

The Image of the Nation as a Woman in Twentieth
Century Scottish Literature: Hugh MacDiarmid, Naomi
Mitchison, Alasdair Gray

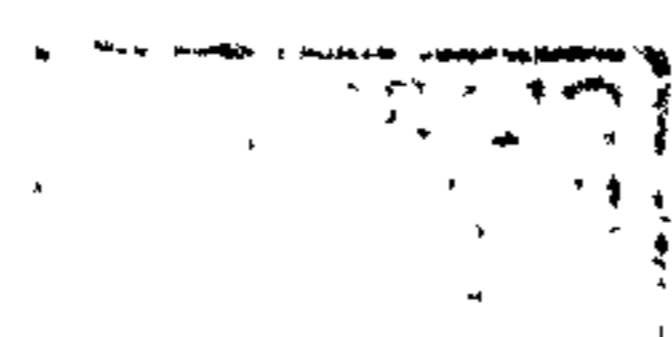
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July 2001



Abstract

This thesis considers the use of the allegorical personification of the nation as a woman in the work of the twentieth century Scottish writers Hugh MacDiarmid, Naomi Mitchison and Alasdair Gray. The image of nation as woman, whether as mother, virgin, goddess or victim is widespread in European iconography from the eighteenth century onwards, but is not common in Scotland until the twentieth century. Not only is the objectification of the female figure intrinsic to such imagery objectionable from a feminist point of view, but the female stereotypes which surround the figure of the nation are contradictory, and it ultimately reinforces a sexist ideology which constructs women as victims. These political flaws and contradictions are highlighted when the metaphor is considered in the context of Scotland's peculiar political situation.

The three authors considered here exemplify very different uses of the nation-as-woman trope. Comparing their work shows that the image is used differently by male and female writers, and that the changes in both gender politics and nationalist theory during the course of the twentieth century mean that its use in the 1990s is much more self-conscious and parodic than when it is used by Hugh MacDiarmid in the 1920s. Nation as woman is a trope which is much more easily used by male authors, as for example in the work of MacDiarmid and Gray, whereas Naomi Mitchison, in appropriating the voice of mother Scotland, finds problems asserting her own voice as a woman writer in Scotland.

The work of all three writers demonstrates an awareness of the problems inherent in the trope. From the 1920s to the 1950s MacDiarmid uses the female figure to represent both Scotland and his creative muse, but acknowledges the lack of such a tradition in Scotland by importing his female figures from other cultures and literatures. The version of Scottishness which MacDiarmid creates privileges the position of a male nationalist in relation to a female nation, and his influence in the Scottish literary scene is such that Naomi Mitchison, as a woman writing in the 1940s, finds it difficult to address the 'matter of Scotland' without resorting to the gendered iconography of woman as nation. Alasdair Gray, writing forty years later, is also influenced by

MacDiarmid, but this is shown through his post-modern rewriting of MacDiarmid's key poem *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, and his problematisation of many of the political and aesthetic contradictions inherent in the nation-as-woman trope. However, although he ironises the trope, he offers no alternative to it, and no way out of its debilitating construction of women.

The trope is even reproduced in the work of critics and feminist writers attempting to use gender theory to undermine conservative ideologies of nationhood. The pervasive and attractive trope of nation-as-woman seems to be self-perpetuating, but remains conservative, because not only does it depend on the construction of women as victims but it also ultimately casts nations as victims, and such a defeatist ideology is not very productive either for women or for Scotland. Any writer who is to exorcise the nation-as-woman figure needs to dismantle this ideology of victimhood, and the thesis concludes with the example of one Scottish woman writer, Janet Paisley, who begins this process, and suggests a potential direction for Scottish writers in the future.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Christopher Whyte, and the Carnegie Trust who funded me for three years of full-time research. A version of Chapters Seven and Eight of this thesis has been published as 'Imagined Bodies and the Landscape of Home: Woman as Nation in the Fiction of Alasdair Gray', in *Terranglian Territories: Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference on the Literature of Region and Nation*, ed. by Susanne Hagemann (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. 269-76.

Many people helped and encouraged me while I was working on this project, and it would be impossible to thank everyone. Particular thanks go to Moira Burgess, for her support and for her invaluable help with long distance research, to Peter Stirling, Carol Collins and Douglas Gifford. Special thanks to Ian MacKenzie for persuading me that it is possible to finish a thesis and for reading and commenting on the final draft; thanks also to Neil Forsyth, Lucy Perry, Stéphanie Janin for the loan of the computer, and other friends and colleagues at the universities of Glasgow and Lausanne.

Chapter One

Woman as Nation

Is it really so simple? Is a woman a place and a man just a thing?

Good *heavens* young-fellow-me-lad, of course not! Ho Ho Ho what a preposterous idea! It's all *much* more civilised than that...

Still, just because it seems so offensive to my taste, I suspect there might be something in it.¹

I

In her essay *Three Guineas*, Virginia Woolf states that 'as a woman, I have no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world'.² Her point is that a nation which has historically denied women property, education and the vote can expect no loyalty from women as citizens. Since women have experienced a different relationship to the laws and customs of the state than men have, and since their 'position in the home of freedom' is different from that of men, women's interpretation of the word 'patriotism' must also be different from a male definition.³ Woolf's statements provide a clear and concise indication of the problems faced by women in fitting into a nation-state which in its institutions and ideology is predominantly male. Her argument indicates clearly how women may experience the nation in an entirely different way from men. There is a vision of openness, of expansion of territory and ideas contained in the idea of women's country being the whole world. However, the wish to escape from the masculine structure of the nation, expressed in the statement 'as a woman, I have no country', while rhetorically striking, is in its own way limiting and not entirely satisfactory, because it provides no answers for the many women who are involved in nationalist movements, or who hold nationalist beliefs, or the majority of women who simply wish to consider themselves citizens of their nations.

¹Iain Banks, *The Bridge* (London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 160.

²Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1938), p. 197.

³Woolf, p. 18.

The intersection of gender and nation is a problematic ground of enquiry, whether we are considering how women position themselves within the nation or the representation of the nation as itself gendered. Here I am looking at one specific way in which women are constructed differently from men in the iconography of nation, the representation of the nation as a woman, and I consider its application in a twentieth century Scottish context. This imagery is widespread and ingrained in European tradition. The representation of nations in female form can be traced back to the seventeenth century, and earlier instances of woman as goddess of place can be found in the classical and the Celtic traditions. The trope elevates and virtually deifies women on the symbolic level but contributes to their political disenfranchisement from the position of citizen on a practical level. This symbolic elevation appears to value women's role in the nation, while it masks the political powerlessness of actual women within the nation. Feminist reactions to the use of the trope vary, however, and some feminist critics trace the tradition back to a matriarchal 'Golden Age' and thus give it a positive connotation.⁴

The trope is used by both male and female authors, in both straight and parodic forms, and even in a 'politically correct' age informed by feminist discourse and modern conceptions of the nation, the image of the nation as a woman is still obviously attractive. I will look in detail at the use of the image in the work of two male authors (Hugh MacDiarmid and Alasdair Gray) and one female author (Naomi Mitchison), writing in Scotland in the twentieth century. The three authors use the trope in very different ways, and each illustrates a different facet of how men and women relate differently to the idea of the nation. Bearing in mind Virginia Woolf's useful aphorism that women have no country, I will consider how the nation-as-woman image functions as part of a greater structure of gendered ideology. The work of an early twentieth century poet like Hugh MacDiarmid, who is attempting to create a mythical structure for the nation, runs the risk of creating a national ideology and mythology accessible only to men, and may serve to make women feel excluded from the nation, as citizens

⁴See Luce Irigaray, 'The Neglect of Female Genealogies' (March 1987), in *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*, trans. by Alison Martin (New York and London: Routledge 1993), pp. 11-22 (pp. 17-19).

and as creative artists. Women who do not follow Virginia Woolf's line and choose not to be excluded, who choose to write themselves into the nation, as is the case with my second author, Naomi Mitchison, are faced with a difficult choice: whether to use the existing structure of national myths or whether to create new myths and a new image of nation. Within the period and the authors I consider we see a polarisation of two different ways of approaching the trope. In their different ways MacDiarmid and Mitchison both employ it as part of a machinery of national mythmaking, while Alasdair Gray, writing in the last two decades of the twentieth century, uses it in a knowing and ironic manner which undercuts both the objectification of the female body and the possibility of 'knowing' the nation in any definitive way. This post-modern perspective gives new life to the trope, which may also be witnessed in the work of Scottish women writers such as Liz Lochhead and Janet Paisley.

II

The single figure of a woman representing the nation is epitomised by the institutional use of figures such as Britannia, Marianne or Helvetia on the currency of the nation. Beneath the surface of this apparently simple emblematisation of national identity lie a whole series of complications and dichotomies. The question which ultimately has to be answered is whether this gendered system of representation exploits the female body and alienates actual women within the nation from participation in a sense of nationhood. The metaphor gives women a symbolic power while stripping them of any actual power. As Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias point out in *Woman-Nation-State*, nationalist discourse makes much use of the allegory of 'the nation as a loved woman in danger or as a mother who lost her sons in battle,'⁵ but this gendered iconography casts men only as citizens, as the nationalist sons of the mother-nation. Maurice Agulhon, in his two volume study of the figure of Marianne as an allegory of Republican France, opposes the generic, abstract symbol of Marianne to the individual

⁵Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias, eds., *Woman - Nation - State* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 9-10.

male agent of history in the figure of Napoleon.⁶ The image of woman as nation not only objectifies the female body but can have a concrete effect on women in society, because if the gendered myth is pursued to its conclusions, the female role is limited to that of progenetrix and guardian of national ideals and traditions.

The editors of the collection of essays *Woman-Nation-State* (1989) list five ways in which women may be involved in ethnic and national processes:

1. as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities
2. as reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic / national groups
3. participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture
4. as signifiers of ethnic / national differences — as a focus and symbol in ideological discourses used in the construction, reproduction and transformation of ethnic / national categories
5. as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles.⁷

While this list is not necessarily exhaustive or definitive, it functions as an instructive starting point from which to explore the relationship between women and nation. It illustrates the way in which the symbolic appropriation of the female body intersects with the actual physical control of women within society, and the way in which each feeds off and contributes to the other. The use of the list format imposes an equal status on five points which deal with different aspects of the word 'women'. Point four, which primarily concerns us here, is concerned with woman as signifier, and is thus markedly different from the other four points which describe roles performed by actual women, and particularly different from point five which describes women as individual agents in national struggles. In point four 'woman' is a construct: it is an imaginary woman who is being used to signify the nation. However, the equal status which Yuval-Davis and Anthias impose on these points serves to highlight the fact that the objectification of the

⁶Maurice Agulhon, *Marianne au combat: l'imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1789-1880* (Paris: Flammarion, 1979); *Marianne au pouvoir: l'imagerie et la symbolique républicaines de 1880 à 1914* (Paris: Flammarion, 1989).

⁷Yuval-Davis and Anthias, p 7.

bodies of women for ideological purposes has an actual impact on the real life of women as subjects within the nation.

It is thus possible to question the validity of the myth on political and feminist grounds, but what I want to argue here is that the flaws in the metaphor are already written into it, and that its function is based upon a series of contradictions. The simplicity of the symbol of woman as nation becomes immediately complex when we begin to unpack the trope, because the various constructions of femininity on which the metaphor depends are opposed to each other.

Marina Warner, in *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (1985), distinguishes between the nation personified by a male form and the nation personified by a female form. When the nation is personified as a woman this female figure becomes the space within which all the citizens of the nation may exist. Warner compares the female national symbols of the Statue of Liberty and Britannia with male national symbols such as John Bull or Uncle Sam, and points out that these last represent the typical Englishman and the typical US. citizen respectively.

The female form tends to be perceived as generic and universal, with symbolic overtones; the male as individual, even when it is being used to express a generalized idea. [...] We can all live inside Britannia or Liberty's skin, they stand for us regardless of sex, yet we cannot identify with them as characters.⁸

The male symbol of nation is that of an individual, typical man. The caricature of the national character tends to be that of Everyman. The individualised national type is, in the national mythology, male.⁹ The female figure is used to represent the unrepresentable, whether this be abstract virtues or national greatness. Warner's image of the bodies of Americans climbing up inside the copper shell of the Statue of Liberty vividly illustrates both her concept of the female form as a space within which we can live, and the essential emptiness of the symbolic female body. The institutionalised

⁸Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985; repr. London: Vintage, 1996), p. 12.

⁹See Raphael Samuel, 'Introduction', in *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), III: *National Fictions*, pp. xi-xxv.

figure of nation as woman, emptied of character and of internal organs, is far removed from the real life existence of actual individual women.

The emblematic figures of Britannia and Helvetia are generally represented in armour, or at least armed. Helvetia on the Swiss currency clutches a spear and a shield; Britannia wears a helmet and full armour. Maurice Agulhon concludes his study of the figure of Marianne by suggesting that what she ultimately represents is the figure of the soldier, an iconography which can be traced back to Joan of Arc.¹⁰ Double meanings surround this martial imagery, because while the armoured woman as nation signifies that she is the defender of the nation, the rhetoric of woman as nation generally constructs her as someone to be defended. This double existence of both defender and defended is epitomised in the figure of the mother. The calm, poised and shielded figure of Britannia carries connotations of security. This security provided by the calm and governing figure of a woman finds its ultimate representation in the image of the home and the figure of the mother. Much of the doubleness surrounding the nation represented as a woman can be explained by the contradictions contained within the figure of the mother. The mother creates the safe space of home, defends and protects her children; yet at the same time she is constructed as an iconic figure to be defended. Her construction depends upon the dual identification of the male nationalist figure: he is both the child created and defended by the powerful mother figure; and the man of action in defence of his country.

Further contradictions complicate the figure of the mother. She is both defender and defended; she is also, necessarily, both sexual and asexual. The apparent asexuality of the armoured institutional figure becomes sexualised in two ways: firstly, in the procreative power of the mother, and secondly in the threat of sexuality which is veiled by the impenetrable shield of armour. Allegorical female figures rely, Marina Warner argues, on a construction of a specifically sexual virtue which allows them to function as closed, sealed containers into which concepts may be poured. To illustrate the qualities of the allegorical female figure, Warner tells the story of the Vestal Virgin Tuccia, who was accused of breaking her vow of chastity and, in order to prove that she

¹⁰Agulhon, *Marianne au pouvoir*, p. 349.

was indeed chaste, miraculously managed to carry water in a sieve from the river.

Warner concludes:

The inviolability of the allegorical figure, portrayed as a sealed container of the meaning she conveys, helped to differentiate her sphere from the individual female's, who belongs to time and flux and is subject to change.¹¹

Warner's use of this symbol highlights the denial of female sexuality both in classical myth and in the allegorical female figure: these figures are chaste, sound, 'whole'; they are simply vessels for the idea which they contain. The female body personifying an abstract concept functions as a receptacle which contains the abstract concept. The history of the use of the female figure as a personification of abstract virtues such as truth, virtue and beauty, whether or not this personification is determined by grammatical gender, gives the female form a positive value which contributes to her role as national figurehead.

Marina Warner points out that the bodies of allegorical female figures are often reinforced 'either literally, when they are made of bronze, or metaphorically, when they are drawn, painted or described clad in armour'. This reinforcement strengthens the contours of the female body 'so that the poor leaky vulnerable bag of skin and bone and flesh so despised by churchmen can become transformed into a form strong enough to hold within its ambitious contents.'¹² As well as containing the essence of the nation, this shell reproduces the boundaries of the nation. If women function, in Yuval-Davis' and Anthias's terms, as 'reproducers' of the boundaries of ethnic and national groups, the symbolic female body is imposed upon these national boundaries, and her chastity and inviolability represents both the nation's defences against external invaders, and the preservation of national purity: a closed system of reproduction. The chaste body of the nation is a guarantee of national security.

The woman-as-nation figure tends to emerge at times of strong patriotic feeling: this is true for both Marianne and Britannia. The figure of Britannia, as we recognise

¹¹Warner, p. 242.

¹²Warner, p. 258.

her today, developed in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, although the earliest representation of a figure called 'Britannia' appeared on a Roman sculpture. The development of the figure at this particular time may be attributed to a metaphorical nexus between the Renaissance fascination with the body, the figure of Elizabeth — the 'Virgin Queen' — and England's sense of vulnerability to attack which was resolved, at least temporarily, by the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. This defeat provoked a revival of patriotic iconography, including the warlike figure of Boadicea (or Boudicca), legendary Queen of the ancient British tribe of the Iceni.¹³ Iconography suggests also a connection between the body of the virgin queen and the protection of England's national boundaries, emphasising the importance of female chastity to national integrity. In the figure of Britannia this inviolability is represented by her breastplate, shield and helmet.¹⁴

Britannia inherited many characteristics from the figure of Boadicea. The earliest extant representation of the actual Britannia figure appears in 1607, in William Camden's *Britannia*, and she also forms the frontispiece to Michael Drayton's elaborately illustrated *Poly-Olbion* (1612-1622), where she sits in the centre of a triumphal arch, clothed in a cloak representing the British landscape, surrounded by fruit which represents fertility.¹⁵ The reappearance of a figure named 'Britannia' occurs after the Union of the Crowns of Scotland and England, in the reign of James VI of Scotland and I of England. James was keen on the idea of further union between Scotland and England, since the two countries were, in a sense, united in his body, and he styled himself 'King of Great Britain'. He is also credited with designing the Union flag. James' hope for the construction of a 'British' identity obviously contributed to the emergence of the national goddess, but representations of Britannia also draw on the cult surrounding his predecessor, Queen Elizabeth. The complex web of symbols and allegorical meanings which surrounded Elizabeth was an imaginative interpretation of classical mythology and displaced Marian iconography. Elizabeth as the 'Virgin Queen'

¹³Samuel, p. xxiii; Warner, pp. 49-51.

¹⁴Linda Woodbridge, 'Palisading the Body Politic', in *True Rites and Maimed Rites: Ritual and Anti-Ritual in Shakespeare and His Age*, ed. by Linda Woodbridge and Edward Berry (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), pp. 270-298 (p. 281).

¹⁵William Camden, *Britannia* (London, 1607); Michael Drayton, *Poly-Olbion* (London: M. Lowes, I. Browne, I. Helme, I. Busbie, 1612-1622).

is the epitome of the allegorical chaste female body, and was indeed often represented carrying the sieve of Tuccia.¹⁶ The figure of the 'Virgin Queen', representing a fusion between the 'motherland' and the head of state, visibly reproduces the chaste body of the inviolable nation. Britannia draws on both the chastity embodied by Elizabeth, and the warlike defence of English territory during the reign of Elizabeth represented by Boadicea after the Spanish Armada.

