Emmie, the liberated Rose, the lovely white negress Linda Lee, and the artist Serafini, who lost his memory — hence his past — in the war. How fascinating to see one in whom "his whole metabolism is changed and he emerges as an artist" (Zora, 175). Her fascination is with character that is free, autonomous; and it is
found in cases as dissimilar as those of Roddie MacLean and Annie Black. Annie did the impossible: "she tossed the only little bit of tradition that was in her out of the window.... She stepped out of the framework of Cairnto to which she had been bred, she developed a technique of living that was personal to herself" (Annie, 293). Thus she was pure "character," impervious, beyond innocence or evil, "rapt, flower like, in her own secret self, the self that even she was not aware of, a deep, unknowable essence" (276). Rose resembles her in an amoral autonomy that seems to defy influence, hence time, and must therefore fascinate a heroine haunted by time and hereditary identity. Roddie appeals in the same way: "In the sunlight, he turned to smile at me, the bold, reckless smile that comes only to those who have the world before them and no old debts to the past and no old doubts from the past trailing behind them" (Emmie, 218; MacLeans, 17). It is the charming uncontingency of the Scottish Mrs. Miller that permits her to transcend race barriers in The Mrs. Millers. Fascinated with such free characters, Janet yearns for the kind of transcendence they suggest. Yet for her, identity itself lies in the contingencies, the frameworks, the debts and doubts from the past, that severely limit individual freedom.

Janet expresses her own determinism in figures of jigsaw puzzles and puppets (Zora, 7). Life is a maze of unshakeable influences, demonically personified as friends: "it seems to me absurd to say that we live our lives—our lives are largely conditioned for us and directed by the people we know, the people whom we term loosely our 'friends'" (Rose, 17). "Life has a way of taking control and rendering the whole human free-will concept completely null and void" (Martha's Aunt, 140). It is "absolute bunk," she often thinks (Rose, 214). And when, as Dee's governess (in Rose), she takes her charge for a visit to Reachfar, she must sit by and watch her own family "conditioning" the child, and realize with shock that her own Reachfar identity—the stability it means to her—is necessarily opposed to freedom. Only through losing Reachfar can she be "free." Only by changing can Reachfar become something beyond contingency, a part of the autonomy of Janet.

But persons carry with them associations and restrictions from which they cannot free themselves—such is the conservative theme of The Mrs. Millers. Janet must learn that just as she is one with her Reachfar past, so the Dalacs and the Lindsays, island whites and blacks, "are at the mercy of history"—such is a common plight in Scottish fiction—and history, as usual for the Scottish novelist, is bound to local circum-

[ 162 ]
stances (Mrs. Millers, 88). Ironically, a black St. Jagoan must tell Janer Reachfar that "no person is ever quite separate from her family or her race." But the paradox of freedom is one Janet immediately understands: "Everything would be much more simple if we were all separate as you say" (127), for it is this impossible separateness that she finds fascinating in the Roddies and the Annies. The Mrs. Millers envisions close intimacy of the races; but it recognizes that such closeness must, like any other human relationship, be made by two persons who respect the differentness, hence the contingency, of each other. "Men's minds are the sum of their race inheritance and their individual experience" (208); "men's minds are small" (137)—and their smallness is, among other things, a rootedness, an attachment to small place.

Jane Duncan recognizes as a traditional concern of Scottish culture a fiercely ambivalent attachment to locality, and for Janet the attachment can include not just the life-giving love of Reachfar, but the sordid horror of lowland Cairnton and the fantastic menace of St. Jago. Jane Duncan finds love-hate ambivalence a flaw in L. G. Gibbon's Mearns inspiration (A Scots Quair), and argues that her own Cairnton novels—Annie, Friends from Cairnton—are conceived in pure hatred. But in Annie Janet says no emotion is barren; love and hate will both bear fruit (92); indeed, "hatred is akin to love, in more ways than people tend to think" (303). The rootless are rather those incapable of feeling anything (Martha's Aunt, 121). Places arouse feelings as persons do, and like persons they have identities of topography, climate, history, and culture. Each is attended with a certain logic of events and its own quality of time and space (Monica, 255-6). Cairnton is "a place where nothing happened" (Annie, 189), just as St. Jago was "crowded with events...and situation arose out of situation, as suddenly and garishly as the passion vines grew overnight from branch to branch" (Sandy, 123), and time at Reachfar—hence events—had a mythic Old Testament quality. Thus, the "dimension of place" is "one of life's basic dimensions" and not to be ignored (Mrs. Millers, 5).

Persons are local in identity and are to be known thus. Linda Lee is a symbol of St. Jago as Jean is of Cairnton, and Janet expects that "all my acquaintance must know that I was born and brought up at Reachfar" (MacLean, 217), because she cannot imagine herself "without Reachfar behind me" (Mrs. Millers, 70). In her passion, albeit sceptical, for self-definition, she often associates herself with Reachfar topography: "People tell me that I change very little...It must be

the Reachfar rock in me" (Rose, 175). Displaced, she felt "like an awkwardly-shaped lump of Reachfar rock that had somehow been introduced into this rarified atmosphere" (Zora, 147). Her obsession with place may itself be "an outcrop of Reachfar rock" in her mind (Mrs. Millers, 181). Her husband teases her with the metaphor (Sandy, 180), and she expands it wittily: "The rocks of Ross-shire, I am informed, are of the Archaean schist type and... I am something of an Archaean schist myself" (Martha's Aunt, 6). Deeply fixed to her "native rock" (Emmie, 9), she learns what that means only when, at almost forty, she must go to an exotically different climate and learn that a climate is "not only a physical thing"; "the life of the mind is inextricably bound up with the physical surroundings" (Sandy, 121), and her rootedness involves a heritage intellectual and moral:

There were times when I felt forced to step into the open and say things like this, when I felt that I was almost a reincarnation of my grandmother, times when I could feel a hard materialistic realism jutting through the surface of my mind as the hard grey schist outcropped among the wine-coloured heather and the soft green moss of the Reachfar moor [Cairn, 138].

And the impulse of the budding writer is traced to the same sense of rootedness. Her father, eager for a book with her name on it, urges her to write letters home:

I want you to do it for your own sake, so that your home is always fresh in your mind, so that you will never forget that it is there. And I want you to mind, always, on the way we live here and what we think is right and what wrong and I want you never to forget the kind of people you belong to. You were born on Reachfar, it made you what you are and it would be a loss to you to forget it [My Father, 118].

Disorientation of place then, like instability of relationship, must be a crisis of identity itself, and that is what the Reachfar Story is largely about. Janet is not "very good at this thing of moving from one sort of country to another." "Suspended between two worlds," she admits to a "feeling of disorientation" (Zora, 74, 77). In the fantastic world of St. Jago she had "somehow lost her moorings" (Sandy, 67). On the mountain she thinks she is home again, only to have fate cruelly teach her otherwise: "I am lost. I have lost my bearings. I am in strange, terrifying country—hostile country. I am lost" (Mrs. Millers, 197). Adjustment is hard for one blinded to the smallnesses of life by the hill view, the "infinity" of Reachfar vision. The unreality of St. Jago becomes a personal unreality: "I feel that I am not the same person here as I am at home in my own climate and that the home me is the
real me and this makes me distrust the island me" (MacLeans, 79). But the disorientation had begun long before. It was the process of exile that led to the invention of the "home me" long before St. Jago. The creative impulse that now defines the "home me" originated with the instability of Reachfar, doomed by history, by human imperfection, by Jock Skinner and "Poop on the Miss Boyds!" The Reachfar Story is no simple exile's lament for the "auld hame." It is closer to the Fable of the Cave and the parable of poor Gulliver, a study in the genesis and ambiguity of vision.

Reachfar becomes an operative ideal. But the space-time reality in which the ideal is grounded is neither sentimental nor vague. Janet never tires of mocking the stereotyped Highlanks of sentimental fable. Such stereotypes, in fact, aggravate the problem of knowing Janet:

Nobody, I have been told repeatedly, could be more typical of my race and background than I am; but as the conversation went on, it became obvious that Betty and all her family seemed to be working from the premise that all Highland lassies sat at spinning wheels crooning melodies (with English words by Kennedy-Fraser) beside peat fires [Rose, 167].