However, there are two sides to every coin, and the valorisation of chastity depends, in a sense, upon its opposite. If the 'wholeness' of the national body is penetrated, the nation loses integrity and is open to exploration and / or domination by external forces. This may be represented as the female body voluntarily and lasciviously offering herself; or it may take the form of the threatened violation and rape of the national body. The metaphor of exploration of land represented as the female body belongs to a tradition of representing woman as land which can be traced at least as far back as the Song of Solomon.¹⁷ This metaphor emphasises the fertility of the female body, paralleling the female reproductive capacity with agricultural processes, and also depends upon the mystery and unknowability of the female body to represent undiscovered lands, full of wealth and fertility. Jan van der Straet's 1575 picture of Amerigo Vespucci's discovery of America represents America as a naked and voluptuous Indian woman, reclining on a hammock.¹⁸ She appears slightly startled by the appearance of the explorer before her, but her posture is clearly inviting. Her hammock is strung between two trees which frame the scene of the as yet undiscovered land behind her: to proceed, the explorer will have to pass through her body. Here the feminised land invites domination, and the mythologising of America as 'virgin land' to

¹⁶Warner, p. 244.

¹⁷'A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a garden locked, a fountain sealed. Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates with all choicest fruits [...] a garden fountain, a well of living water, and flowing streams from Lebanon. Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden, let its fragrance be wafted abroad. Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits.' *Song of Solomon*, 4. 12-16.

¹⁸Jan van der Straet, c. 1575. Reprinted from a 1580 engraving in Rebecca Blevins Faery, *Cartographies of Desire: Captivity, Race, and Sex in the Shaping of an American Nation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), p. 91.

be discovered and penetrated by male science has a long history in American iconography.¹⁹

In a convincing reading of both the text and images of Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion*, Laurent Berec extends the theory that the valorisation of female virginity is directly connected to the fear of invasion of national territory, to argue that by situating Britannia in the centre of the triumphal arch on the title-page, the designer of *Poly-Olbion* constructs her body as the portal through which one has to pass to enter English territory.²⁰ The very earliest known image of the Britannia figure is a sculpture excavated in 1980 in Aphrodisias, Turkey, which portrays the Roman conquest of Britain by showing the emperor Claudius overpowering Britannia, represented as an Amazon, with one breast bared. Marina Warner is not slow to point out the irony in the fact that this first appearance of the now martial and imperial Britannia was used to characterise a colonised country.²¹ Although Britannia's martial imagery gives an impression of power, her elaborate defences at the same time suggest the possibility of invasion. The threat of the domination and violation of the female body is implied by Britannia's breastplate.

The threat to the national body may not simply be that of foreign invasion. There is also the danger of corruption from within, in the form of political mismanagement inappropriate to the dignity of Britannia as mother-goddess. By the middle of the eighteenth century Madge Dresser cites instances of Britannia represented as 'innocent virtue outraged [...] variously dismembered, buggered, ridden and even flogged naked with "a Scottish Thistle."' ²² The female body lends itself to such allegorical representation, and the construction of the chaste mother figurehead perhaps even invites it; because it is the violation of that chastity which gives the allegory political significance, and not simply the violation on its own.

¹⁹See Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975); Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

²⁰Laurent Berec, 'Femininity and Nationalism in Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion*'. Unpublished paper presented at ESSE 2000, Helsinki, August 25-29, 2000.

²¹Madge Dresser, 'Britannia' in *Patriotism: the Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, ed. by Raphael Samuel (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), III: *National Fictions*, pp. 26-49 (p. 26); Warner, pp. 45-6.

²²Dresser, p. 34.

The best definition of this particular version of the nation-as-woman theme is given by Florence Stratton who describes the way in which 'woman now serves as an index of the state of the nation.' Writing in the context of African literature by male writers, Stratton identifies two strands of what she calls 'the Mother Africa trope.' In the first, woman is seen as the container of an unchanging African essence. In the second, in order to indicate the political domination of Africa, the Mother Africa figure is represented as in servitude, abandoned, raped or in prostitution.²³ This 'index of the state of the nation' use of the female body develops from the nation as mother trope, because in order for the metaphor of exploitation to work, there must exist an idealised and non-abused female body. If the female body functions as an index for the state of the nation, her degradation shows how far she has fallen from the status proper to the vessel of the primordial national essence.

We construct the nation as progenetrix, as something anterior, firstly because it is logical for the nation to exist before its citizens, but also because to believe in the nation as a pre-existing entity relieves us from the responsibility of imagining the nation. Benedict Anderson makes the distinction between nation-states, which may be constructed as 'new' and 'historical' and nations, which always 'loom out of an immemorial past'.²⁴ The nation is thus outside the historical process. It cannot be something which we have created, it has to be something which created us, because otherwise we are alone and responsible. Therefore 'mother-land', and 'mother-tongue' — Anderson points out that language is equally primordial²⁵ — signify a belief in the nation as a primordial entity. Thus the fascination with national origins, with myths of the origin of the nation, becomes subsumed into the larger myth of ultimate origin provided by the body of the mother.

The biological determinism inherent in the metaphor of the motherland is an essential component of the nation-as-woman myth, because it bolsters the belief in the nation as something to which we are 'naturally' tied. Benedict Anderson points out that

²³ Florence Stratton, *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 41-44.

²⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983; Revised edition 1991), p. 11.

²⁵ Anderson, p. 144.

familial and domestic metaphors govern many terms used to refer to the nation: motherland, *Vaterland*, *patria*, *Heimat*.²⁶ Anderson does not distinguish between paternal and maternal labels for the 'homeland'. Yet the metonymic relationship of mother to home powerfully informs the iconography of the nation as a woman, and the 'natural' space of the female body is extended to the comforting and maternal space of the home. The iconography of home has a double function, because not only does it reinforce a sense of the nation as a place of belonging in a familial sense, it also characterises the nation as a space which must be protected. The female and maternal space of home must be defended against all external threats, and thus in wartime the trope of nation as home acquires extra significance. In the first year of the second world war the following British institutions were created: the Ministry of Home Security; the Home Secretary; the Home Guard; the Home Intelligence Unit and the BBC Home Service. In each case, as Antonia Lant points out, the word 'home' is interchangeable with 'national'.²⁷

Cynthia Enloe suggests that 'home' is a crucial term in nationalist discourse because of the notion of the family as the basis of the sovereign nation state. In these terms, the use of woman as signifier of nation can have concrete effects for women within the nation at a legal level. She describes the Croatian government's legislative program to control women's work and reproduction, including outlawing abortion, eliminating childcare facilities and legislating to discourage 'non-womanhood,' e.g. late marriages which produce no children.²⁸ Less extreme measures to encourage population growth include maternity leave and higher child benefits: in the 1930s the Beveridge Report cited fear for the fate of the 'British race' as the major reason for establishing

²⁶Anderson, p. 143.

²⁷Antonia Lant, 'Prologue: Mobile Femininity', in *Nationalising Femininity: Culture, Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War*, ed. by Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp. 13-32 (p. 17). This metonymic relation of home to nation is an element of the woman as nation myth; however, as Lant also says, the mobilisation of women during the second world war problematised this metonymic structure, as woman could no longer be presumed to be tied to the home as a signifier of constancy and domesticity (pp. 15-16).

²⁸Cynthia Enloe, *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 240-3. Enloe states that the centrality of the 'home' to the nation is reflected in the way in which forms of violence against women such as rape and domestic violence are kept off the international legal agenda because these actions are deemed to be related to the 'family' and governments tend to resist outside intervention in what they see as essentially 'family matters'.

child benefits in Britain.²⁹ This racial emphasis in national legislation on female sexuality subjugates biological reproduction to the cultural reproduction of the 'essential' traditions of the race. The implications of this are not only contrary to contemporary attitudes to race relations but also have extreme consequences for women, not only in terms of the institutional control of female sexuality but also when rape becomes a weapon in war against another nation.

The rhetoric of rape in titles such as *The Rape of Kuwait*, a popular book during the Gulf War, exploits the allegorical parallel of woman-as-land to invest the archaic definition of the word 'rape' — 'The act of taking a thing by force; *esp.* violent seizure of property, etc.' (OED) — with contemporary moral horror at rape as a sexual crime.³⁰ Such titles re-emphasise the symbolism of the idea of the homeland as female body who must be defended against violation.³¹ But on a physical and real level this type of symbolism becomes action in, for example, the atrocities committed during the war in the former Yugoslavia. An EC investigation team estimated that 20,000 Muslim women were raped in Bosnia between April 1992 and January 1993.³² If women are seen as signifiers of the boundaries of ethnic groups / nations then the rape of women is the ultimate invasion of territory.

III

The classical simplicity of the Britannia or Helvetia figure hides a series of contradictions. As soon as we begin to unpack the metaphor and pursue the implications of the woman-as-nation figure, faultlines appear in the sculpted smoothness of her robes. The conflicting constructions of the nation as powerful progenetrix and damsel in distress both depend upon each other, and both are explicitly sexualised versions of the body of the woman as nation. We move from the simplified and solitary image of the nation as a woman to series of metaphors in which her very role demands that she be

²⁹Yuval-Davis and Anthias, pp. 8-9.

³⁰Jean P. Sasson, *The Rape of Kuwait: The True Story of Iraqi Atrocities Against a Civilian Population* (New York: Knightsbridge, 1991).

³¹Andrew Parker, and others, eds., *Nationalisms and Sexualities* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p. 6.

³²Enloc, p. 240.

represented in interaction with others. Whether as mother, lover, virgin or whore, she is written into a narrative which places her in relation to the action of the nationalist male. We can chart a gradual move from image towards allegorical narrative, because while the static figure of Britannia, for example, can exist merely as a symbol, the metaphor of the mother implies a narrative and suggests a situation where the mother-nation interacts with others. And the woman as 'index of the state of the nation' requires a narrative in which the hardships she undergoes are related. It is this move from image to sustained allegorical narrative which makes very vivid the contradictions and problems inherent in the figure of nation as woman. Once she is located in the realm of narrative she is more likely to function under the restrictions of the conventions of character, and thus the gap between her abstract representative status and that of a character with a narrative role becomes much more visible and pronounced.

Moving from Hugh MacDiarmid's poetry, through Naomi Mitchison's use of poetry and fiction, to Alasdair Gray's novels of the 1990s, reveals the increasingly obvious problems inherent in the construction of a Scotland-as-woman figure in literature. Although changing thought patterns, including an increasing awareness of gender politics, contribute to complicating the trope, the differences between genres are also significant. Hugh MacDiarmid's use of iconic and archetypal figures in his poetry, including the nation-as-woman figure, is closer to the static and fixed image of nation as woman in sculpture and iconography. The novelists, who are both, in their different ways, writing the narrative of the nation, are immediately confronted with the problem of integrating their allegories into their realist representation of character.

The example of the women raped in Bosnia in the early 1990s vividly illustrates what can happen if the rhetoric of women reproducing the boundaries of nations is taken literally and pushed to its extremes. On a less extreme level, women are still alienated from the rhetoric of a nation which is constructed on the symbolic body of a woman but which excludes women from participating as agents in the national narrative. Do women recognise themselves in nationalist poetry or fiction which uses the female body to represent nation in this way? Women readers and writers are forced to come to terms with texts which thus serve to exclude them, and if they want to

contribute to the national narrative they have to find some way to negotiate between the strength of the metaphor of nation as woman and their own conviction of the strength of their own voices as individuals within the nation.

Eavan Boland writes about her experience as a female Irish poet trying to write within the Irish poetic tradition. She describes the effect of the nation-as-woman personification on our perception of women in general and illustrates the problems this causes for the woman as citizen, reader and writer:

Once the idea of a nation influences the perception of a woman, then that woman is suddenly and inevitably simplified. She can no longer have complex feelings and aspirations. She becomes the passive projection of a national idea.³³

This simplification of the figure of woman further marginalises women both as writers and as readers. As producers and consumers of literature, women have a different relationship to nationalist texts than do men, particularly nationalist texts which explicitly make use of the figure of woman as a symbol. Women have difficulty locating themselves in texts which have no space for them except as symbols. The danger of the woman-as-nation trope is that the female figure functions as a symbol which supports a masculine nationalism but effectively excludes women from participating in the national narrative except as symbols.

The female reader of such a text is forced to perform an act of double reading. Feminist reader response theory illustrates the way in which the reading experience structured by androcentric literature privileges the male reader, who experiences the text as a validation of his personal experience as universal experience. If the text privileges the masculine viewpoint of a male protagonist, the female reader will find no space for herself in the text unless she learns to read as a man, to identify with a male protagonist and to accept a male value-system. This process has been described as the immasculation of women (as opposed to emasculation of men).³⁴ There may be female characters within a text but generally the woman within the text functions as other: 'The

³³Eavan Boland, *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in our Time* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 136.

³⁴Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. xx.

male reader is invited to feel his *difference* [from the woman in the text] and to equate that with the universal.³⁵ If the woman within the text is functioning as a symbol of nation the male reader recognises his difference from the woman as nation and equates that difference with his personal and universal position as citizen of the nation. The universal position thus excludes the female, who functions solely as a signifier of difference.

Boland describes the use of the image of woman as nation in terms of a violation of a necessary ethical relation between imagination and image within Irish poetry. Her answer to the problem resembles a pledge: 'I must be vigilant to write of my own womanhood [...] in such a way that I never colluded with the simplified images of women in Irish poetry.'³⁶ Female writers faced with an androcentric national canon and a male nationalist ideology may choose from three options: to ignore the national narrative entirely; to write themselves into the national narrative by reproducing the male nationalist ideology and iconography; or to find some way of re-inventing the nationalist narrative by re-casting women as agents and citizens within it. Eavan Boland documents the process by which she realised she was assimilating herself both as a nationalist and as a poet into a masculine poetic tradition which left her no voice to speak. Once a female poet has realised she is a part of this process, Boland suggests, it is 'easy, and intellectually seductive, for a woman artist to walk away from the idea of a nation.'³⁷ Virginia Woolf stated that 'as a woman I need no nation'. But to hold such an attitude is to collude in the myth that nationalism is a subject which only involves men: women who seek to negotiate their existence within the nation must either try to adapt the existing myths or to find some new way of engaging with the idea of nation.

³⁵Patrocínio P. Schweickart, 'Reading Ourselves: Towards a Feminist Theory of Reading', in *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts and Contexts*, ed. by Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocínio P. Schweickart (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 31-62 (p. 41).

³⁶Boland, pp. 151-2.

³⁷Boland, p. 145.

IV

The aim of this thesis is both to analyse the different ways in which the metaphor of the nation as a woman is employed and to ask whether it is possible for a woman writer to locate herself within this tradition without compromising her personal integrity. This thesis limits the scope of the topic of woman as nation to a twentieth century Scottish context and close consideration of three primary authors. I do not claim that there is anything fundamentally different about the basic use of the trope in the Scottish context; in fact, the authors generally reproduce the metaphor and its various shifting connotations, despite the problems caused by Scotland's problematic political situation. The three authors I consider illustrate distinct uses of the nation-as-woman metaphor and through a study of their work, which covers the twentieth century, we may see the changing attitudes towards the trope over time. They also illustrate the way the trope changes as simple imagery moves towards narrative and allegory. Hugh MacDiarmid's woman as nation is the closest to a simple, ahistorical and emblematic muse, but even so his use of the female figure is fraught with complications. Naomi Mitchison primarily uses the image of nation as mother, and she attempts to write the metaphor into a historical novel using realist techniques, demonstrating the difficulties of integrating the trope into narrative. Alasdair Gray makes extensive use of the nation as violated or victimised woman, and his ironic distance from his use of the trope deliberately highlights its flaws. Consideration of each author's work is split into two chapters, because in each case there is a shift in the way in which the nation-as-woman metaphor is applied.

The emergence of the trope in Scotland is historically specific, and is an aspect of the 'Scottish Literary Renaissance' which is closely linked to the development of a nationalist consciousness at the beginning of the twentieth century. Chapter 2 considers to what extent the trope can be said to exist in Scotland prior to the twentieth century and situates the emergence of the Scotland-as-woman metaphor proper within the precise historical context of the Scottish Renaissance.

Chapter 3 considers MacDiarmid as the key figure of the ‘Scottish Renaissance’, and examines his gendered nationalist ideology as displayed in his long poem *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1926) which explicitly sets up the dynamic of male nationalist versus female nation. Chapter 4 goes on to cover MacDiarmid’s continuing use of female symbols in his poetry from the mid 1930s to the 1960s after he has virtually abandoned both the use of Scots as a literary language and Scottish nationalism as an ideal. His ideas become centred more on a belief in the unity of the Gaelic race than simply on Scotland as a nation but continue to be symbolised by a muse-like female figure.

Chapter 5 considers the ways in which Naomi Mitchison, as a female writer, succeeds in her aim to ‘write herself into Scotland’ in her poem sequence which attempts to deal with ‘the matter of Scotland’, and to what extent she succeeds merely in reproducing the gendered ideology of the male-dominated renaissance. Chapter 6 shows how, in her historical novel *The Bull Calves* (1947), she makes the move from woman as nation to woman as a character within history, and is more successful in negotiating herself a position within the Scottish renaissance with this novel than with the rather hackneyed reproduction of the image of the nation as a mother which dominates her poetry.

Chapter 7 looks at Alasdair Gray’s use of pornographic sexual fantasies of bondage and rape as a metaphor for the exploited state of Scotland in *1982, Janine* (1984). Although many people objected to the explicit nature of the fantasies, it may be argued that Gray subverts and challenges the static figuring of a passive, essential, ahistorical womanhood which encapsulates the spirit of the nation. However Gray does not succeed in entirely deconstructing the metaphor as he still clings to a romantic equation of nation with mother which is never really resolved. Chapter 8 considers Gray’s further problematisation of the woman-as-nation trope in his 1992 novel *Poor Things*. Gray conflates the two metaphors of woman as nation and body as state in his post-modern parody of a nineteenth century Gothic novel. By focusing on the physical, Frankenstein-like creation of the body, Gray draws attention to the social and cultural construction of the idea of the nation and also of the figure of woman. The multiple

narrative structure of *Poor Things* and Gray's post-modern and playful take on the subject are emblematic of a late twentieth century theoretical preoccupation with plurality and the impossibility of any fixed definition of a text or of a nation. Nonetheless Gray cannot entirely abandon the gendered myths which he problematises. Though he foregrounds the construction of the woman-as-nation trope he reproduces and perpetuates it.

Gray's ironic use of the nation-as-woman trope is by no means the last word on the topic. The trope continues to be perpetuated, both by authors and by critics who, in paralleling the exploitation of women with the exploitation of nation, often inadvertently reproduce the trope of victimised woman as index of the state of the nation. Within Scotland we witness very few constructions of nation which are able to entirely abandon this gendered ideology. The pervasiveness and attractiveness of the trope of nation as woman even in the work of writers and critics who seek to challenge and undermine it is part of its fascination. In the shifting uses of the image in Scottish literature of the twentieth century we may chart not only the differing agendas of individual authors but also the changing political situation of Scotland. However the image of woman as nation remains, a familiar constant, a representational and symbolic home.

Chapter Two

'Anything you like': Nation as Woman in the Scottish Tradition

The Celtic lady is not very widely popular
 But the English love her oh they love her very much
 Especially when the Celtic lady is Irish they love her
 Which is odd as she hates them more than anyone else.
 When she's Welsh the English stupidly associate her chiefly
 With national hats, eisteddfods and Old Age Pensions.
 (They don't think of her at all when she is Scotch, it is rather a problem.)

— from Stevie Smith 'The Celts' (1957)¹

I

There is very little use of the nation-as-woman image in Scotland prior to the twentieth century, and the lack of a Scottish female figurehead is noticeable in the eighteenth century and particularly in the nineteenth century when representations of Britannia and Marianne proliferated. The logic underwriting the representation of the nation as a woman is found to be flawed when the metaphor is unpacked, and these flaws appear even deeper when we consider the use of the metaphor in Scotland. In addition to the general problems with the trope already identified — that the assumptions implicit in it are offensive from a feminist point of view, and that the basic metaphors themselves are contradictory and do not withstand close examination — Scotland's particular political situation further complicates the existing flaws.

One of the principal problems in the basic model of nation as woman is that the nation is required to be both motherland and virgin. This fundamental ambivalence comes not only from a confusion of accepted archetypal roles for woman but also from a dual interpretation of the basic metaphor of woman as vessel. The mother nation is the container from which the race is produced; while the figure of the virgin represents the unbroken boundaries of the vessel-nation. This of course depends on the complementary metaphor of nation as vessel, a bounded space containing race, tradition

¹ Stevie Smith, *The Collected Poems of Stevie Smith* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 350.

or political system, depending on how it is used.² But this metaphor is itself flawed in the case of Scotland, whose boundaries are debatable. Ernest Gellner defines nationalism as ‘primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent,’ and it is precisely this lack of correspondence, between the borders of Scotland as a nation and the boundaries of the political system to which Scotland belongs, which complicates the nation-vessel-woman symbolism.³ While the figures of Britannia, Helvetia and Marianne are institutionalised signifiers of the nation-state, whose bodies represent the integrity of the nation and the political boundaries of the state, the Scotland-as-woman figure cannot function in exactly the same way and necessarily has boundaries which are shadowy and indistinct. Post 1707, there is no institutional role for Scotland as woman to play. This means that the uses of the figure and the opportunities for her appearance are restricted. If she cannot represent an existing nation-state, she can only function either as the incarnation of the ancient nation or as a mobilising symbol of oppositional nationalism. If there is no institutional space for her, her appearances are largely restricted to the literary. The noticeable lack of Scotland-as-woman images in the nineteenth century is due not only to Scotland’s lack of statehood but Scotland’s lack of any demonstrable nationalist consciousness during that period.⁴ The problems displayed by all of the authors considered here in their use of the Scotland-as-woman trope can be related at least in part to the dissonance between the traditional use of the body as a metaphor for the state and Scotland’s political position.

The problems surrounding the use of the Scotland-as-woman metaphor are thus closely related to its emergence at a precise historical moment. Although instances of Scotland being represented as a woman can be found in pre-twentieth century literature,

²Alasdair Gray, describing Scotland in terms of the processes of immigration and emigration throughout history, says that ‘like every other European land a great mixture of folk has poured into this irregularly shaped national container’. *Why Scots Should Rule Scotland 1997: A Carnaptious History of Britain from Roman Times Until Now* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1997), p. 4.

³Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p. 1.

⁴Tom Nairn in *The Break-Up of Britain* states that Scotland’s lack of a nationalist movement in the nineteenth century ‘condemned’ the nation to ‘eccentricity and oblivion.’ *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism*, 2nd, expanded edn. (London: Verso, 1981), p. 135. Hugh MacDiarmid’s characteristically obscure yet enabling comment on this state of affairs was that ‘it must be recognised that the absence of Scottish nationalism is, paradoxically enough, a form of Scottish self-determination.’ *Albyn, or Scotland and the Future* (1927), in Hugh MacDiarmid, *Albyn: Shorter Books and Monographs*, ed. by Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 1996), p. 19.

they are fairly sparse and cannot be said to constitute a tradition as such. It is only in the early twentieth century that sufficient numbers of similar versions of the trope occur, and this is linked to the emergence of nationalist politics in Scotland and the development of a sense of national consciousness. The appearance of a Scotland-as-woman figure is inextricably linked to the 'Scottish Renaissance', the political and cultural revival of the interwar period in Scotland. Scotland's national identity is asserted by paralleling Scotland as woman not only with established and thoroughly institutionalised figures such as Britannia and Marianne but also with the example of the use of the nation-as-woman figure in the Irish Literary Revival, as in Yeats' play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*.

There is a curious paradox in the fact that the nation-as-woman figure, in reproducing the boundaries of the nation, represents that nation's enduring independent spirit and individuality while necessarily being remarkably similar in appearance to all the other national figureheads in Europe. As Georg Kreis points out in his discussion of the Helvetia figure, the representations of nations as women vary as regards attributes and accessories, but not in type.⁵ Thus Marianne acquires the red Phrygian cap which represents the Republic and the Revolution, and Britannia her breastplate and trident. In other words, each woman is dressed in cultural specifics, but these are external to the basic model of nation as woman. There is a transnational tradition to the figure. (See fig. 1.) However, the mythology of nation as woman requires that the figure possesses at least the illusion of an immemorial and culturally specific existence. The always already existing mother nation *has* to have an anterior existence, because she exists outside of the historical process and gives birth to the nation and its history.

The use of the female body assimilates Scottish nationhood to all other nationhoods similarly signified by the female form. The female body is not used to signify the essential *difference* of Scotland, but on the contrary Scotland's similarity to other nations and her participation in the condition of nationhood itself. What is different about the figure of Scotland as woman is that her borders are less rigidly defined. The Scottish writers who resurrect a female figure to represent Scotland in the

⁵Georg Kreis, *Helvetia – Im Wandel der Zeiten: Die Geschichte einer nationalen Repräsentationsfigur* (Zurich: Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 1991), p. 21.

early twentieth century are validating their construction of Scotland as an independently existing nation. They are not drawing on an immemorial Scottish tradition, but are choosing, somewhat belatedly, to establish a parallel between themselves and the scripted nationhood of other countries. And yet this need for the creation of an immemorial history for the figure has influenced the work not only of writers of fiction but of critics too. After a brief look at the far more established history of the woman-revolution figure in Ireland, I will consider to what extent we can identify such a "tradition" in Scottish literature. I survey the various ways in which the metaphor is used in Scotland.



Fig. 1. Helvetia with other female personifications of nation after World War I. Swiss postcard, 1918. Schweizerisches Museum für Volkskunde, Basel, Switzerland.

¹ Cairns Craig, "The Celtic Revival in Scottish Literature: An Introduction", in *The History of Scottish Literature*, ed. by Cairns Craig (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1972), 1, "The Celtic Revival" (1977), pp. 1-49, 7.

² Hugh MacDermid, "The Celtic Muse", *The Celtic Revival: Papers of Hugh MacDermid*, ed. by Michael Grieco and W.E. Adams (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1983), 1, 11-42, pp. 603.

early twentieth century are validating their constructions of Scotland as an independently existing nation. They are not drawing on an immemorial Scottish tradition but are choosing, somewhat belatedly, to establish a parallel between themselves and the accepted nationhood of other countries. And yet this need for the myth of an immemorial history for the figure has infiltrated the work not only of writers of fiction but of critics too. After a brief look at the far more established history of the woman-as-nation figure in Ireland, I will consider to what extent we can identify such a 'tradition' in Scottish literature. I survey the various ways in which the metaphor is used in Scotland prior to the twentieth century, and then go on to consider what form the Scotland-as-woman figure takes in the early twentieth century. Before going on to look at Hugh MacDiarmid's use of the figure in detail, I will first briefly survey his contemporaries, and consider how the use of the nation-as-woman metaphor contributes to a profoundly gendered vision of nation which had lasting consequences for Scottish perceptions of nation throughout the twentieth century.

II

The appearance of a Scotland-as-woman figure in Scottish literature of the early twentieth century suggests the influence of the female personification of the nation in the Literary Revival of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in Ireland. As Cairns Craig points out, 'the Scottish Literary Renaissance took both name and some of its impetus from the more politically focused Irish movement of the previous decade'.⁶ Besides the influence of the Irish Revival on the writers of the Scottish Renaissance in terms of the use of language and the revitalisation of a national tradition, MacDiarmid explicitly acknowledges his appropriation of the figure of Cathleen ni Houlihan, among others, from the Irish literary tradition.⁷

⁶Cairns Craig, 'Twentieth Century Scottish Literature: An Introduction', in *The History of Scottish Literature*, ed. by Cairns Craig (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987-), IV: *Twentieth Century* (1987), pp. 1-8 (p. 5).

⁷Hugh MacDiarmid, 'The Gaelic Muse', *The Complete Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid*, ed. by Michael Grieve and W.R. Aitken, 2 vols (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), I, 657-662 (p. 660).

The figure of Cathleen ni Houlihan, made famous by Yeats' play of the same name (1902), is perhaps the finest example of a literary use of the nation-as-woman figure functioning as the inspiring genius of oppositional nationalism. In Yeats' play the eponymous figure appears as a poor old woman who has lost her 'four beautiful green fields', and who travels the country in search of young men who are willing to fight and die for her. The devotion of these young men and their sacrifice for the mother country rejuvenates the poor old woman, and she becomes, in the last line of the play, 'a young girl [with] the walk of a queen'.⁸ The power of Yeats' symbolism in its contemporary context led Countess Markievicz to describe the play as 'a kind of gospel', while the republican insurrectionist P. S. O'Hegarty found it 'a sort of sacrament'.⁹ Yeats himself asked, 'Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot?'¹⁰

The power of Yeats' image, however, was partly due to the fact that Ireland had a rich tradition of personifying the nation as a woman, from the pre-Christian sovereignty goddesses onwards. Figures of women in Mediaeval Irish literature that have been read as the personification of Ireland include Queen Medbh of Connacht, the tragic heroine Deirdre, and the Cailleac Bheara, an old hag who becomes young and beautiful again when she persuades a young man to make love to her, obviously the ancestor of Yeats' Cathleen ni Houlihan figure. From the seventeenth century onwards the Ireland-as-woman figure took on the role of embodying a suffering and oppressed nation, and appears under various names, including Roisín Dubh, the Sean Bhean Bhocht (the Poor Old Woman), and Caitlín ní Houlihán, who first appears as the personification of Ireland in the work of the Gaelic poet Heffernan in the late eighteenth century. In the genre of the *aisling*, a form of dream-vision poetry which developed in eighteenth century Ireland, the poet encounters a beautiful young woman, the *spéir-bhean*, who represents the spirit of Ireland, and who is waiting for the return of the exiled Jacobite pretender. The *spéir-bhean*, unlike the more ancient versions of Ireland as woman, is young and passive. Yeats' first use of the figure of Cathleen ni Houlihan,

⁸W. B. Yeats, *Cathleen ni Houlihan* (London: Bullen, 1906), p. 15.

⁹Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 200.

¹⁰W. B. Yeats, 'The Man and the Echo' (1939), *The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach (New York: MacMillan, 1968), p. 632.

in the poem 'Hanrahan and Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan', is very different from the Poor Old Woman of the play, and closer to the *spéir-bhean* of the *aisling* tradition.¹¹

Yeats had an established tradition and mythology of sovereignty goddesses and Ireland as woman figures upon which to draw, a resource not available to MacDiarmid, at least not within Scotland. MacDiarmid's attempts to negotiate this lack are most evident in his poem 'The Gaelic Muse' (CP i 657-662), where he gives his Scottish muse names from an eclectic selection of cultures, drawing heavily upon the Irish. To say that MacDiarmid displays anxiety regarding the lack of indigenous models might be going too far, but he certainly seizes upon rather tenuous examples of Scottish forerunners of his Gaelic muse in order to bolster the illusion of a tradition.¹² What is interesting is the extent to which later twentieth century critics perform similar manoeuvres in the belief that the Scotland-as-woman figure arrives in the literature of the early twentieth century as part of an unbroken tradition, rather than being, on the contrary, determined by the precise historical moment.

In his article 'The Representation of Women in Scottish Literature', Douglas Dunn asserts:

Scotland, like the Muse, is a feminine term and Idea. Among the more obvious examples are Dame Scotia in *The Complaynt of Scotland*, Scota in Ross's *Helenore*, Burns's more local muse, Coila, in *The Vision*, and perhaps also Kilmeny in James Hogg. [...] It is an imaginative embodiment that leads to Chris Caledonia in Grassie Gibbon's novel. [...] Scotia can be dignified, proud, and lovely; she can be Queen Margaret, Mary, Queen of Scots, all the women in the songs and all the women who ever wrote them, sang them or heard them. She can be Kate, Mrs Tam O'Shanter [...] or the nimble daemon Nannie [...] She can be anything you like.¹³

¹¹See Toni O'Brien Johnson and David Cairns, 'Introduction', in *Gender and Irish Writing* (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1991), pp. 1-12 (pp. 3-4) and Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, 'Thinking of her as Ireland', in *Gender and History in Yeats's Love Poetry* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 55-72 (pp. 55-66).

¹²See Chapter Four for a fuller discussion of this.

¹³Douglas Dunn, 'The Representation of Women in Scottish Literature', *Scotlands*, 2 (1994), 1-23 (pp. 16-17).

I quote this at length because Dunn at once offers an introduction to the use of the nation-as-woman metaphor in Scottish literature and, in his critical approach, exemplifies many of the problems generated by considering the trope. His article as a whole, as its title implies, reassesses the representation of women throughout the history of Scottish literature, from Barbour's *The Brus* to the present day. Such a project is valuable, and Dunn's general, if at times haphazard, survey clears the way for more detailed analysis of the marked gender bias of Scottish literature. However, his recognition of the omnipresent figure of Scotland represented as a woman seems to be the result of a critical need to impose a continuity of tradition upon Scottish literature. In this instance it is not continuity in literature *per se* which concerns him, but the continuity of the symbolic signifiers of national identity. Dunn wants to read Scotland as woman as an unbroken tradition stretching from the middle ages to the present day. However, his 'obvious examples' do no more than suggest a shadowy tradition which does not stand up to close examination. He includes within his list James Hogg's *Kilmeny*, but, despite the poem's concerns with the past and present state of Scotland, its heroine is neither explicitly nor implicitly paralleled with the troubled nation, and its inclusion serves rather to demonstrate the insubstantiality of the tradition which he identifies.

Dame Scotia in Robert Wedderburn's *The Complaynt of Scotland* is, indeed, a late medieval example of Scotland as a woman, though as far as I can determine this is the only extended use of the trope in the period. The 'affligit lady dame scotia', as she is described, appears to the poet in a dream and he recounts the way in which she reprimands her three sons, the Three Estates, for the divisions which threaten to destroy Scotland. The figure of Scotia in the *Complaynt* is 'modelled on [Alain] Chartier's "France" who in turn is related to Boethius' "Philosophy"'.¹⁴ This early allegorical personification of Scotland as a woman may immediately be identified as having continental and classical antecedents. She can be established, that is, in a textual tradition of female personification which is by no means limited to Scotland.

¹⁴Robert Wedderburn, *The Complaynt of Scotland*, ed. by A. M. Stewart (Edinburgh: Scottish Texts Society, 1979), p. 56; p. xxxiii.

Catherine Kerrigan points out that the supposedly ‘natural’ origins of the nation as woman ‘signify a long ancestry’, and elsewhere she uses Benedict Anderson’s definition of the nation state looming out of an ‘immemorial past’ in order to discuss the importance of historical continuity in the construction of nationalism. She comments on the uses of ‘symbolic practices (legends, myths, flags, anthems, etc.)’ which contribute to our conception of the nation as our natural inheritance.¹⁵ Such traditions and artefacts are created in order to bolster a sense of national identity as natural and immemorial, and they are invested with an imagined history much longer than their actual history. The nation-as-woman metaphor is one of these myths, and Dunn seems to imagine for it a long and uninterrupted history, to create not so much a natural sense of nationhood as a natural sense of continuity and tradition running through Scottish literature to the present day. He uses ‘Tam O’Shanter’ to suggest that Scotia may be ‘anything you like’, from Tam’s wife Kate to the ‘nimble daemon Nannie’. There is no suggestion in Burns’ poem that either figure is intended to be read as anything of the kind. Yet Dunn’s ‘anything you like’ epitomises a twentieth century projection of Scotland as a woman on to the history of Scottish literature. Because the nation-as-woman signifier embodies a natural relation to nation, she carries with her the illusion of immemorial existence and anteriority. It is this illusion which twentieth century Scottish critics tend to project, and their considerations of the figure of Scotland as woman elide discussion of her embarrassing absences from the history of Scottish literature and thereby participate in the twentieth century construction of the nation as a woman.

As the editors of *The Polar Twins* point out, with honourable exceptions Scottish literature ‘withdraws from consideration of the whole matter of Scotland until MacDiarmid and Soutar in the “Scottish Renaissance.”’ They emphasise the significance of Burns’ muse in *The Vision* being not a national, but a local, muse, an embodiment of Kyle.¹⁶ Rather than including Burns’ Coila as a local version of the

¹⁵Catherine Kerrigan, ‘Desperately Seeking Sophia’, *Scottlands*, 2 (1994), 155-163 (p. 155); Catherine Kerrigan, ‘Nationalism and Gender: Scottish Myths of the Female’, in *Proceedings of the Scottish Workshop of the ESSE Conference, Bordeaux 1993* (Grenoble: Etudes Ecosaises, 1994), pp. 105-111 (p. 106). See also Eric Hobsbawm, ‘Introduction: Inventing Traditions’, in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 1-14.

¹⁶Edward J. Cowan and Douglas Gifford, ‘Introduction’, in *The Polar Twins* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1999), pp. 1-18 (p. 6).

tradition, we should consider why Burns does not create a Scottish muse at the end of the eighteenth century. It certainly suggests his lack of confidence in Scotland as a nation in this first century after the Union, the period which elsewhere saw the emergence of the figures of Britannia and Marianne. Britannia had first been represented in the previous century; Marianne was being created at precisely the end of the eighteenth century in Revolutionary France.