Twice has only to mention "Granny's Heilan' Hame" to evoke the response, "Yah! None of that slush!" (Sandy, 184). The whimsical narrator of Muriel is a writer about the real Highlands—"I see no reason why we should be turned into stags at bay and monarchs of the glen." She is at pains to disown the "peasant drama" of the regionalist:

It was beautiful harvest weather and we worked a bit each day, but there was nothing dark, desperate and earthy about it like Grassic Gibbon's "Scots Quair" or any of that high intensive drama in a peasant setting for which writers like Thomas Hardy and Mary Webb, in their separate spheres, are so justly famous. There was not, either, any Celtic twilight or Kailyard about it. The light is clear at my home and we grow our vegetables in neat rows in the back garden [Muriel, 293].

By contrast with Cairnton everything seems right with Reachfar, but the rightness is a mixed comic idyll with a precise value: the sort of living in detail that the modern world has lost. As Janet grows up, the rigidities in that rightness become apparent. The Reachfar code, a tree, shudders at the shock of a "voice of reality beside the lovely Thames" called Rose (Rose, 42). Reachfar persons are "separate individuals who could get into similar muddles and make similar mistakes to those I could make myself." Her father is "simply a man," and her shattered vision is seen to have been "romanticed, sentimentalised and grossly false, an insult to the reality that he was" (My Father, 156, 97).
STUDIES IN SCOTTISH LITERATURE

The possession of a Reachfar of the mind is possible only through the demythologizing of the reality. Reachfar codes and persons must somehow be adjusted to the realities of other places. In this complex process other places function as counterparts in various narrative patterns; and as several places play against each other, the narrator's consciousness of her identity in place grows in depth and definition. Perhaps the most intricate in its manipulation of place and time, My Friends from Cairnott evolves through such juxtapositions: Reachfar is lost and gained; Cairnott is rediscovered and reassessed; and both processes lead to the sober acceptance of St. Jago as the place in which life must continue.

The St. Jago novels all use that West Indian island as ambiguous counterpart to Reachfar. "Paradise Plantation" is a horrible opposite; the name seems a deliberate anti-utopian irony. "Paradise" is an infernal substitute for the paradise lost, a place of unreality, impermanence, alienation. At times it appears in its tranquil anarchism to have captured the time that Reachfar sadly lacks: "life very often seemed to be made up of nothing but time, a sort of pocket of time enclosed within the space bounded by its green hills, and for such a place it seems to me that Paradise is a very appropriate name" (Martha's Aunt, 24). But the appearance of "happy valley" conceals the reality, the tragic duplicity of Johnson's Rasselas: "in inward fact it was a microcosm of this ugly, earthly world and rent this way and that by a thousand jealousies and discontents" (Sandy, 85). It becomes a place of enchantment, of theatrical masques and comic errors and sexual disguises, where the problem of knowledge is ludicrously vexed by the multiple untruths by which people live. The episodic center of My Friend Sandy is a fantastic Christmas play, for which Janet the newcomer is responsible, with the result that her position in Paradise becomes a function of ludicrous masquerade. She is suspected of an affair with the island rake, and the rake's mistress's alcoholic twin brother tries to kill her during the performance. She feels she has stepped into a looking-glass world. The island has an "unreal and fantastic quality"; it is a place "where, literally, anything could happen and in which I, in turn, might, without being aware of it, behave in a way, as one can in dreams, that has no relation to real life" (Sandy, 31). "The whole place and all the people in it have an air of upheaval and impermanence about them" (43). It becomes a hell of absurd unreason. In The MacLeans the looking-glass absurdity has become a nightmare from which there is no escape. The appeal to an ideal Reachfar is urgent.