Burns makes an extended allegorical use of Scotland as a woman just once, in a poem titled 'Caledonia', where Scotland appears as an amazon-like warrior woman. This whole poem relies on allegory, as Caledonia battles with a series of allegorical enemy figures including the 'Anglian lion' and the 'Scandinavian boar'.¹⁷ Burns also briefly addresses Scotia in the penultimate stanza of 'The Cotter's Saturday Night'. However, his failure to repeat the invocation of a nationalist muse in the much longer poem 'The Vision' (1784-5) suggests an uneasiness regarding the personification of Scotland in female form. The poet persona of 'The Vision' had been on the point of swearing an oath to abjure poetry forever and to concentrate instead on farming and making money, when the vision arrived to 'stop those reckless vows'. She is described, on her entrance, as a 'tight, outlandish hizzie, braw', and the poet indeed presumes that he is in the presence of 'some Scottish muse', a deduction based on the holly-boughs around her head, the 'tartan sheen' of her dress, and her mantle on which he can make out the landscape of Scotland.¹⁸ Burns' decision to give his 'native muse' a more local name reveals a certain lack of conviction regarding the representation of Scotland as a whole. His description of the muse is instructive, however, perhaps all the more so because she turns out to be Coila rather than Scotia. In all but name she corresponds to many of the conventions and complexities of the muse as nation. It is worth remarking that Burns' muse is initially described as 'outlandish'. Although she represents the local, there is a foreign quality to her, an otherness which ensures that she remains detached from that which she represents. This becomes significant, particularly when

¹⁷'Caledonia' (1794), in Robert Burns, *Poems and Songs*, ed. by James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 363-365.

¹⁸'The Cotter's Saturday Night' (1785), Burns, pp. 116-121; 'The Vision' (1785), Burns, pp. 80-90.

we come to consider that the Scotland-as-woman figure in MacDiarmid's poetry is almost invariably of foreign origin.

The eleven stanza long description of Coila's 'mantle large, of greenish hue' on which the poet can discern a Scottish landscape, resembles the illustration of Britannia on the title-page of Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion* (1612). The female figure in Drayton's work wears a cloak on which we see the same hills, towns and people which appear on the maps accompanying the text. The cloak of Burns' muse shows not only the landscape but the people of Scotland and events in Scotland's history. These representations not only provide examples of the way in which territory is mapped onto the female body, but also demonstrate how the naked female body may be dressed in allegory, as if the identification of woman with the nation or the landscape was a cloak which could be put on, taken off, or even passed between different women.

One eighteenth century poet does use a female personification of Scotland: Alexander Ross, also cited in Dunn's summary, invokes a muse named 'Scota' in the prologue to his 'Helenore, or The Fortunate Shepherdess'.¹⁹ This figure functions for Ross as the poetic muse, as she jolts him from his despair that he will never write as well as Allan Ramsay by literally inspiring him to creation: 'PUFF — I inspire you, sae you may begin' (l. 51). However, she is also the incarnation of the nation, as her primary concern is that he should write in Scots rather than English. In case there should be any doubt regarding his conflation of the figures of muse and nation, in his invocation — 'Say, Scota, that anes upon a day / Gar'd Allan Ramsay's hungry hert strings play' — 'Scota' is footnoted with the helpful information 'the name of my muse'. Although Ross's text is not generally considered a major Scottish eighteenth century work, his use of the muse figure as Scotland is revealing, if only because MacDiarmid goes on to combine the personification of the nation and the figure of the muse in a very similar way. Ross's muse becomes Scota at the intersection of literature and politics, or more specifically, at the point where language is used as both a literary and a political instrument. In Ross's prologue, Scota's injunction to the poet to write in her 'ain leed' since we have 'words a fouth, that we can ca' our ain' (ll. 56; 58) suggests

¹⁹Alexander Ross, 'Helenore, or The Fortunate Shepherdess 1778', in *The Scottish Works of Alexander Ross*, M. A., ed. by Margaret Wattle, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1938), 1, 9-141.

the political potential of both language and literature as the expression of a sense of nationhood.

III

The use of the figure of nation as woman which emerges in the early twentieth century is one aspect of the 'Scottish Renaissance' reinvention of a mythology for Scotland. But the acceptance of the figure by readers and critics says as much about the need for a Scotland-as-woman figurehead in the Renaissance as it does about the intentions of the authors concerned. Christopher Harvie suggests that Chris Guthrie, in the guise of 'Chris Caledonia', acts as the 'emotional "point of rest"' for most Scots readers of Lewis Grassie Gibbon's *A Scots Quair*. For Christopher Whyte, 'Chris Guthrie functions as Chris Caledonia again and again in Gibbon's trilogy', while Thomas Richardson describes her as 'the Scottish national metaphor'.²⁰ In fact this explicit identification of Chris with the nation is made only twice in *A Scots Quair*, both times in *Cloud Howe*, the second book of the trilogy. Chris's second husband, Robert Colquhoun, famously exclaims 'Oh Chris Caledonia, I've married a nation!', while the new laird, Stephen Mowat, 'felt he was stared at by Scotland herself'.²¹ Kurt Wittig suggests a schematic reading of the trilogy whereby this identification may be expanded throughout the trilogy and throughout the span of Chris's life: 'Chris, the woman, becomes, more and more "Chris Caledonia"'. She 'comes from the land', her marriage to the Highlander Ewan Tavendale signifies the union of Highlands and Lowlands, and her second husband, the Rev. Robert Colquhoun, represents the ties that bind state and religion in Scotland.²²

²⁰Christopher Harvie, 'Nationalism, Journalism and Cultural Politics', in *Nationalism in the Nineties*, ed. by Tom Gallagher (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991), pp. 29-45 (p. 43); Christopher Whyte, 'Not(e) from the Margin', *Chapman*, 80 (1995), 28-35 (p. 31); Thomas C. Richardson, 'Reinventing Identity: Nationalism in Modern Scottish Literature', in *Nationalism in Literature: Third International Scottish Studies Symposium Proceedings*, ed. by Horst W. Drescher and Hermann Völkel (Frankfurt am Main and New York: Peter Lang, 1989), pp. 117-129 (p. 127).

²¹Lewis Grassie Gibbon, *A Scots Quair* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1995), p. 139; p. 105. *A Scots Quair* is made up of three novels, *Sunset Song* (1932), *Cloud Howe* (1933) and *Grey Granite* (1934). It was first published as a trilogy in 1946.

²²Kurt Wittig, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1958), p. 331.

Various critics, engaging with Wittig's claims, have attributed the phrase 'Scotland herself' to Wittig, though in fact he takes it straight from *Cloud Howe*.²³ Wittig's reading has been disputed on the grounds of Gibbon's own anti-nationalist sentiments, and the otherwise proto-feminist treatment of women in the trilogy as a whole.²⁴ Gibbon's treatment of the question of reproductive rights, in particular — the suicide of Chris's mother on finding she is pregnant again, and Chae Strachan's statement to his daughter that 'life came out of women through tunnels of pain and if God had planned women for anything else but the bearing of children it was surely the saving of them' (p. 45) — speaks to a modern and sympathetic attitude to women.

Such psychological realism co-exists uneasily with the 'mythological' aspect of the character of Chris Guthrie. While explicit reference to Chris as nation is made only twice, the identification of Chris with the land is more sustained, though most exploited in the first book of the trilogy, *Sunset Song*. Gibbon's feminisation of the agricultural landscape allows him to exploit the sexual metaphors implicit in the allegory, paralleling female and arable fertility and thus placing women in a passive and receptive sexual role. In his short story 'Clay', this theme is expressed through his male protagonist's obsession with the land. He describes his fields 'as though they were women you'd to prig and to pat afore they'd come on', and tends the land day and night until the local people joke 'that he'd take it to bed with him if he could.'²⁵ Chris's relationship with the land is more complex as it is through her consciousness that we see the land as an extension of herself and a means of expressing both her sexual and her psychological identity. The four agriculturally titled parts of *Sunset Song*: 'Ploughing', 'Drilling', 'Seed-Time' and 'Harvest', corresponding to stages in Chris's sexual and emotional development, give structural support to the analogy of agriculture

²³Susanne Hagemann, *Die Schottische Renaissance: Literature und Nation im 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1991), p. 189; Isobel Murray, 'Novelists of the Renaissance', in *The History of Scottish Literature, IV: Twentieth Century*, pp. 103-117 (p. 109).

²⁴Hagemann, *Die Schottische Renaissance*, p. 189; Keith Dixon, 'Rough Edges: The Feminist Representation of Women in the Writing of Lewis Grassie Gibbon', in *Studies in Scottish Fiction in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Joachim Schwend and Horst Drescher (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1990), pp. 289-301; Deirdre Burton, 'A Feminist Reading of Lewis Grassie Gibbon's *A Scots Quair*', in *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Jeremy Hawthorn (London: Edward Arnold, 1984), pp. 35-46.

²⁵Lewis Grassie Gibbon, 'Clay', in *A Scots Hairst: Essays and Short Stories*, ed. by Ian S. Munro (London: Hutchison, 1967), pp. 16-27 (p. 21; p. 23).

to sexual reproduction and to the sexual act itself. These part-headings are given further textual support. Chris as a young girl is described as ‘no more than ploughed land still’ (*A Scots Quair*, p. 61), her first sexual awakenings ‘[score] her mind as a long drill scores the crumbling sods of a brown, still, May’ (p. 71). On realising she is pregnant, she does not wake her husband ‘for this was her rig and furrow, she had brought him the unsown field and the tending and reaping was hers’ (p. 177), and later in her pregnancy ‘came that movement in her body as she watched Ewan still — a mother with his child he was, the corn his as this seed of his hers, burgeoning and ripening, growing to harvest’ (p. 187). Such an equation of the female body with the land may of course be used to help substantiate an extended ‘Chris Caledonia’ reading, particularly since the parallel of Chris with the land lays emphasis on her qualities of fertility and endurance, both components of the nation-as-woman construction. Despite this, as Brian Morton points out, Chris ‘is not an abstract and romantic personification of a nation like Yeats’ Kathleen ni Houlihan.’²⁶

The psychologically realistic characterisation of Chris herself makes any such identification problematic. There is an allegorical aspect to her representation but it does not fully correspond to the necessarily abstract and mythological woman-as-nation figures already considered. Chris resembles neither Britannia nor Cathleen ni Houlihan. On the contrary, reading Robert Colquhoun’s ‘Chris Caledonia’ statement in context suggests that she represents the national character rather than the nation itself. When Robert asks Chris if it feels ‘tremendous and terrible’ to be pregnant, she answers only that ‘it made you feel sick, now and then’ (p. 139). It is this undemonstrative and reductive humour which earns her the title of ‘Chris Caledonia’: she represents a typically Scottish character. As Thomas Crawford puts it, ‘If an observer says that a person is “Scotland herself”, and if the remark applies to character, he can only mean that her personality reflects and embodies what the observer conceives to be the *national* character.’²⁷ That is, rather than being an abstract and one-dimensional concept

²⁶Brian Morton, ‘Lewis Grassie Gibbon and the Heroine of *A Scots Quair*’, in *EDDA: Nordisk Tidsskrift for Litteraturforskning*, 4 (1980), 193-203 (p. 202).

²⁷Thomas Crawford, ‘The View from the North: Region and Nation in *The Silver Darlings* and *A Scots Quair*’, in *The Literature of Region and Nation*, ed. by R. P. Draper (London: MacMillan, 1989), pp. 108-124 (p. 122).

such as Britannia, Chris embodies a national typicality in a manner similar to John Bull. She proves the exception to Marina Warner's rule that the female allegorical figure is generic while the male is individual.²⁸

Chris preserves the Scottish character in a pure form, being superior to the gossiping and backbiting of the communities of Kinraddie and Segget, and this is connected to her identification with the land. In his novels of the same period, Neil Gunn uses the female body and the landscape in a very similar way to Gibbon, although Gunn's Scottish landscape is that of the Gaelic-speaking Highlands rather than Gibbon's North-East. Gunn's women too are associated with the fertility and permanence of the land and function as a crucial backdrop to community life. In *Butcher's Broom* (1934), a novel which was intended to 'be about women,'²⁹ the central character, Dark Mairi of the Shores, is represented as having a deep identification with the land itself:

the valley is shaped as the eyes of Dark Mairi see it. A smooth shape of slender flanks and fluent spinal ridges, of swelling breasts and wandering arms, brown-skinned except where the region of its fertility lies softly grey-green with grass...³⁰

Christopher Whyte identifies Mairi as 'Gunn's embodiment of Gaelic Scotland.'³¹ Certainly in her identification with the land and her symbolic presence throughout the book she occupies a very similar space to Gibbon's Chris Guthrie. Gunn's construction of Gaelic Scotland depends very much upon a strict delineation of gender roles, which he describes in pseudo-anthropological detail. His achievement in representing a Scottish community and its mythology, particularly in *The Silver Darlings*, has led to his being described as the greatest novelist of the Scottish Renaissance. However, Whyte has questioned the 'eulogistic' consensus of Gunn criticism on the grounds of Gunn's representation of Gaelic culture and of gender. He argues that Gunn's essentialising of both gender roles and the Gaelic community are linked, and that Gunn

²⁸Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985; repr. London: Vintage, 1996), p. 12.

²⁹Francis R. Hart, 'Neil Gunn's Drama of the Light', in *The History of Scottish Literature, IV: Twentieth Century*, pp. 87-102 (p. 92).

³⁰Neil Gunn, *Butcher's Broom* (Edinburgh: Porpoise Press, 1934), p. 12.

³¹Whyte, 'Not(e) from the Margin', p. 31.

uses a specific construction of gender to underpin the structure of his ‘traditional’, ‘natural’ Gaelic community. Gunn’s prescriptive gender ideology, and iconisation of an essential femininity, represent, for Whyte, aspects of an ideology close to contemporary European fascism.³²

The association of the female with both the domestic and natural creates the illusion of a ‘natural’ domestic femininity which is associated with the preservation of tradition. In Gunn’s *Highland River* (1937), the female figure is once again removed from the narrative of history and paralleled instead with the unchanging backdrop of the landscape and the natural landmark. In the following extract Kenn’s mother Ellen stands watching her husband and sons go to church, while she stays at home to cook the Sunday dinner:

So quiet and contemplative and abiding she is, that from the shelter of her skirts one may brave God and all the unknown and terrifying things that go back beyond the hills to the ends of the earth and the beginnings of time [...] she becomes the rock that throws its shadow in a weary land [...]

So long has she been outside the mysteries and cults and secret associations man has made for his own pleasure and importance, that she is beyond the ethic of each age and every age, as life itself is, and continues as life continues, and endures as the hills endure.³³

The mother here acquires the status of a natural landmark and functions as a refuge and a sanctuary: she has an existence outside the temporal world inhabited by men. While Gunn never explicitly figures woman as nation he posits women as essential to, yet outside, the cohesion of the (male) community, elevating them to a mystical plane while at the same time effectively denying them any individual agency. Richard Price, in his largely appreciative study of Gunn, acknowledges that Gunn’s ‘affectionate characterisation of women [...] always runs the risk of a dangerous if well-meaning

³²Christopher Whyte, ‘Fishy Masculinities: Neil Gunn’s *The Silver Darlings*’, in *Gendering The Nation: Studies in Modern Scottish Literature*, ed. by Christopher Whyte (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), pp. 49-68 (p. 66).

³³Neil Gunn, *Highland River* (Edinburgh: Porpoise Press, 1937; repr. Edinburgh: Canongate, 1991), pp. 89-92.

sentimentalisation'.³⁴ The 'archetypal' mother figure is removed from civil society and any political agency, remaining a symbolic figure who possesses 'little personal individuality'³⁵ and becoming not an individual but an iconic female figure who 'endures as the hills endure'.

Catherine Kerrigan discusses the stereotype of the good wife and mother, 'perpetuated in nineteenth and twentieth century novels by male authors', who is the centre of order in the family and in the community, and points out that it is this idealised image of domestic womanhood which is transferred to the symbol of the nation as a woman. Caledonia, for Kerrigan, represents 'order, community, continuity, stability [and] security.'³⁶ In the figure of nation as housewife national identity may be preserved in perpetuity. Roderick Watson identifies Gibbon's Chris Guthrie with 'Alba as a place outside time in which ultimate truth can be found in the spirit of place and by (feminine) intuition, rather than through reason, intellect and masculine control.' He concludes that, for Gibbon, 'nation' ultimately had 'nothing to do with the conventional politics of Scotland, nor with the spirit as understood by his own Church of Scotland.'³⁷ The 'spirit of place' is associated with specifically feminine virtues which are located outside the sphere of civil society. Chris, like Ellen in *Highland River*, is removed from the male world of politics and religion and thus preserves the 'true' national spirit.

This insistence on female domesticity idealises the mother figure as the personification of a particular, rural, way of life which is seen to epitomise Scottish identity. This static, ideal and domestic figure is, however, distanced from the intellectual and above all masculine image presented by the writers of the Scottish Renaissance. While the exclusion of women from the 'canon' of mainstream literary movements is by no means exclusive to Scotland, the oppression of women is

³⁴Richard Price, *The Fabulous Matter of Fact: The Poetics of Neil M. Gunn* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), p. 114.

³⁵Margery McCulloch, *The Novels of Neil M. Gunn: A Critical Survey* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987), p. 74.

³⁶Kerrigan, 'Nationalism and Gender', p. 107. This image, of Caledonia as house-wife, is perhaps perpetuated in the figure of Winnie Ewing, dubbed 'Madame Ecosse' in the European Parliament, where she holds the seat for the Highlands and Islands. She was also given the nickname of 'Home Rule Housewife' when she won the Hamilton by-election for the SNP in 1967. Catriona Burness, 'Drunk Women Don't Look at Thistles: Women and the SNP, 1934-94', *Scotlands*, 2 (1994), 131-54 (p. 138).

³⁷Roderick Watson, 'Visions of Alba: The Constructions of Celtic Roots in Modern Scottish Literature', *Etudes Ecosaises*, 1 (1992), 253-264 (p. 259).

particularly emphasised in countries which themselves are fighting against oppression.³⁸ Marilyn Reizbaum suggests that the emphasis on virility in nationalist discourse in Scotland and also in Ireland during the same period, may be ‘a response to the historical figuration of cultural “inferiority” in stereotypes of the feminine,’ particularly the tendency to theorise the Celtic race and Celtic literature as essentially feminine.³⁹ In Scotland this rejection of the feminine had one specific ‘domestic’ literary tradition on which to focus. The nostalgic and sentimental ‘Kailyard’ novel represented a domesticity and parochialism from which the writers of the Scottish Renaissance felt the need to distance themselves. According to Carol Anderson and Glenda Norquay:

Once Kailyard literature was identified with a passive and ‘feminine’ world view, anyone wishing to assert intellectual rigour had to turn his back on the cabbage patch. [...] Parochialism and femininity were seen to be inextricably linked, operating as a barrier to [MacDiarmid’s] fusion of universality and national identity.⁴⁰

The ‘confident intellectual basis’⁴¹ of MacDiarmid and other writers of the Renaissance regarding the validity and indeed existence of a Scottish identity and literary tradition was a stimulus towards creativity and imagination and represented a clear rejection of the ‘domesticity’ of the Kailyard. But this rejection of domesticity is related to the process of creativity and not necessarily to subject matter. As we have seen, the idealisation of the domestic and maternal female is an important component of the novels of Gibbon and Gunn and is used by MacDiarmid too in the figure of Jean in *A Drunk Man*, although MacDiarmid does deviate from the Caledonia as house-wife mode to represent women as a disruptive force. The domesticity of women such as Chris Guthrie or Ellen Sutherland in *Highland River* is connected to their mythological

³⁸Joy Hendry, ‘A Double Knot on the Peeny’, in *In Other Words: Writing as a Feminist*, ed. by Gail Chester and Sigrid Nelson (London: Hutchison, 1987), pp. 36-45; Marilyn Reizbaum, ‘Canonical Double-Cross: Scottish and Irish Women’s Writing’, in *Decolonizing Tradition: New Views of Twentieth Century ‘British’ Literary Canons*, ed. by Karen K. Lawrence (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), pp. 165-90.