But the utter difference of the two places is undercut by important
JANE DUNCAN AND THE REACHFAR STORY

resemblances. Like Reachfar, Paradise is the past, governed by a heroic Scottish matriarch as wrong in her denials of history as Janet’s grandmother. Reachfar reached its historic end in Janet’s youth, and St. Jago is doing so in her middle years, and she is haunted by the grim parallel: “why is it that I always seem to come in just at the end of every epoch? I saw the sun set on a certain way of life in the north of Scotland—probably the last place in Britain where it set—and here I am, in at the death here too” (Sandy, 107). "The Scots are pretty good at history,” writes Neil Gunn, “which, perhaps, is why most of them mistrust it. For it is full of facts, most of them ugly.” The Scottish novelist can hardly escape his preoccupation with past history, history for him being past. The waning of the plantation festival of "Cropover" sends Janet’s mind back to the last Harvest Home at Poynddale in 1918 (see The Miss Boys). But the historic fatality connecting Janet’s places simply underlines problems throughout her personal history. What happens to her at St. Jago—her struggle with the knowledge and variability of character—happens to her everywhere.

Her constant preoccupation with the variability of character recalls, in different ways, both Jane Duncan’s exemplar Proust and her ancestor Jane Austen. Almost all of Proust’s 3000 pages, suggests Roger Shattuck, may be seen “as consisting in Marcel’s gradual discovery and acceptance of the truth that no person, no action, no sentiment, no social phenomenon is ever simple and consistent.” “Les êtres ne cessent pas de changer de place par rapport à nous” might as easily be the theme of all of Janet Sandison’s “friendships.” Reuben Brower has seen anticipation-with-differences of the Proustian theme in Jane Austen’s “sense of variability and intricacy of character,” her awareness that the knowledge of a Darcy or a Swann “is an interpretation and a construction, not a simple absolute.” Both antecedents are illuminating, but the differences are definitive. Janet’s own cultural heritage transmits a faith in character as “simple absolute.” Her narrative art springs from a communal tradition rich in “characters,” heroically impermeable, the fixities of legend. She herself is inseparable from a Reachfar tied to such tradition; hence, unlike Marcel or Elizabeth Bennet, she can learn her lesson only at the cost of self-repudiation. Her Reachfar childhood fixed her attitude toward character and relationship, and hence, the story of learning the terrible, mutable truth about friendship must be the story of Reachfar’s transformation as well.

But the Reachfar child's instinct for persons will never truly be lost. Janet inherited "a good touch of her old witch of a grandmother," says Monica; "it's a kind of instinct for people and events" (Zora, 130-31). The child brought up in lonely places, her whole world "concentrated in the persons of the few people sitting round the Sunday dinner table," was brought to know "every shade of expression on their faces, could interpret every glance of their eyes, could identify to hairbreadth precision the meaning of every inflection of their voices" (Miss Boyds, 65). Only the child can have such knowledge. Children bring "to their observation of the adults around them a detachment, a clearness of vision that is fuddled and clouded when age and experience overtake us" (Cairnton, 25-26). For the adult Janet, knowing character is the problem of what has become of the child's power. "I was utterly bewildered. Hitherto, I had prided myself a little on being a fairly accurate observer of people, this being my main interest" (Rose, 132). One recalls that other Jane's bewildered Elizabeth: "I, who have so prided myself on my discernment!" But for the post-Proustian the problem is more intricate than a stage in the maturing of judgment. It involves an anomaly of memory and vision. Twice attempts to define it: "a queer thing how most of the time you notice every finicking little thing about people and yet how, now and again, you miss something enormous that everybody else can see at a glance" (MacLeans, 30). The anomaly in the vision of Janet the woman is to be understood only in terms of the evolution of Janet the artist.

The same is true of Janet's "attitude to human relationships" (Cairnton, 26), another ambivalent bequest of Reachfar. Janet the Highlander often yearns for the solitude of the Reachfar hilltop, especially when bombarded and benumbed by the force of other personalities. She backs away instinctively from invasions of her privacy, and is embarrassed when forcing others into self-exposure (Emmie, 59, 88; Muriel, 47, 65; MacLeans, 14). An excellent image of the Highland solitary appears in the love scene with Twice in Muriel:

I was still conscious of that extraordinary vulnerability, as if the
man could penetrate all my most secret defences and leave me
without a weapon for the safeguard of my inmost self. But now
I also felt that I had the key to all his defences and was held back
only by his will. He did not want me to break through, I felt,
into his private world and that barrier of unwillingness stood
like an impenetrable wall between us [Muriel, 246].