³⁹Reizbaum, ‘Canonical Double-Cross’, p. 172. See Malcolm Chapman, *The Gaelic Vision in Scottish Culture* (London: Croom Helm, 1978) for an extended discussion of this stereotype.

⁴⁰Carol Anderson and Glenda Norquay, ‘Superiorism’, *Cencrastus*, 15 (1984), 8-10 (p. 8).

⁴¹Beth Dickson, ‘Foundations of the Modern Scottish Novel’, in *The History of Scottish Literature, IV: Twentieth Century*, pp. 49-60 (p. 59).

status and their affinity with the land and with the cycles of history. Domesticity is sublimated: it is a crucial constituent of femininity but also central to the preservation of national character and identity.

Given this association of the female and the domestic with the guarding of a pure national identity, it is ironic that Helen Cruickshank once said she planned to write a book called *The Domestic History of the Scots Renaissance*.⁴² Whether or not there was an element of self-irony in this, her choice of title puts her in her place. Cruickshank was a poet, but not generally considered to be one of the first order, and lived a life of 'selfless devotion to poetry and its practitioners', in particular to MacDiarmid himself.⁴³ MacDiarmid himself identified Cruickshank, in this domestic and supportive role, with 'the Scottish muse'.⁴⁴ The ease with which MacDiarmid was able to locate Cruickshank, and also his wife Valda Trevlyn, in this mythical role, is echoed in Douglas Dunn's brief history of the 'Scotia' figure, where, claiming that Scotia 'can be anything you like', he includes in his list of examples 'all the women in the songs and all the women who ever wrote them, sang them or heard them'. This moves the figure of Scotland as woman out of the realm of the symbolic and begins to implicate the lives of actual women in the structure of the myth. This is disturbingly close to Robert Graves' statement in *The White Goddess* that 'woman is not a poet: she is either a Muse or she is nothing'. Although Graves goes on to qualify his claim — 'this is not to say that a woman should refrain from writing poems; only, that she should write as a woman, not as if she were an honorary man' — it is clear that the consciously creative position of 'poet' is defined as exclusively male.⁴⁵

A similar problem of identification of the figure of the 'poet', combined, as Marilyn Reizbaum pointed out, with the strongly patriarchal nature of nationalist discourse, haunts the 'Scottish Renaissance group'. Kurt Wittig's *The Scottish Tradition*

⁴²Helen B. Cruickshank, 'Mainly Domestic: Being Some Personal Reminiscences', in *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Festschrift*, ed. by K. D. Duval and S. G. Smith (Edinburgh: K.D. Duval, 1962), pp. 187-195 (p. 187).

⁴³Dorothy McMillan, 'Twentieth Century Poetry I: Rachel Annand Taylor to Veronica Forrest-Thomson', in *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*, ed. by Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp. 428-443 (p. 435).

⁴⁴Hugh MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet: A Self-Study in Literature and Political Ideas* (London: Methuen, 1943; repr. London: Jonathan Cape, 1972), pp. 400-401.

⁴⁵Robert Graves, *The White Goddess: A Historical Grammar of Poetic Myth* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948; repr. 1961), p. 446-7.

in Literature (1958) considers no women at all in his chapter 'The Modern Makars' dealing with the poetry of the Renaissance. The reference Wittig's title makes to the mediaeval poets echoes MacDiarmid's chosen filiation with William Dunbar, and it is interesting that Wittig locates Marion Angus, Violet Jacob and Helen Cruickshank in the previous chapter, perhaps to avoid spoiling the perfect line of his sketch of the male makars. Wittig gives extended consideration to six men in his poetry chapter, and to three men in his chapter on 'The Modern Novel.'⁴⁶ The fact that the pantheon of the Scottish renaissance has until some recent re-evaluations been almost entirely male may be related to the wider literary phenomenon of gendered canon formations. Literary criticism is now beginning to uncover and reintegrate the female writers of the period. The obligatory critical footnote mentioning Violet Jacob, Marion Angus and Helen Cruickshank is beginning to be expanded into the text, Willa Muir is being given critical recognition outwith her role as the wife of Edwin; and Naomi Mitchison, Catherine Carswell and others are now being written into the history of the renaissance. A new vision of the renaissance, incorporating these female writers, is beginning to compromise our image of the renaissance as predominantly male.⁴⁷

The painting 'Poet's Pub' by Alexander Moffat (1980), although produced many years after the scene which it represents, functions as a powerful piece of iconography regarding the Scottish literary scene. A group of poets, including Hugh MacDiarmid, Robert Garioch, Edwin Morgan, George Mackay Brown and Norman MacCaig are gathered round a pub table, pints in hand, and in some cases pipes in mouth. (See fig. 2.) The pub in question may be Milne's Bar in Edinburgh, as the history and the mythology of the Scottish Renaissance identify it as the scene of many poetry- and whisky-fuelled evenings. The maleness of the assembled company is inescapable, and in it we may read the maleness of the Scottish literary community. There are no women in the foreground of the picture, but blurred and indistinct female figures may be

⁴⁶Wittig, pp. 280 ff. In 'The Modern Makars' he considers in detail MacDiarmid, William Soutar, Sydney Goodsir Smith, Douglas Young, Edwin Muir and George Bruce. In 'The Modern Novel' he gives detailed attention to Eric Linklater, Lewis Grassie Gibbon and Neil Gunn, although to give him credit he does mention Naomi Mitchison's *The Bull Calves* and Dot Allan's *The Deans* (1929) and *Hunger March* (1931).

⁴⁷See for example the chapters on Violet Jacob, Marion Angus, Catherine Carswell, Willa Muir and Nan Shepherd in *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*, and the volume *Scottish Women's Fiction, 1920s-1960s: Journeys Into Being*, ed. by Carol Anderson and Aileen Christianson (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000).

distinguished, appropriately enough, on its margins. A female figure with long hair and bare arms slumps, her head propped up on her hand, at a table to the left of the group. Her face is barely hinted at, compared to the distinct lines which characterise the poets. At the door of the pub on the extreme right of the picture another indistinct woman leans against the doorpost. And towards the centre of the background of the picture is a roughly painted female figure dressed in what appears to be a Greek tunic which has slipped from her shoulders to expose her breasts. She is waving a Lion Rampant. Presumably this is the Scottish muse, her attentions somewhat divided on this particular occasion. She too is out of focus, a blur when compared to the crisp lines denoting the poets at their table, and although this may not have been to the forefront of the artist's mind, her blurred outline is revealing in terms of the fuzzy contours which the nation's political situation forces upon its figurehead.

The indistinct contours of the Scotland-as-woman figure differentiate her from the clearly delineated figure of Yeats' Cathleen ni Houlihan, who played a distinct political role. The Irish literary revival was sufficiently connected to politics for Yeats to demand 'Did that play of mine send out / Certain men the English shot?' The texts of the Scottish literary renaissance did not have the mobilising political impulse that Yeats and others imputed to *Cathleen ni Houlihan*. The personification of Scotland does not represent the nation-*state*, but neither does she function as a symbol of oppositional nationalism. Scotland as woman has to represent the less definable concept of national identity, or national consciousness, or the 'ancestral spirit of the nation'.

Hugh MacDiarmid cannot by any means be described as 'typical' of the poets and novelists writing in the Scottish renaissance or after, but as the literary 'father' of the Scottish renaissance and indeed of twentieth century Scottish literature, his approach to both nation and gender is undoubtedly influential. His use of the symbol of nation as woman is the most extensive of the Scottish renaissance writers, just as his treatment of Scotland as a nation is arguably the most developed. In the following two chapters I consider how, as well as determining a model for the relationship between Scotland and woman, his work illustrates many of the fault-lines inherent in the construction of the nation-as-woman figure, and its Scottish incarnation in particular. The curiously hazy

and imprecise Scotland-as-woman figure which develops in the Scottish renaissance period eventually becomes, in MacDiarmid's work, the symbol of a Scotland which is ultimately indefinable, not simply due to its political position but due to the restraints of language and the impossibility of any 'true' representation of the nation.



Fig. 2. *Poet's Pub*, by Alexander Moffat, 1980. Figures include Norman McCaig, Sorley MacLean, Hugh MacDiarmid, Iain Crichton Smith, George Mackay Brown, Sydney Goodsir Smith, Edwin Morgan, Robert Garioch, Alan Bold and John Tonge. Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

Chapter Three

'A Bit of the Other': Hugh MacDiarmid's Early Vision of Scotland

Our nationality is like our relations to women: too implicated in our moral nature to be changed honourably, and too accidental to be worth changing.

— George Santayana

I

Hugh MacDiarmid occupies a unique position in Scottish literature of the twentieth century, in terms both of his innovations and of his influence on the work of the poets and writers who followed him. Throughout his career his beliefs shifted, from a commitment to a Scottish cultural renaissance based on the revival of Scots as a language, to the location of Scotland within a 'Union of Celtic Republics', to a more abstract intellectual and aesthetic appreciation of Scotland in his later work. But throughout his career the image of Scotland remains central to MacDiarmid's changing vision, and Scotland not as a closed entity but a Scotland open to influences from outside. MacDiarmid's poetry may be seen as a constant negotiation between his attempt to represent his version of Scottish identity and his need to refresh the moribund Scottish culture with eclectic references to the literature and philosophy of numerous other countries. In his later work his reach becomes broader still, with an encyclopaedic range of references to different branches of science. In his earlier poetry, particularly *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, which will be the focus of this chapter, the field in which he is negotiating is not so wide; nevertheless he creates a whole series of tensions in his attempt to fix some vision of Scotland within the context of an international appreciation of intellectual and aesthetic theories and developments.

It is difficult to look at MacDiarmid's work without taking into consideration his ego, and the striking figure he cut on the Scottish literary scene. This was to a large extent a self-created persona. Christopher Grieve created the persona of Hugh MacDiarmid, the poet, and was able to project onto this alter ego the messiah-like figure of the poet who

will both describe and create the nation, with the onerous task of the Scottish poet who 'maun assume / The burden o' his people's doom' (ll. 2639-40) in *A Drunk Man*, which develops later into the figure of the 'poet as prophet' (CP ii 1372).¹ This self-assertion takes in part the form of an over-emphasis on masculinity: the masculinity of the poet and of the nationalist.

Despite the many charges of misogyny which may be levelled at MacDiarmid on both practical and textual levels, more recent readings of MacDiarmid, informed by gender theory, have destabilised the construction of dominant masculinity and find in his work a stylistic and thematic openness to the idea of the other.² On a practical level, many of MacDiarmid's pronouncements and actions serve to exclude women from any significant role in art or in history. His infamous statement that 'Scottish women of any historical importance or interest are curiously rare...' furthers a masculinist reading of history and serves to reinforce the stereotype of a cantankerous and egotistical chauvinist. He further suggests, provocatively, that the 'undue influence of the female sex' on Scottish affairs may be to blame for the 'absence in modern Scotland of all the rarer and higher qualities of the human spirit.'³ Again, his assertion that 'the total output of our poetesses of any quality at all has been extremely slight' reads as an abrupt dismissal of Scottish women poets which is compounded by his lack of acknowledgement of the achievement of female vernacular poets such as Helen Cruickshank and Violet Jacob. To be fair, however, this statement is followed by an explanation of the paucity of female poets: 'The position to which women were so long relegated accounts, of course, to a very large extent for this.'⁴ This awareness of female oppression complicates any

¹See Alan Bold, 'Dr Grieve and Mr MacDiarmid', in *The Age of MacDiarmid: Essays on Hugh MacDiarmid and his Influence on Contemporary Scotland*, ed. by Paul H. Scott and A. C. Davis (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1980), pp. 35-50. Line references to *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* are from Hugh MacDiarmid, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, ed. by Kenneth Buthlay (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987); all other MacDiarmid page references are to *The Complete Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid*, 2 vols, ed. by Michael Grieve and W.R. Aitken (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), abbreviated in the text as CP i and ii.

²Christopher Whyte, 'The Construction of Meaning in MacDiarmid's "Drunk Man"', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 23 (1988), 199-238 (p. 218); Christopher Whyte, 'Gender and Sexuality in "The Drunk Man"', *Scottish Affairs*, 5 (1993), 136-146; Catherine Kerrigan, 'Desperately Seeking Sophia', *Scotlands*, 2 (1994), 155-163.

³Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Elspeth Buchan: Friend Mother in the Lord', in *Scottish Eccentrics* (London: Routledge, 1936), pp. 160-193 (p. 160).

⁴Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Muriel Stuart', in *Contemporary Scottish Studies* (Edinburgh: Scottish Educational Journal, 1979), pp. 37-51 (p. 48). See Nancy K. Gish, 'Hugh MacDiarmid', in *The Gender of*

simplistic reading of MacDiarmid as male chauvinist. The use of images of women within MacDiarmid's texts remains highly problematic, and there is an overlap between his construction of women in his poetry and his experience of the actual women in his life. He casts both in a similar symbolically maternal and muse-like role, inspiring and protecting. MacDiarmid claims in the opening pages of his autobiography *Lucky Poet* that his choice of wives reflected the development of his nationalist beliefs:

I could never, by any possibility, have had anything to do with an English girl, but married first of all a Scots girl of old Highland descent, and as my second wife a Cornish girl, symbolising the further development of my pro-Celtic ideas.⁵

While this is a joke, in a literary text with a distinct agenda, it nonetheless epitomises the symbolic role women played for MacDiarmid in describing and giving shape to his existence. Later in *Lucky Poet* this becomes even more evident, as he parallels a list of names he has used for his muse in his work with the names of real women in his life:

I have been extricated again and again from like difficulties [...] by Audh, or the Scottish Muse, by beloved Hodegetria, Chrysopantanasa (Golden-universal-Queen), or Brigit the goddess whom poets adored, because very great, very famous was her protecting care — Carlyle's 'actual Air-Maiden, incorporated tangibility and reality', whose electric glance has fascinated the Gaelic world — often in the form of friends like my wife Valda, or Helen Cruickshank, or Mary Ramsay, or some other friend.⁶

The objectification of women in his poems and the mystification of the female role spills over into MacDiarmid's descriptions of his relationships with actual female friends. The juxtaposition of the names of Valda and Helen Cruickshank with the pan-cultural litany of names for the Scottish muse suggests that MacDiarmid attributed a supernatural protective and maternal quality not only to the many mythological, religious and literary female

Modernism: A Critical Anthology, ed. by Bonnie Kime Scott (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 275-286.

⁵Hugh MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet: A Self-Study in Literature and Political Ideas* (London: Methuen, 1943; repr. London: Jonathan Cape, 1972), p. 7. He also introduces *Lucky Poet* by illustrating the divisions in Scotland by means of three fairly bawdy stories (pp. 5-7).

⁶*Lucky Poet*, pp. 400-1.

figures he cites, but also to all women in general. However unfounded and ill-advised MacDiarmid's belief in this form of the Eternal Feminine may be, his re-iteration of the protective, maternal and inherently superior powers possessed by women demonstrates a respect for an essential femininity which he covets. He covets it because it is other, and this evident awareness of a female space which the male poet is unable to occupy leads Christopher Whyte to qualify *A Drunk Man* as 'not a pernicious text. It speaks about women but does not purport to speak for them. It does not usurp feminine discursive space.'⁷

The female principle in MacDiarmid's iconography functions as muse both of nation and of inspiration. Since MacDiarmid's project, at least initially, is to revitalise Scottish culture and nationhood by means of a linguistic and literary renaissance, the overlap between the creative muse and the muse of nation is significant and necessary. We see this in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* where the Drunk Man himself is defined by his masculinity, his creativity and his nationality, and in the later poetry where the female principle is invoked to represent both abstract thought and Alba.

The development of the female principle throughout MacDiarmid's work can be divided into three basic stages, which correspond to changes in MacDiarmid's attitude towards language, the cultural renaissance and nation. The first stage covers the years from 1920 to around 1932, the period during which MacDiarmid argues that any form of political revolution must include a cultural renaissance as a necessary component, and is committed to the revival of Scots as a language within this programme of cultural renaissance.⁸ In this period the female principle is split between the physical and the spiritual. MacDiarmid draws upon two distinct and opposed images of women: the first earthly, domestic and physical; the second mysterious, alien and spiritual. This duality persists to some extent but by the time MacDiarmid has moved on to a belief in a pan-Celtic continuum of nations, the 'Gaelic Muse' he chooses to represent this idea seems to be composed more of the spiritual than of the physical. And the muse who governs the third stage of MacDiarmid's work, his 'poetry of knowledge' is more abstract still. The

⁷Whyte, 'Gender and Sexuality in "The Drunk Man"', p. 137.

⁸See Stephen Maxwell, 'The Nationalism of MacDiarmid', in *The Age of MacDiarmid*, pp. 202-223 (pp. 218-9).

following chapter will go on to consider these later incarnations of the muse, but this chapter will be concerned primarily with the first period of MacDiarmid's career, where many of his anxieties regarding language and nation are embedded in the representational gap between 'real' and ethereal women.