It is the self-protective impulse, the passion for remaining spiritually
intact within one's circle, that Neil Gunn repeatedly dramatizes. Looking back, Janet realizes that "I had pursued solitariness all my life, I saw now, as primitive man must have pursued the food that would satisfy his hunger and keep him alive, without recognising that he was in fact pursuing the essential means of his survival" (Annie, 137). Such is the serious background to the many flippant expressions of the view that "the world would be a splendid place... if it were not for the people in it" (Emmie, 112), or the world "would be marvellous if there was nobody in it except oneself" (Rosa, 209). For Janet, then, each new possibility of "friendship" is a new menace to one's privacy, one's stable self. Her longing for escape from such entanglements is a characteristic: "If only, I wished, it were possible to let people pass heedlessly and unheeded by as the Atlantic water flowed past this ship, closing in over its wake so that the passing left no mark" (Emmie, 49).

What then of the Janet for whom "friends" comprise the network of influences of which life is made, for whose memory "people appear like the coloured threads that made up that long-ago tangle of wool... all the threads almost inextricably interwoven" (MacLeans, 92)? What of the Janet who is "the kind of person who lived entirely at the mercy of the people I knew, the people whom I called my 'friends'" (Rose, 95)—who, for most of the time, has "no character at all"—who is "not much of a character" but "merely the prey of every influence, pressure and thrust that life has at its command" (Emmie, 8; Sandy, 108)? Where is the Janet who feels "I myself have no existence except in the relationships between myself and other people" (MacLeans, 140)? Again, the tragic paradox. Identity is inseparable from the very "influences" that rob one of freedom or compromise one's nature. In the Reachfar paradise that is lost, one could somehow have both: one's integrity as a person, and one's identity in a system of stable relationships. Yet even Reachfar in space and time taught the lesson of the fall: the contingency of "friendship," the variability of character. Like all living things relationships must grow and develop. After the fall any other view is delusive, and at thirty-three Janet finds "I had been deluding myself that I, in relation to my family, was a static quantity related to a number of other static quantities and that we were all static in relation to one another. But this was not so and the true nature of our relationships was difficult to determine." The most intimate relatives become separate then, and the result is a "terrible loneliness, for all these people who had been the steady firmament of my world


[169]
now appeared as a number of separate worlds, all shifting and changing as they pursued some orbit of their own” (My Father, 156-57). The image has appeared before: “People are like a whole universe of little worlds” (Muriel, 224). How can shifting other worlds ever be known? How can stable relationships evolve in a universe of erratic orbits? “Friendship” must indeed be a mystery as well as a menace, demanding acts of faith or folly that are necessary for there is nothing else. Only in the “knowing” of other people can one define oneself.

Janet has little faith in definitions; yet, characteristically, like the other menacing mysteries of human experience, they fascinate her. “Sophie is very much my type of person.” “What type of person is that?” “I can’t tell you except by opposites” (MacLeans, 155). “Sashie, what sort of person are you?” “Darling, what an absurdity of a question! If one knew, one wouldn’t be such a person, would one?” (Sandy, 167)

“The I am is nearly always a lie” (Muriel, 18-19, 25). Defining oneself is possible only in the total context of one’s relationships; and the very effort to realize a truth, a stability, is a desperate effort to create oneself, to create in oneself a permanence to replace that lost permanence—that Reachfar—destroyed by time and space. For all Twice’s insistence that Janet accept change as reality, and for all her repeated efforts to do so, the basic impulse of her character and of her autobiographical venture is the Romantic artist’s quest for permanence, a permanence true to the fluidity or dynamism of life, and to the fullness of space and time. It is this Romantic quest that makes her evolution as an artist the ultimate focus of the Reachfar Story.

The “instinct for persons and events” contributes, as does the fascination with the “interconnectedness of things.” But there are other components. The adult’s narrative power is a continuation of the child’s love of mimicry and word-play, of playing a repertory of persons with Uncle George and Tom the handyman. Her fascination with words and names—the queer, the picture-making, the oddly distinctive—is tied to a primitive faith in the power of naming. Her memory for conversation is inseparable from her picture-memory of character (Monica, 102), and words become pictures in her mind (Rose, 19).