We can see a duality in the use of the female figure as personification of place or nation informing MacDiarmid's work from an early period. In the poems 'Spanish Girl' and 'La Belle Terre Sans Merci' he uses images of women to describe his experiences in Salonika with the RAMC in 1916-18. Both poems introduce themes of his ambivalent relationship to the female body which recur throughout his work. While there is no denying 'the erotic appeal of the subject'⁹ of the poem 'Spanish Girl' (1923), there is nonetheless an almost sinister aspect to the description of sexual intercourse with the 'rose that will not let me rest' (CP i 11). The indefatigable sexual appetite of the Spanish girl, prefiguring the 'Cratur without climacteric' of *A Drunk Man*, seems to overwhelm the male narrator of the poem:

...O weltering womanhood
On whose dispurposed mood
Flotsam
I am. (CP i 12)

The horror and the attraction of this sexual encounter lie in the powerlessness experienced by the narrator in face of the woman's sexuality. The 'I am' standing on its own seems a verbal reassertion of an intellectual masculinity against an uncontrollable female sensuality. In 'La Belle Terre Sans Merci' (1920), this sensuality becomes explicitly corrupt. MacDiarmid turns Keats' 'Belle Dame'¹⁰ into a female personification of Salonika. Since MacDiarmid's stay in Salonika was interspersed with bouts of malaria, the land for him takes on a corrupt aspect which leads him to describe it in terms of a beautiful but syphilitic prostitute. MacDiarmid's lyrical and sensuous appreciation of the beauty of the landscape (the houses shine, the cypress groves glimmer; 'the broad seas are a mesh of quivering gold' (CP ii 1197)) is suddenly and violently undercut: no sooner

⁹Alan Bold, *MacDiarmid: A Critical Biography* (London: John Murray, 1988), p. 93.

¹⁰John Keats, 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', *The Poetical Works of John Keats*, ed. H. Buxton Forman (Oxford: Clarendon, 1906), p. 354.

has he 'blessed the fate that gave [his] eyes / To light on Paradise' than he is addressing the land in a litany of female debauchery and disease:

O Siren of the wrecking shores
 O Mirage of the desert lands,
 Mother of whores
 With leprous hands — (CP ii 1199)

The personification of the land as the 'siren of the wrecking shores' in 'La Belle Terre Sans Merci' is reproduced in a slightly different form in a series of poems written around the same time: 'Allegiance' (CP ii 1200); 'She Whom I Love' (CP ii 1113); and 'Beyond Exile' (CP i 305). The leprous prostitute of the 'alien clay' finds a counterpart in the woman to whom these love poems are addressed, generally accepted to be Peggy (Margaret Skinner, MacDiarmid's first wife). 'She Whom I Love' becomes associated with the natural landscape: 'with the waters and the skies / She watcheth me...' (CP ii 1113) and in 'Beyond Exile' his anticipation of encountering 'The quick step at the quiet door / The gay eyes at the pane!' (CP i 306) is translated into a joy that his feet will soon be on 'familiar sod' rather than 'alien clay'. If Peggy here becomes the 'embodiment of the brilliantly lit land' from which MacDiarmid was physically separated,¹¹ and for which he was suffering pangs of homesickness along with his malaria, her metonymic relationship to the land is not that far removed from that of 'La Belle Terre Sans Merci'. In both series of poems MacDiarmid's environment and state of mind find poetic expression through the bodies of women. Peggy acquires the status of a natural phenomenon, a home and a refuge, while the confusion and illness encountered abroad are represented in terms of a female sexuality that is horrific and diseased. The gap between home and other is expressed by the apparently irreconcilable dichotomy between the familiarity of female domesticity and the unfathomable otherness of female sexuality. This prefigures the female duality in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1926) between the figure of Jean, the Drunk Man's wife, and that of the 'silken leddy', the ethereal muse figure who recurs in various incarnations during the course of the poem.

¹¹Bold, *MacDiarmid*, p. 94.

II

The figure of Jean in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* provides a thematic framing device for her husband's drunken moonlight contemplation of a thistle. She is first mentioned in line 101 and it is her (projected) words which close the poem. In her role as the Drunk Man's wife she functions as a symbolic constant in a poem where every other symbol undergoes a series of changes and acquires dark and nightmarish aspects. This constancy, her association with home and her connection to an earthy and familiar sexuality contribute to the image of her body as Scotland which occurs roughly a third of the way through the poem. As wife and as sexual partner Jean is the only constant against which the Drunk Man can define himself. Early in the poem he asks himself:

— Am I a thingum mebbe that is kept

Preserved in spirits in a muckle bottle

Lang centuries efter sin' wi' Jean I slept? (ll. 282-4)

Jean defines the Drunk Man's present. Sleeping with Jean represents the root of his existence, an index of normality by which he defines himself. In the poem the Drunk Man has wandered somewhat adrift and has ended up instead lying on the ground contemplating a thistle. This physical state of being adrift from home is necessary for the Drunk Man's unfocused mental wanderings. But the mention of Jean and memories of her body and their sex life within the poem function as a textual home, a point of reference to which the Drunk Man regularly returns. The figure of Jean in the poem is rooted in the physical, and in the descriptions of her we find an explicit account of physical sexuality which we do not see in the (albeit sensual) descriptions of the more ethereal 'silken leddy'. Sex is problematised in *A Drunk Man* and exists as a series of contradictions: a frank approach to the description of the sexual act is paralleled by a revulsion at its physicality, as seen in 'La Belle Terre Sans Merci'. A belief in the superior and more spiritual status of women is compromised by an belief in the inherent corruption of all women. In the body of Jean, MacDiarmid reconciles his wildly extreme versions of female sexuality into manageable proportions: she possesses neither the voracious sexuality of the 'cratur without climacteric' (l. 830) nor the pseudo-virginity of

the bride in 'O Wha's the Bride?' (ll. 612-635). Jean, in the socially sanctified position of the wife, is apparently able to sustain a sex life which topples neither into romance nor into sexual excess. The Drunk Man's recollection of sex with her shifts from bawdy and playful: 'I'se warrant Jean 'ud no be lang / In findin' whence this thistle sprang' (ll. 591-2) to sex as a form of spiritual awareness, a 'kind o' Christianity' (ll. 574).

Jean's sexuality is associated with a privileged female knowledge to which the Drunk Man does not have access, represented throughout the poem in terms of light:

A luvin wumman is a licht

That shows a man his waefu' plicht. (ll. 595-6)

Both Jean and all women in general ('Licht's in them a'—' (l. 935)) are perceived as possessing a quality of 'illumination' which grants them a deeper insight than men into human nature and particularly into men themselves. This illuminating quality is associated in the poem with MacDiarmid's perception of the viscosity of female physicality, particularly in the two stanzas which precede the 'O Wha's the Bride' section, as the male address: 'O lass wha see'est me / As I daur hardly see...' is paralleled with the projected female response: 'Gin you could pierce their blindin' licht / You'd see a fouler sicht!' (ll. 604-5; ll. 610-11). (In 'Ode to all Rebels' (1934), MacDiarmid attributes this privileged female knowledge, somewhat less romantically, to the fact that women wash men's underwear, remarking 'thank God for laundries' (CP.i 493-4).) This illuminating quality possessed by women, while it gives women themselves privileged insight, also serves to help the man to see more clearly and to participate in a process of self-realisation. In the 'peculiar licht o' love' the Drunk Man is able to see his 'derrin' nature' (l. 2033; l. 2026), and this combined with the two linked exclamations 'sex reveals life, faith!' and 'be life's licht, my wife!' (l. 985; l. 988) creates the impression of sex with Jean as illuminating, positive and self-revealing.

Jean's physicality, sexuality and connection with home combine to make her body function as a symbol for Scotland. MacDiarmid takes the binding nature of marriage and the procreative and self-revealing aspects of sex to create a persuasive image of woman as nation in the body of Jean:

Create oorsels, syne bairns, syne race.

Sae on the cod I see't in you
 Wi' Maidenkirk to John o'Groats
 The bosom that you draw me to.

And nae Scot wi' a wumman lies,
 But I am he ... (ll. 957-62)

MacDiarmid begins with the Nietzschean maxim of 'be yourselves', a phrase which functions as a slogan in the first half of *A Drunk Man*. (cf. ll. 743-6). Buthlay points out that MacDiarmid goes further than Nietzsche in applying this principle of self-realisation not only to the individual but also to the nation.¹² This transference from individual to nation takes place through the medium of sex and procreation: 'Create oorsels, *syne* bairns, *syne* race', and therefore through the medium of the female body. This body, in the next line, is explicitly mapped as the country of Scotland. In the clearly sexual context, with the head of the woman on the pillow as she draws the Drunk Man to her bosom, he, from his dominant and superior position, may look down on her body and identify her as Scotland. This sexual figuring of Scotland as a woman who is the begetter of the race requires the wifely, motherly figure of Jean, who is associated with an earthy physicality and with home. The beginning of the following stanza: 'nae Scot wi a wumman lies' clearly polarises the terms 'Scot' and 'wumman' since a Scot, in this definition, must be someone who sleeps with women. Thus women are excluded from the subject position 'Scot', as indeed are homosexual men.¹³ While women are seen as receptacles of nationhood, they do not fully participate in that nationhood. The tasks of defending and of defining the nation are seen as definitively male.

In MacDiarmid's construction the nationalist is invariably male. In addition, he enters into a kind of macho contest regarding which expressions of nationalist sentiment are suitably virile. The Drunk Man contemplates the 'members o' St. Andrew's societies' who write to newspapers to complain about 'use o' England whaur the U.K.'s meent'. In the Drunk Man's estimation such paper patriotism is highly inferior to the role he has chosen in the national struggle:

¹²Buthlay, ed., *A Drunk Man*, p. 63.

¹³Christopher Whyte, 'Not(e) from the Margin', *Chapman*, 80 (1995), 28-35 (p. 30).

Wad I were them — they've chosen a better pairt,
 The couthie cratur, than the ane I've ta'en,
 Tyauvin' wi' this root-hewn Scottis soul;

A fer, fer better pairt — *except for men.* (ll. 393-6, my emphasis)

To be called a 'man' now becomes a qualitative judgement, and the 'couthie cratur' who pass their time writing to the newspapers are effectively emasculated by the Drunk Man's statement. A 'man's job' is defined by its difficulty and labour-intensiveness, and the Drunk Man's mental trials become described in terms of physical graft. The denigration of the masculinity and independence of the 'couthie cratur' is compounded by the supplementary description of them as 'Each tethered to a punctual-snorin' missus' (l. 398). Here the 'missus' becomes no more than a comic accessory to the caricature, and in this representation of male-female relations there is no hint of sexual intercourse, as compared with the Drunk Man's relationships with women throughout the poem. The lack of independence conveyed by the word 'tethered' is contrasted with the Drunk Man's free rein: 'Whilst I, puir fule, owre continents unkent / And wine-dark oceans wander like Ulysses...' (ll. 399-400). The solitude of the Drunk Man is another defining factor in his virility, and yet in his mental wanderings he never loses touch with his home base, personified by Jean.

III

Jean is firmly located at home, occupying the same dramatic space as Tam O'Shanter's wife Kate, a fixed point to which the Drunk Man must eventually return. Tam encounters the 'other' in the form of the witches' coven and the figure of Nannie in her 'cutty sark'. The brownies and bogles which fill 'Tam O'Shanter' are translated into the Drunk Man's mindboggling intellectual voyage through European philosophy, within which the muse-like figure of the 'silken leddy' may be identified as occupying the same bewitching role as that of Nannie. If Jean is located at home and associated with the physical, the 'silken leddy', the other side of the female coin, has no fixed abode, and her reappearance in

different translations links her to the disconnectedness of the Drunk Man's cerebral journey.

The figure identified as the 'silken leddy' appears only three times in the 2685 lines of *A Drunk Man*, and each appearance is in a translation, two from the Russian poet Alexander Blok and one 'suggested by the German of' Else Lasker-Schüler. She is far less rooted in reality than the figure of Jean, and as each appearance associates her with alcohol, the supernatural or the moon, her very existence is in question. Yet her status as a symbol of woman within the poem, a counterpoint to the physical and safe version of femininity provided by Jean, makes her a very important figure, and her 'otherness' throws new light on MacDiarmid's entire project.

The role of the 'silken leddy' appears to be derived largely from MacDiarmid's interest in the figure of Sophia, the Wisdom of God, whom he found in the work of Vladimir Soloviev. MacDiarmid develops his ideas on Sophia in the article 'A Russo-Scottish Parallelism' (1923) and the poem 'Hymn to Sophia, the Wisdom of God' (CP i 455). Sophia represents a very specific use of the idealised female form which had already attracted him in his earlier poetry. Sophia is the traditional symbol of wisdom in Gnostic doctrine, and in this role she also functions as the ultimate embodiment of unity, the reconciliation of opposites which governs MacDiarmid's poetry. MacDiarmid describes Sophia as 'not only the perfect unity of all that is *sub specie aeternitatis*, but also the unifying power in the divided and chaotic world, the living bond between the Creator and the creature.'¹⁴

The first appearance of the 'silken leddy' in *A Drunk Man* is in a translation from Blok (ll. 169-220), whose 'beautiful lady' was also derived from Soloviev's idea of Sophia.¹⁵ She appears in close association with the fluid and unstable symbols of alcohol and the moon, and may, it is suggested, be a vision of the Drunk Man himself, 'transmuted by the mellow liquor' (ll. 225-6). While the original Blok poem is clearly a description of a prostitute, MacDiarmid's translation includes no references which make

¹⁴Hugh MacDiarmid, 'A Russo-Scottish Parallelism' (1923), in *Selected Essays of Hugh MacDiarmid*, ed. by Duncan Glen (London: Cape, 1969), pp. 38-43 (p. 40).

¹⁵Catherine Kerrigan, *Whaur Extremes Meet: The Poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid 1920-1934* (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1983), p. 109; Samuel D. Cioran, *Vladimir Solov'ev and the Knighthood of the Divine Sophia* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1977), 146. See also Peter McCarey, *Hugh MacDiarmid and the Russians* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987).

this evident. And for Blok's title, translated as 'The Lady Unknown', MacDiarmid substitutes 'Poet's Pub', linking both the female figure and the transmuting liquor to the idea of creativity.¹⁶ The appearance of the lady serves to stimulate the Drunk Man to poetic activity and deeper thought. Her second appearance, which closely follows the first, is a 'free adaptation' of another Blok poem which hails the arrival of a strange and unknown woman. Blok's poem is called 'The Unknown Woman' but MacDiarmid changes this to 'The Unknown Goddess', elevating the image of the woman to a protective and superior status. For the section immediately following this MacDiarmid supplies the title 'My Nation's Soul' which suggests to Kenneth Buthlay that this goddess is 'a Scottish deity, whom [MacDiarmid] suspects of trapping the Drunk Man in a particularly Scottish form of constricted religious morality'.¹⁷

Although Buthlay makes this connection, it seems to me important to note that at no point is the figure of the 'silken leddy' explicitly related to nation or to Scotland. Indeed, the crucial thing about her is that she is *strange*, both in the supernatural nature of her appearances and in the fact that each of her appearances is in a translation, a 'foreign' text. While the homely figure of Jean is associated with Scotland in a very physical way, the 'silken leddy' figure comes from elsewhere. Her role is more that of MacDiarmid's creative muse, the muse who enables him to express his vision of himself and of Scotland, and the fact that the muse is foreign has implications for MacDiarmid's vision of Scotland. An internationalism is informing his nationalism. The strangeness of the 'Unknown Goddess — 'The features lang forekent . . . are unforecast' (l. 248) — implies that the familiar has been supplanted by something else.

Soloviev's vision of Sophia contained a strong erotic element, and McCarey points out that in his poetry she is seen as the 'successor and perfect development of Aphrodite'.¹⁸ This eroticism is translated in *A Drunk Man* into a wild and at times dangerous female sexuality, represented in the nexus of images clustered around the

¹⁶The division of *A Drunk Man* into 59 titled sections was for its inclusion in the 1962 *Collected Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1962). See Kenneth Buthlay's edition of the text (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987) for a fuller discussion of this. Since the titles were evidently supplied by MacDiarmid they may be used to cast some light on readings of the poem, but as they were supplied 30 years after its composition they are perhaps not very much help in deducing MacDiarmid's original intentions.

¹⁷Buthlay, ed., *A Drunk Man*, p. 25.

¹⁸McCarey, p. 60.

strange woman, which emphasise her 'otherness'. These include the prostitute of Blok's first poem, whom MacDiarmid turns into an illusion; the sexuality of the moon, who becomes, in the 'To Luna at the Cradle and Coffin' section (l. 819 ff), the barmaid in the tavern of life; the 'carline' possessed of an insatiable sexuality; the shifting and changing nature of the moon itself; the uncertainty, unpredictability and untrustworthiness of alcohol. The illusory, fickle, dangerous quality attached to these female images is the catalyst for the Drunk Man's vision. The female images grouped under the heading of 'silken leddy' represent 'otherness' — otherness as opposed to Jean, whose body preserves the space of home and of nation. MacDiarmid chooses to represent both home and other in terms of women, with the result that cross-cultural influences become represented in terms of marital infidelity. In the first Blok poem, the appearance of the 'silken leddy' is preceded by a line in parentheses which is not from Blok: 'Jean ettles nocht of this, puir lass' (l. 186). This line is ambiguously placed and so it may merely be the drinking of which Jean is ignorant and not necessarily the contact with the mysterious woman. The very appearance of Jean in this section of the poem, however, serves to juxtapose the two female figures and to suggest the possibility of sexual transgression.

The Drunk Man seems to feel some guilt regarding his association with the 'silken leddy', and this places himself, Jean and the 'silken leddy' in the eternal sexual triangle. The Drunk Man finds himself caught between the forces of familiarity, physicality and home, represented by Jean, and the attractive, dangerous and foreign 'other' woman. The other woman is a necessary element to the poem but read in terms of Jean's controlling structural role in the poem she appears almost like a foreign body invading. The disruption she causes is the same disruption caused by MacDiarmid's eclectic assimilation of foreign literatures and philosophies within a poem which claims to be looking at 'the thistle'. This disruption is what makes *A Drunk Man* what it is, but what is interesting is the frisson of guilt and infidelity that is associated with the appearance of the 'silken leddy'. In writing about Scotland MacDiarmid cannot but be seduced away by his attraction to internationalism: Tom Nairn describes the poem as 'that great national poem about the impossibility of nationalism.'¹⁹ The representation of the relationship between

¹⁹Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1981), p. 169.

nationalism and internationalism through the metaphor of sexual seduction highlights the difficulties MacDiarmid is having in remaining faithful to the vision of Scotland he is trying to create.

Three more poems expand and further complicate this representation of nationalism and internationalism in terms of sexual relationships and sexual jealousy. The poem 'Tarras' in *Scots Unbound and other poems* (1932) — Tarras is a type of volcanic rock — describes a rocky landscape in terms of the female body, and the poet compares his relationship to the landscape with more conventional relationships to women:

Ah woman-fondlin'! What is that to this?
 Saft hair to birssy heather, warm kiss
 To cauld black waters' suction.
 Nae ardent briests' erection
 But the stark hills'! (CP i 338)

Here the harshness and difficulty of the Scottish landscape is celebrated in contrast to the importance some people may set on a 'simpling face'. Most interesting is Part II of this poem, entitled 'Why I Became a Scots Nationalist', where the feminised harshness of the landscape is transferred onto the body of a woman representing Scotland, and the process of stimulating nationalism, of engaging with the nation, is described in explicitly sexual terms:

...Like Pushkin I
 My time for flichty conquests by,
 Valuing nae mair some quick-fire cratur'
 Wha hurries up the ways o' natur',
 Am happy, when after lang and sair
 Pursuit you yield yoursel' to me,
 But wi' nae rapture, cauldly there,
 Open but glowerin' callously,
 Yet slow but surely heat until
 You catch my flame against your will
 And the mureburn tak's the hill. (CP i 339)

This somewhat bizarre allegory, of nationalism represented in the description of an unwilling woman being coaxed to orgasm, returns us to the contorted sexual politics of *A Drunk Man*. In terms of the duality already set up, the figure of woman portrayed here would seem to be closer to Jean than to the ‘silken leddy’, since the woman is contrasted to ‘flichty conquests’ and the connotations attached to her are those of nature and the landscape. But the relationship in this poem is considerably different from the consensual sexual relationship of the Drunk Man and Jean. The woman here participates in the sexual act ‘wi’ nae rapture, cauldly [...] glowerin’ callously’. This reluctance on the part of the woman and the determination and triumph on the part of the man suggests an unequal balance of power in the relationship, and on the allegorical level this would seem to suggest that MacDiarmid’s relationship with Scotland has reached breaking point.

In the collection *Stony Limits* (1934), MacDiarmid continues this description of his relationship with Scotland in terms of a deteriorating marital, or at any rate sexual, relationship. In ‘Towards a New Scotland’, he complains, ‘Let nae man think he can serve you, Scotland, / Withoot muckle trial and trouble to himsel’ (CP i 453). The relationship becomes recast in terms of Scotland’s unreasonable demands and the poet’s unwavering love: ‘Ah, Scotland, you ken best. [...] Yet gladly I rejected ither literatures for yours, / Nor covet them noo you’ve ootcast!’ (CP i 452). Again foreign literature is constructed as ‘ither’, and set in the context of sexual jealousy, rejection and covetousness. The fact that the poet has not, in fact, rejected other literatures at all merely adds to the humour of the poet’s relationship to his nation represented in terms of marital strife.

The theme of sexual jealousy and infidelity is developed further in a small section of the long poem ‘Ode to All Rebels’.²⁰ This italicised section, which interrupts the narrative flow of a longer section of the poem, is as follows:

Scotland, when it is given to me

As it will be

To sing the immortal song

The crown of all my long

²⁰CP i 487-512. This poem was originally intended to be published in *Stony Limits and Other Poems* (1934), but was deleted from the first edition.

Travail with thee

I know in that high hour
 I'll have, and use, the power
 Sublime contempt to blend
 With its ecstatic end,
 As who, in love's embrace,
 Forgetfully may frame
 Above the poor slut's face
 Another woman's name. (CP i 489)

Here again we are confronted with Scotland as a woman, and with the introduction of 'another woman' into the equation. But the allegory of Scotland as the wife threatened by the poet's flirtations with foreign influences is significantly changed here. In this poem Scotland is described as 'the poor slut' whose face is associated, in the act of sex, with 'another woman's name'. 'Poor slut' seems an unlikely phrase to be used about a wife, so Scotland no longer holds the position of wife, but has been relegated to the status of a mere sexual object. The poet's 'long travail' with Scotland recalls the 'muckle trial and trouble' of 'Towards a New Scotland' as well as the sexual struggle of 'Why I Became a Scots Nationalist'. Reading these poems together we can trace a distinct deterioration in MacDiarmid's relations with Scotland marked in explicitly sexual terms.

The other woman in this poem follows more clearly from the idealised otherness of the 'silken leddy', but her position as representative of an illicit sexuality has changed: now she represents an unattainable fantasy which is MacDiarmid's dream of Scotland as opposed to its debased reality. This vision of the unattainable woman is a move towards the type of female symbolism MacDiarmid uses in his later poetry, particularly in the figure of the Gaelic Muse.

IV

MacDiarmid's attraction towards the female principle as an ideal has been identified by some critics as in keeping with his experimental and modernist approach towards

language. Catherine Kerrigan's 'destabilizing' reading of *A Drunk Man* identifies in MacDiarmid a 'sometimes profound sense of women's power to disrupt his secure world of masculine authoring.' Kerrigan explicitly links the shifting symbolism of the figure of the 'silken leddy' to the 'chaotic language' of *A Drunk Man* thus associating MacDiarmid with theories of *écriture féminine*. For her, MacDiarmid's chaotic, irrational and unstructured poem removes it from the 'hierarchy of male-dominated public discourse.'²¹

Kerrigan sets up the binary opposition of 'chaotic', 'feminine' language as opposed to 'linear', 'masculine' language, but MacDiarmid in fact goes further than this, by breaking down the boundaries which attribute linearity to masculine thought and chaos to feminine intuition. In an earlier poem 'Au clair de la lune' (CP i 23-25) the moon is personified as a woman — in the final section of the poem, a huntress. Her light has the power to drown a 'dumfoun'ered Thocht', and is the source of a song 'that frae the chaos o' Thocht / In triumph breaks or lang.' Chaos, then, rather than being part of a system of irrationality and fluidity that is opposed to the masculine logic of thought, instead becomes itself associated with thought. The song generated by the moon stands as an alternative to the 'chaos o' Thocht'. So although Aileen Christianson rightly points out the exclusion of women from the 'thinking centre' of *A Drunk Man*,²² thought itself is represented in terms of limitations and chaos, while the otherness embodied in Jean, the 'silken leddy' and the moon is associated with a clarity which the Drunk Man is trying to apprehend. In the 'Author's Note' to the first edition of *A Drunk Man*, MacDiarmid warned against attempting to 'confer [...] a species of intelligibility foreign to its nature upon my poem' for the reason that 'drunkenness has a logic of its own'.²³ While drunkenness provides a suitably fluid metaphor for the poem's shifting imagery, various voices and bewildering mental connections, MacDiarmid's rather disingenuous attribution of the structure and governing logic of the poem simply to alcohol both highlights and hides its contradictions. *A Drunk Man* is presented as a stream of consciousness and stands as an example of 'the chaos o' Thocht'. The Drunk Man's perception of Scotland

²¹Kerrigan, 'Desperately Seeking Sophia', p. 155; p. 160.

²²Aileen Christianson, 'Flyting with *A Drunk Man*', *Scottish Affairs*, 5 (1993), 126-135 (p. 126).

²³Buthlay, ed., *A Drunk Man*, p. 196.

and his relationship to it cannot be expressed in terms of linear, rational thought. The Drunk Man covets the 'other', and covets the form of expression that he believes to be contained within the other. There are times when he seems to attain the song that allows him to break free from the chaos of thought:

These are the moments when my sang
Clears its white feet frae oot amang
My broken thocht, and moves as free
As souls frae bodies when they dee. (ll. 1919-22)

It is in his moments of union with the other, in the act of sexual intercourse, that the Drunk Man finds a transcendental and spiritual quality and comes close to some resolution of his struggle with the thistle. The mention of the 'kind o' Christianity' he has found while in bed with Jean (ll. 572-4) is expanded later in the poem and acquires overtones of Platonism which recall John Donne:²⁴

Clear my lourd flesh, and let me move
In the peculiar licht o' love,
As aiblins in Eternity men may
When their swack souls nae mair are clogged wi' clay. (ll. 2032-5)

In the physical and extra-linguistic act of sex the Drunk Man finds the clarity that allows him to escape from the limitations of his body. The imagery of the soul leaving the body links this to the passage above where his 'sang / Clears its white feet frae oot amang / [His] broken thocht' (ll. 1119-21), suggesting that his thought is as much of a limitation as his 'lourd flesh' and that the clarity of the ideal song which he is seeking to create can only be found on a spiritual level where both body and thought are left behind. Nevertheless, paradoxically, it is his physical body which occasionally allows him to reach this transcendent state in sex, and it is the female body which allows him to embody his creative and his national ideals outwith the limitations of language.

It is this quality which is above and outwith thought that MacDiarmid perceives and covets in women and which he wishes to appropriate. He succeeds, textually, by having

²⁴'As souls unbodied, bodies unclothed must be / To taste whole Joyes.' 'Elegy: To his Mistris Going to Bed', ll. 34-35. John Donne, *The Complete English Poems*, ed. by C. A. Patrides (London: Everyman, 1985), pp. 183-5.

the Drunk Man become pregnant with the poem. He has already played with the idea of the poem as something organic, something growing inside him, referring to it elsewhere as 'My gnawin' canker' (l. 798). Having asked 'Wull ever a wumman be big again / Wi's muckle's a Christ?' (ll. 638-9) and commented on pregnancy, 'Gin that's the best that you ha'e comin', / Fegs but I'm sorry for you, wumman' (ll. 640-1), the Drunk Man, almost one thousand lines later, instead finds *himself* pregnant with God:

I'm fu' o' a stickit God.

THAT'S what's the maitter wi' me.

Jean has stuck sic a fork in the wa'

That I row in agonie. (ll. 1632-5)²⁵

Thus MacDiarmid gains access to the analogy of pregnancy for poetic achievement. Having effectively excluded women from the position of poet, he appropriates the experience of pregnancy for himself: a usurping of feminine space which is nicely termed by Aileen Christianson as 'womb envy.'²⁶ Nancy K. Gish's chapter on *A Drunk Man*, in her *Hugh MacDiarmid: The Man and his Work*, is entitled 'Fu' o' a stickit God' and she discusses this lyric in terms of the poet as 'the progenitor of a new vision and historic development that he cannot release, his labour pains going on and on without issue', commenting on 'the poet's different creative urge and the dark comedy of his inability to get it out as simply and naturally as women do.'²⁷

Gish seems to take the Drunk Man at his word on this point, and indeed elaborates on his thesis by her polarisation of 'the poet' and 'women'. Just as women have been excluded from the subject position 'Scot', so they are now being excluded from the role of poet and relegated to an ultimately pointless (according to the Drunk Man) maternal backwater. Gish's somewhat dismissive 'get it out as simply and naturally as women do' seems rather to negate the importance and the pain of childbirth.²⁸ But her use of the word 'naturally' does foreground an important aspect of MacDiarmid's attitude to women

²⁵'Stick a fork in the wall' is defined by Jamieson's *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language* as the wife transferring the pains of labour to the husband. See Buthlay, ed., *A Drunk Man*, p. 120.

²⁶Christianson, p. 129.

²⁷Nancy K. Gish, *Hugh MacDiarmid: The Man and his Work* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), p. 78.

²⁸Given her feminist criticism of MacDiarmid's review of Rebecca West's *The Judge* six years after this it may be assumed that her views have changed somewhat. Gish, 'Hugh MacDiarmid', pp. 275-86.

which recurs throughout his work: he believes that women embody a naturalness, a closeness to nature; and he covets some such organic relationship between himself and poetry (and language).

My division of MacDiarmid's images of women during this period into the physical and the spiritual, the wife and the other, fits neatly into the discussion of the representation of the nation as a woman but becomes more complicated when he uses woman as the muse of language and of thought. Although the figure of the 'silken leddy' can be identified with the poetic muse, and her shifting imagery can be paralleled with the shifting logic of non-linear language, the figure of Jean is by no means removed from the intellectual or spiritual inspiration experienced by the Drunk Man and indeed it is in the physical act of sex with her — something he never achieves with the ethereal 'silken leddy' — that he claims to come closest to the kind of comprehension he is seeking. It is perhaps this overlap between his female images that leads MacDiarmid in his later poetry to abandon such a dualistic representation of women and combine both Jean and the 'silken leddy' into one muse figure. The strains on his relationship with Scotland evident in the later poetry of this early period perhaps left him no option but to abandon his triangle and move on.

Chapter Four

The Gaelic Muse: The Female Figure in MacDiarmid's Later Poetry

Scotland felt at that moment
 That no man ever personified her,
 Ever would represent her,
 As he did,
 And she grew in glory
 And was transfigured with pride.
 It was not a Scottish moment;
 It was a universal moment.

— Hugh MacDiarmid from 'The Poet as Prophet' (1953) CP ii 1376-7

I

The female figure in MacDiarmid's later poetry appears in two principal guises: the apparition of the 'Brightness of Brightness' from the Irish Gaelic *aisling* tradition, and the figure of Audh 'the deep-minded', derived from the Norse sagas. These two figures govern two distinct periods of MacDiarmid's poetry. The 'Brightness of Brightness' or 'Gaelic Muse' is related to MacDiarmid's 'Gaelic Idea', whereas Audh is associated more with his later 'poetry of knowledge'. There is an overlap between the two figures, however, and the 'Gaelic Muse' eventually becomes incorporated into the all-inclusive figure of Audh. As with the different images of the 'silken leddy' in *A Drunk Man*, both these manifestations of the muse are borrowed images, drawn from other cultures and sometimes taking the form of direct translations from other texts. A clear line can be drawn between MacDiarmid's use of the female figure in his earlier work and the way she evolves once he becomes enamoured of the concept of the Gaelic Muse. The most obvious change is that the very distinct constructions of femininity which exist within the *Drunk Man* become merged into one governing female ideal. This single figure is, however, a muse with 'many names' (CP i 658). MacDiarmid highlights his habit of borrowing from other texts and cultures by using, as Peter McCarey points out, 'about

twenty names from a dozen different cultures' which correspond to his vision of the Gaelic muse.¹

Roderick Watson describes the multiple names of Audh and the Gaelic muse as part of 'that vision of flux, complexity and unity which haunted MacDiarmid all his life', relating this to MacDiarmid's fascination with elaborate Celtic artwork and music.² The 'braidbinding' which functions as a symbol for MacDiarmid's poetic method in this later work becomes tied to the female figure, both in the recurrent descriptions of her hair as 'plaited like the generations of men' and in the overlapping of the many different names surrounding one female ideal. Rather than moving away from the personification of the nation in female form, as some critics suggest he does in this period, MacDiarmid instead uses the female form as one of his more successful methods of reconciling his multiple visions of Scotland. Stephen Maxwell claims in 'The Nationalism of Hugh MacDiarmid' that

only occasionally does MacDiarmid adopt the literary convention of addressing the spirit of Scotland as a person. More characteristically, he approaches Scotland as an intellectual problem, a challenge to the imagination.³

He cites, in part substantiation for this, the poem 'Composition (1934)', one of a series of poems written to accompany paintings by William Johnstone, which begins: 'Scotland! Everything he saw in it / Was a polyhedron he held in his brain' (CP ii 1070).⁴ Maxwell sees in this poem an expression of MacDiarmid's intellectualisation of Scotland and a move away from personification towards something colder and more exact: 'He knew / There was a way of combining them he must find yet / [...] Into one huge incomparable jewel' (CP ii 1070-1). Yet this notion of 'composition' seems on the contrary to be closely related to what MacDiarmid is trying to achieve by combining his various versions of the feminine ideal into the single figure of the Gaelic muse.

¹Peter McCarey, *Hugh MacDiarmid and the Russians* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987), p. 124.

²Roderick Watson, 'Visions of Alba: The Constructions of Celtic Roots in Modern Scottish Literature,' *Études Écossaises*, 1 (1992), 253-264 (p. 260).

³Stephen Maxwell, 'The Nationalism of MacDiarmid', in *The Age of MacDiarmid: Essays on Hugh MacDiarmid and his Influence on Contemporary Scotland*, ed. by Paul H. Scott and A. C. Davis (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1980), pp. 202-223 (p. 203).

⁴Hugh MacDiarmid, *Poems to Paintings by William Johnstone, 1933* (Edinburgh: Durval, 1963).

MacDiarmid comes closest to uniting his disparate visions of Scotland in the multi-faceted nature of his composite female figure.

This new version of the female principle in MacDiarmid's work marks a profound change in his attitude towards Scottish nationalism and the literary and linguistic renaissance. In the early thirties MacDiarmid's views on nationality underwent what has been described as a political and linguistic 'sea-change from a purely national revival of Scots [...] to a pan-Celtic vision rooted in Gaelic.'⁵ MacDiarmid's pan-Celtic vision included not only Scotland and Ireland but also Wales, Cornwall and Brittany and he verbalises this vision as the 'Gaelic Idea'. MacDiarmid sets out his theory in the long poem *To Circumjack Cencrastus* (1930) and in his essay 'The Caledonian Antisyzygy and the Gaelic Idea' (1931).⁶ He envisaged a European quadrilateral of racially defined mindsets, claiming that his 'Gaelic idea' was the necessary counterbalance to Dostoevsky's Russian idea, which had disrupted the European balance between north and south. Later, in his poem 'The Poet as Prophet' (1953) he sets up an opposition between the 'classicism' of Europe and the 'barbarism' of the Celts, envisaging a 'European *oecumenos*' in relation to which England, Russia and Spain are on the periphery, and barbarism (Gaeldom) is entirely outside, 'a distinct world altogether' (CP ii 1373-4). In parallel with this political shift, he moves away from his practice of writing in Scots, perhaps because the poetic limitations of that language were beginning to become more evident to him.⁷ *To Circumjack Cencrastus* (1930) is still written largely in Scots, as is the volume *Scots Unbound and Other Poems* (1932), but by *Stony Limits and Other Poems* (1934), he has abandoned Scots in favour of English. MacDiarmid does not write whole poems in Gaelic, and although his poems are peppered with Gaelic words and quotations, his knowledge of the language seems to be restricted to a use of the lexis, rather than any complex syntax, and the reiteration of stock phrases and

⁵Tom Scott, 'Lament for the Great Music,' in *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Critical Survey*, ed. by Duncan Glen (Edinburgh and London: Scottish Academic Press, 1972), pp. 184-191 (p. 184).

⁶Hugh MacDiarmid, 'The Caledonian Antisyzygy and the Gaelic Idea,' in *Selected Essays of Hugh MacDiarmid*, ed. by Duncan Glen (London: Cape, 1969), pp. 56-74.

⁷Duncan Glen suggests that just as 'in the twenties MacDiarmid had rejected English as having "outgrown itself", he was in the thirties rejecting Scots as underdeveloped, although he has yet to acknowledge this in print.' Duncan Glen, *Hugh MacDiarmid and the Scottish Renaissance* (Edinburgh and London: Chambers, 1964), p. 146.

quotations from the great poets. His knowledge of Gaelic culture is drawn from a variety of secondary literature.⁸

MacDiarmid's grandiose constructions of the essence of Gaeldom are all contingent on the revival of Gaeldom's broken, dying culture. As with his earlier nationalist beliefs, he sees language and literature as essential components of the political awakening he envisages. The quasi-messianic role of the poet as the guardian and saviour of his culture established in *A Drunk Man* is further developed in the poetry associated with the 'Gaelic idea,' most explicitly in 'The Poet as Prophet' (1953), subtitled 'The Man For Whom Gaeldom Was Waiting' (CP ii 1372-1377). The central role of the poet in Gaelic culture was part of the attraction for MacDiarmid, and in this poem he identifies each of the overlapping European ideas as having a prophet: communist Europe, with its centre as Moscow and its prophet Marx; liberal and parliamentary Europe with its prophet Rousseau and its centre 'the English tradition'; and federative Europe with its centre Rome and its prophet Proudhon. He does not actually identify the 'barbarian' Gaelic prophet but we are left in little doubt that this figure is none other than himself.