Just as her identity seems composed of the “influences” of friends, so her idiom is often a tissue of tags from the same sources. Twice notes that “Words, just as words, quite simply in themselves mean more to you than they do to most people” (Cairnston, 48); “your attitude to words is a little exaggerated” (Mrs. Millers, 123). Her mind “has a habit of finding release in jingles of words” (Rose, 79). Person and place fuse in the mystery of bye-naming (Flora, 3). The place-names
of St. Jago — New Hope, Canaan, Content, Paradise — "turn St. Jago into a fantasy world for me" (Emmie, 15). Her disorientation can be traced back to the "romance" of names surrounding Reachfar and to the symbolic weight (far-reaching influence; Gaelic house of law)⁹ of the name Reachfar itself.

Here is yet another of the artist's impulses in the child: the penchant for symbolic vision, also a mixed blessing. The child who screams in terror at the "dead baby" doll (The Miss Boyds) is already the superstitious Highland woman for whom character can be "a sort of luck talisman" (Cairnton, 57). The child who recognizes Annie as the "symbol of my ‘difference’" (Annie, 165) will be the young woman for whom Rose personifies reality breaking in upon dream, a symbol of Surrey in the reckless 20's and 30's, and the older woman in St. Jago: "I suppose we must have a symbol on which to hang our consciousness of what we feel to be the injustice of life. My symbol was High Hope" (Mrs. Millers, 215). Janer forms a complex symbolic relationship with each of her "friends." Rose is her Celtic Twilight side and at the same time symbolizes the ugly reality that shatters that dream; thus, she is the war in Janet herself. The fraudulent oracle Madame Zora is a grotesque Janet, forever talking of her many friends, yet terribly alone, and forever seeking escape from loneliness and the chain of necessity — "We are all links in a chain!" — into the past. For Janet, other persons must be known as symbols of places, of mental climates, of epochs in life: Jean of Cairnton; Linda Lee as "the embodiment of the spirit of the island" (Martha's Aunt, 192), and Sashie de Marnay of its pathetic falseness; MY GRANDMOTHER of Reachfar.

But while the child possesses the artist's symbolic impulse, the adult alone can recognize the ambivalence of symbolic vision, the lonely egoism it implies. Janet's fears increase that her world is all subjective. It is not just Martha's aunt that is "all self." One becomes a friend of Janet by assuming symbolic import relative to Janet, and hence, "one is never sure whether one is liking the real person or some glamorised version of that person that one has oneself invented" (Emmie, 79-80). Painful demythologizing forces on Janet the disagreeable realization that "people, for me, have what you might call contexts . . . Basically, I am tremendously egotistical and selfish, I think. I never think of people except in relation to myself and as part of the furniture of certain periods in my life" (Rose, 184). The pervasive theme of the sub-

⁹My own Gaelic is much too rudimentary to assess the derivation: reachd/ law; fardach/ house. What matters is that Jane Duncan herself presumes such a derivation.
j ectivity of symbolic vision marks the sophistication of The MacLeans. Twice repeatedly warns Janet; Edward Dulac tells her, "We can't really see beyond ourselves and to some extent we see other people as ourselves in a different situation" (97). And Janet comes to confess, "I think that we like or love the images of people that we ourselves project." Reminded she had said she had no character independent of other "influences," she reflects, "This is the anomaly. I am simply not sure whether I with my monstrous ego am the reality or whether all the other people are the reality and I am only a reflection of them" (156). She seems to oscillate between Keats's "Poetical Character" and what Keats called the "wordsworthy or egotistical sublime," and either poet could have taught her the painful ambivalence of vision, had not her experience done so. The growing artist must, in the face of this painful oscillation, undertake the constant readjustment of renewed vision to rediscovered reality.

Most important, Janet the artist has inherited from the child a sense of mutability, of Time the Destroyer. Jane Duncan recalls her father hoeing a Black Isle garden, reciting Rosalind's "Men have died from time to time and worms have eaten them, but not for love." But only the adult Janet can know that it is sometimes a good thing to lay the ghosts of one's past, and that memory can be, not a trap of nostalgia, but a source of transcendent power. "Memory is a very, very queer thing," and things fascinate Janet in proportion to their queerness. The Highlander in her has a "long, hard memory." The specialist in "friends" has a great "tangled web of memory, out of which individual loops may with difficulty be pulled — and sometimes, in an awed fashion, I become aware that this tangle I carry within me is only an infinitesimally small part of the memory tangle that makes up the race memory of my country" (MacLeans, 201, 92). All the novels are studies in the worlds and processes of memory, but Zora, Cairnton, and My Father are the most complex illustrations.

Zora has a melodramatically improbable plot, and the fortune-teller herself is more meaningful in function than credible as a person. Yet the book is marvellously gathered around the idea Janet expresses: "One lives so much by memory" (165). The narrative is pervaded by déjà vu and mysterious memory lapse. Monica twits Janet, "You go on as if your past had been blotted out, as if it had never existed" (18), and yet Janet knows with mixed feelings that such loss is impossible. She learns, like Thackeray's Esmond, that memory is a kind of immortality, providing a fuller dimension for knowing people. Her dead grandparents:
I did not think of death, but of them as they had been, not static and cold, but warm and full of the movement of the little foibles and quirks of character that, in my memory, had made them immortal. They had not died, for me, but had been overtaken in my mind by a change, so that I knew them as it were in a new way and in a new dimension, with a truer knowledge that came to the mind from some other sphere. . . . I was no longer knowing these people with my brain or with my intellect, but I was knowing them in a way deeper than I had ever known them before [22-23].

It is the Reachfar paradox of loss and gain. It is a way akin to that of Madame Zora, who "knows" the war amnesia victim in spite of his changed face, and the way of Granny Gilmour, who "knows" he is not dead. The plot comes fittingly to focus on memory loss, and Janet must in fascinated sympathy try to imagine being a person without a memory—an achievement most unlikely, says Monica: "you've got a memory like one of these awful holograph systems they're developing" (176).

Cairnton is a structure of intricate and multiple time shifting, whereby three places are brought into various patterns of juxtaposition in Janet's memory. "I envy you that memory of yours," says Twice; "but memory isn't exactly the right word. It is as if you carry the people still alive in your mind" (47). At the climax all time and place have in a sense become one. Janet slips into "that unreal yet strangely real land that lies between sleep and wakefulness, where place and time become interrelated and cease to exist in their normal dimensions, different places and different times overlaying one another, so that the mind is filled with a complex of pictures as if many happenings had all been photographed on a single area of film" (230-1). The Reachfar of vision is thus achieved as the past is transformed.

The most complete account of the growth of the artist's memory is My Father. It opens with the child trying to "mind on" last year and finding she "can't mind." Uncle George explains "minding" and "minders" and assures her that her "minder" will grow. What "minders" are comes to her as revelation when she sees her father "minding on" her dead mother:

The awareness suddenly came to me that there was in this life we live another dimension as well as those of place and time, the dimension of the "minder," the memory in which time and place could be fused to become one, in which time and place were preserved for ever and in which being born and dying, the two dominant characteristics of outward life, did not exist [52].

Her mother grows in her knowledge now, just as her father does. She
STUDIES IN SCOTTISH LITERATURE

learns the tragic error of her grandmother, for whom the past is all
tirer suffering best forgotten. Yet ironically, the "terrible" memory
in Janet reminds George and Tom of her grandmother. Her father
urges her to keep memory alive in the image of Reachfar by writing
home. Like Marcel and his little madeleine she finds that sounds and
smells bring "all the years" of "remembered life . . . suddenly around
me" (72). In St. Jago, then, she must "mind on" her origins and never
adjust to unreality and injustice. And, envious of those who "were not
foolish enough, as I was, to carry their pasts about with them" (187),
she turns late in time to the timelessness of art and "that dimension
where time and place are fused and which we call memory" (125).

Thus, in the triumph and solitude of her own Reachfar, in the
assimilation of those shocking contingencies called "friends," the artist
grows. New directions and options remain to be seen — and enthu-
siastically anticipated by all New Janeites — in future installments of the
Reachfar Story.

UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA

[174]