II

The figure of the 'Gaelic muse' in MacDiarmid's work originates with his adaptation of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century Irish Gaelic poet Aodhagan O' Rathaille's *aisling*, '*Gile na Gile*' (Brightness of Brightness) which is included in Daniel Corkery's *Hidden Ireland*, cited often by MacDiarmid as one of his sources.⁹ One fragment from this vision poem becomes in a sense the anthem of MacDiarmid's 'Gaelic muse', repeated in varying forms three times within three different poems: firstly in *To Circumjack Cencrastus* (1930), then in the poems *In Memoriam James Joyce* and 'The Gaelic Muse', the relevant sections of both of which appear in his autobiography *Lucky Poet* (1943). The provenance of this image from Irish Gaelic Jacobite song, its repetition

⁸See Douglas Sealy, 'Hugh MacDiarmid and the Gaelic Influence,' in *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Critical Survey*, ed. by Duncan Glen (Edinburgh and London: Scottish Academic Press, 1972), pp. 168-183.

⁹Daniel Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland: A Study of Gaelic Munster in the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin: Gill and Son, 1924 ; repr. Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1967), pp. 175-7. See also *The Poems of Egan O'Rahilly*, ed. by Patrick S. Dineen (London: Irish Texts Society, 1900), pp. 18-21.

and obvious attraction for MacDiarmid, and the different contexts within his work in which it is situated, make it instructive for tracing the development of MacDiarmid's conception of the 'Gaelic muse'.

In an article entitled 'MacDiarmid's Muses', the composer Ronald Stevenson identifies 'The Gaelic Muse' as one of the nine muses invoked by MacDiarmid. Stevenson's at times whimsical article makes no attempt to deconstruct the use of the female principle in MacDiarmid's work, but nevertheless makes some useful categorisations: for example, he distinguishes between 'Scotia' ('No nymph. She's a braw lass. Amazon. Rainbows her raiment. Birdsong her halo.') and 'The Gaelic Muse' as two distinct muses. Stevenson's comment on the Gaelic muse is that MacDiarmid 'found her where the Irish Gaelic poet of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Aodhagan O'Rathaille, left her.'¹⁰ The close identification here of MacDiarmid with O'Rathaille in the role of visionary poet is one which comes through strongly in MacDiarmid's own work. The objectification of the figure of the muse as something which may be 'left' and 'found' by male poets is both indicative of the use MacDiarmid makes of images of women within his work, and instructive as a way in which to approach the imagery and tradition of the *aisling*, Jacobite poems in which the male poet encounters a beautiful young woman who is waiting for the return of her lost love.¹¹ This young woman is known as the *spéir-bhean* or 'sky-woman', and the lost love for whom she is waiting is the Jacobite pretender. She is the spirit of Ireland, and this political allegory casts her in an entirely passive role with no potential for agency. Her existence is based on the absence of the desired one.

MacDiarmid does not exactly pick up the image where O'Rathaille left her, but like O'Rathaille he uses her to personify specific ideas within his work. He changes her from the spirit of Ireland to the spirit of Scotland, or rather, to a spirit of Celticism who is more Scottish than anything else. MacDiarmid's appropriation of the gendered universe of the *aisling* highlights the role of the male poet and plays on the importance of this role in

¹⁰Ronald Stevenson, 'MacDiarmid's Muses,' in *The Age of MacDiarmid*, pp. 163-169 (p. 164; p. 166). The other 'muses' identified by Stevenson are the thistle, Cencrastus, the muse of the five continents and world language, marxism, science, the cosmos and music.

¹¹According to Corkery, Aodhagan O'Rathaille was the first poet to make 'the *spéir-bhean* bewail the exile of the Pretender', the first poet to bind up the *aisling* with the Jacobite cause. Corkery, p. 129.

Gaelic culture. MacDiarmid seeks to parallel himself with O'Rathaille, in O'Rathaille's poem, in this first occurrence of the fragment in *To Circumjack Cencrastus* (1930):

Aodhagán Ó Rathaille sang this sang
 That I maun sing again;
 For I've met the Brightness o' Brightness
 Like him in a lanely glen,
 And seen the hair that's plaited
 Like the generations of men. (CP i 224)

This occurs two pages after MacDiarmid's first mention of the 'Gaelic idea' and the context suggests that the poet's encounter with the 'Brightness of Brightness' here represents the emergence of the Gaelic idea. MacDiarmid's heavy emphasis on the figure of Aodhagan O'Rathaille is partly because the fact that he is an Irish Gaelic writer is important for the pan-Celtic aspect of the Gaelic idea, and partly because the iconic figure of the male poet is important for MacDiarmid's conception of the relationship between poetry and renaissance.

A compressed version of the verse from *Cencrastus* appears in a section of *In Memoriam James Joyce* entitled 'Plaited like the generations of men', with a footnote glossing the reference to O'Rathaille. The 'Brightness of Brightness' becomes for MacDiarmid the personification of an inexpressible complexity and passion, amidst an attempt to describe in words the beauty, complexity and power of music. The key elements of the fragment remain:

Oh Aodhagán Ó Rathaille meets again
 The Brightness of Brightness in a lonely glen
 And sees the hair that's plaited
 Like the generations of men. (CP ii 872)

The compression of the verse suggests that MacDiarmid and O'Rathaille are moving together into a kind of universal poet figure. Situating the 'Brightness of Brightness' in the context of creativity prepares the way for her third and ultimate appearance, in the poem entitled 'The Gaelic Muse'. The female figure has moved to a focal position within the poem, which begins with the *aisling*-derived fragment, and she is specifically

designated as 'The Gaelic Muse', by which MacDiarmid means to signify a new renaissance on the Scottish literary and linguistic scene. In *Lucky Poet*, where it first appears, the poem 'The Gaelic Muse' immediately follows a positive assessment of the poetry of Sorley MacLean and George Campbell Hay. In the work of these poets MacDiarmid identifies the beginning of a Gaelic renaissance and the emergence of a Gaelic muse. Symbolically, MacDiarmid envisages this Gaelic renaissance as the logical development of his own Scots renaissance, though his own contribution to it is limited to a commentary and the insertion of Gaelic lexis into his poems. He claims to see the lady of MacLean's *Dàin do Eimhir* as the representation of 'the Scottish muse', and draws once more, more obliquely this time, on O'Rathaille to apostrophise her:¹²

At last, at last, I see her again
 In our long-lifeless glen,
 Eidolon of our fallen race,
 Shining in full renascent grace,
 She whose hair is plaited
 Like the generations of men,
 And for whom my heart has waited

Time out of ken. (CP i 657) (*Lucky Poet*, p. 358)

Here the arrival of the muse (who has lost the appellation 'Brightness of Brightness') is a sign of long-awaited joy and the glen has become the 'long-lifeless glen' of 'our fallen race'.

The 'Gaelic muse' represents for MacDiarmid both the poetic muse of the Gaelic poets whose work he praises and a version of the personification of the nation as a woman. The origins of the *spéir-bhean* as the personification of a grieving Ireland is combined with the personification of inspiration in female form, and in MacDiarmid's 'Gaelic muse' the boundaries between the two become blurred, as it appears to be the spirit of the nation who functions as the source of inspiration for the poets MacDiarmid cites and for MacDiarmid himself. In adapting the trope of the *aisling* to the description of what he perceived as a literary renaissance, MacDiarmid reverses the active/passive

¹²Somhairlle MacGill-Eain, *Dàin do Eimhir* (Glaschu: Uilleam MacGhill Fhaolain, 1943).

dynamic of the *aisling*. The passive figure of the *spéir-bhean* from the *aisling*, who could only wait for a lost love who will never arrive, becomes instead the symbol for which the poet has been waiting. The poet assumes the passive role, as it is *he*, rather than she, who has been waiting for her arrival 'time out of ken'. And the *spéir-bhean* no longer seeks to be reunited with her lost love, because the poet moves from the *aisling* role of observer to taking an active role in the poem. It is the meeting of poet and *spéir-bhean* which will generate the renaissance. The emphasis on waiting in this last appearance of the *aisling* fragment parallels the *spéir-bhean* with the 'silken leddy' of MacDiarmid's translation of Blok, 'The Unknown Goddess': 'I ha'e forekent ye! O I ha'e forekent. / The years forecast your face afore they went. [...] I bide in silence your slow-comin' pace' (*A Drunk Man*, ll. 241-2; l. 244).

Commenting on the *aisling*, Elizabeth Butler Cullingford contrasts the sexual passivity of the *spéir-bhean* with earlier Irish woman-as-nation myths, such as that of the *Cailleac*, the sovereignty goddess, who, without her proper mate, is 'old, ugly and crazed' but once she seduces some suitable young man, she becomes young again and he becomes king. The passive *spéir-bhean* is still a sexual object, as her physical charms are described by the poet, but she has become removed from voluntary physical involvement in the sexual act.¹³ MacDiarmid's Gaelic muse is granted more volition, as she is the active principle in the poem. However, as MacDiarmid makes clear later in 'The Gaelic Muse', this union between poet and muse is '[n]ot a sexual relationship as that is generally understood, / But an all-controlling emotion / That has no physical basis' (CP i 661).

The sexual appearance of the woman is still emphasised, particularly in the description of her hair, which recurs as a key element in the *aisling* fragment. This phrase, however, the 'hair that's plaited like the generations of men' is not in O'Rathaille's original poem. Peter McCarey gives an extended analysis of the significance of this phrase in MacDiarmid's work, identifying it as a generational chain representing human history made specifically Scottish by the use of the Celtic design

¹³Elizabeth Butler Cullingford, *Gender and History in Yeats's Love Poetry* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 58. Cullingford suggests that colonization meant that any solution to Ireland's problems was improbable, hence the passivity, by the eighteenth century, of the Ireland-as-woman figure.

feature of the plait. He further identifies the recurrent importance of women's hair in MacDiarmid's evocations of sex and also (often in conjunction) in his landscape descriptions of water, specifically as a stream or a waterfall .

Thus the plaited hair of the Brightness of Brightness represents Scotland in her humanity and in her physical geography, and the metaphor of sexual love suggests the poet's moments of ecstatic union with his country.¹⁴

As McCarey makes clear here, the sexual act is only suggested, and metaphor replaces the explicit descriptions of sex in MacDiarmid's earlier poetry. The domestic-physical and illicit-ethereal paradigms of femininity, established in *A Drunk Man*, are conflated, and so the physicality of the woman as Scotland metaphor is moved onto a more suggestive and spiritual plane.

III

Peter McCarey suggests that MacDiarmid's 'vision of Scotland' goes through a 'gradual process of abstraction' and that he concludes 'by eliminating any suggestion of a feminine character central to his work until, in the *Direadh* poems, Scotland, unpersonified, emerges as the central figure.'¹⁵ Although McCarey's conclusions are exaggerated, his identification of this process of abstraction can be linked to MacDiarmid's movement away from a dual conception of female existence and his consequent de-emphasising of physical sexuality. One female figure in his work (albeit one with many names) now bears responsibility for both nation and inspiration, tasks that had been fairly equally distributed between Jean and the 'silken leddy'.

MacDiarmid's fascination with the 'Gaelic Idea' is essentially a linguistic one, and the muse is inextricably the symbol of both nation and language. The ideal of Gaelic culture, to which MacDiarmid can only approximate by including Gaelic phrases in his English, is embodied by the 'Brightness of Brightness'. Immediately following the first

¹⁴McCarey, p. 117. See 'To Circumjack Cencrastus', CP i 190; 'Of My First Love', CP ii 1046 for examples of women's hair used to represent landscape.

¹⁵McCarey, p. 115.

use of the O'Rathaille fragment in *Cencrastus*, the poet is overcome with fear that the 'Brightness of Brightness', although she has 'taen [him] to her white breists there', may reject him on linguistic grounds: 'O wad at least my yokel words / Some Gaelic strain had kept' (CP i 224-5). MacDiarmid includes here what might be called an *apologia* for his failure to write in Gaelic:

— Fain through Burns' clay MacMhaighstir's fire
To glint within me ettled.
It stirred, alas, but couldna kyth,
Prood, elegant and mettled. (CP i 225)

This in itself continues the dichotomy of the physical and the spiritual. If Scots is associated with the 'clay' of the body, Gaelic becomes the 'fire' of the spirit. The Gaelic muse is composed of fire and air rather than clay — she has lost the earthy and physical connection to the flesh. The chastity of the passive *spéir-bhean* becomes the personification of a language which MacDiarmid cannot in fact touch, whose secrets he cannot penetrate. She is merged with the figure of Sophia, Divine Philosophy, as MacDiarmid says: 'I ken fu' weel I ha'e nae words / To match Divine Philosophy's' (225). The intellectual unattainability of the female figure becomes expressed in terms of linguistic incapability. The sense of lack which MacDiarmid claims to experience in his inability to speak Gaelic functions as a metonymy for the loss of Gaelic culture as a whole. As music represents the lost culture in 'Lament for the Great Music', so language itself now becomes a symbol for the culture which, through language, MacDiarmid himself is trying to revive. MacDiarmid's linguistic predicament finds its best expression in *Dìreadh*, where he states: 'I covet the mystery of our Gaelic speech' (CP ii 1191). The paradox this creates, of an opposition between a mystery (something unknown) and that which is 'ours' (something known) is represented in the body of the Gaelic muse, who is unfamiliar because she is foreign and ethereal and yet familiar because she takes a recognisable female form. As in *A Drunk Man*, the 'other' which MacDiarmid covets takes female shape, and it is indeed 'another voice' (CP i 658) which MacDiarmid hears and celebrates in 'The Gaelic Muse'.

In a passage common to both 'The Gaelic Muse' and *In Memoriam James Joyce*, MacDiarmid describes his linguistic (and perhaps also poetic) muse, beginning:¹⁶

Ah my Queen, slender and supple
 In a delightful posture
 As free from self-conscious art
 As the snowcap on a mountain! (CP i 660 (CP ii 839))

In the idealised figure of the muse MacDiarmid claims to represent an extra-textual, extra-linguistic sign of 'what the process of literature could be', other than 'the science of stringing words together / In desirable sequences' (CP i 661). Again MacDiarmid uses the female body to represent a clarity that is inexpressible by the chaos of thought or the intricacies of language. The Gaelic muse functions as a catch-all metaphor for a literary, linguistic and national ideal that resists representation in any other way. The figure of the Gaelic muse appears to free MacDiarmid temporarily from the linguistic obligation to verbalise his perception of literature. However, following the inclusion of this passage in *In Memoriam James Joyce*, that very process of verbalisation is represented in terms of the female body: 'Speech. All men's whore. My beloved!' (CP ii 838). Speech is represented in female form, as a temptress, hated by other women, whose 'demands [...] are for the supreme desires of men' (CP ii 839). It is difficult to gauge the composition date for much of *In Memoriam*, which was finally published in 1955, and while the 'Ah my queen' section evidently comes from an earlier period, the lines following it may not. These lines, in which MacDiarmid explains the utility of the representation of literary inspiration in terms of the mysterious other, may be seen as a later attempt to develop the issues and the imagery which he had established in the Gaelic muse. For he explains:

Men reach out to those things which are beyond their grasp,
 — The embodiment of every vital desire
 That gives them consciousness of being;
 Not lust but exhilaration. (CP ii 839)

¹⁶This passage is 26 lines long, from '- Ah my Queen...' to 'In desirable sequences.' CP i 660-1 and 839-40. There is only one minor difference between the two, in that 'Queen' on the first line is not capitalised in the *In Memoriam James Joyce* version.

The attraction of the other (woman) lies in that unapproachable and unattainable quality. MacDiarmid is at pains to emphasise the asexual nature of this encounter, repeating that this is '[n]ot a sexual relationship as that is generally understood' and '[n]ot lust but exhilaration'. In the figure of the Gaelic muse the physicality of the *Drunk Man* has finally been sublimated into the spiritual and elevated world of the 'silken leddy'.

The unattainability of the other lies partly in the provenance of MacDiarmid's muses from other cultures. The 'silken leddy', is matched by the 'Brightness of Brightness', whose Irish origins do not prevent her from becoming a Scottish muse. In 'The Gaelic Muse', MacDiarmid acknowledges his act of appropriation, hailing the muse as:

our Scottish *Gile na Gile* — [...]
 our Sheila ní Gadhra,
 Our Cathleen ní Houlihán, our *Druimfhionn Donn*,
 Our *pé' n Éireinn í*, 'whoe'er she be'... (CP i 660)

The appropriating and inclusive 'our' becomes attached to these heroines of Irish literature and mythology, the point most clearly made with 'our Scottish *Gile na Gile*' in the first line. MacDiarmid at once acknowledges their strangeness and assumes them into his incorporating muse figure. He has already stated, of the muse: 'Deirdre, Audh — she has many names, / But only one function' (CP i 658). He envisages his muse as a unitary figure made up of many parts, a governing female principle which subsumes many female figures, roles and names. In addition to the Irish list, MacDiarmid invokes a series of Greek names which are names attributed to different types of images of the Virgin Mary in Byzantine art:

Phaneromene,
 Hodegetria, Chryseleusa,
 Chrysopantanasa — Golden-universal Queen —
 Pantiglykofilusa, Zoodotospygi (CP i 658)

He glosses these names in footnotes, with the exception of 'Chrysopantanasa', glossed in the text itself.¹⁷ The inclusion of these unfamiliar appellations of the Virgin Mary

¹⁷Phanerome — made manifest; Hodegetria — leading on the way; Chryseleusa — golden-pitiful; Pantiglykofilusa — all-tenderly-embracing; Zoodotospygi — the life-giving fountain' (CP i 658). For a discussion of types of the Madonna which glosses Hodegetria, Eleousa and Glycophilousa, see Peter and

increase the strangeness of the text and the figure he is describing, as well as making a veiled reference to an established iconography of the female figure. The authority implicit in the Greek terms is echoed in his use of a Latin phrase to describe St. Brigit, 'The light *angelicae summaeque sanctae Brigidae*.' St. Brigit, often described, as indeed MacDiarmid names her here, as 'Mary of the Gael', is also considered to be the Christianised version of a much older and pagan Celtic fertility goddess. MacDiarmid draws the pagan and the Christian versions of the female figure together, since besides his Greek tags and church Latin he also hails Brigit as the 'Goddess of poets'. As the Christian and the pagan constructions of the female are brought closer together, so are Greek and Gaelic. MacDiarmid also brings classical Latin into the same section of the poem, in a quotation from the *Aeneid* describing the Golden Bough, '*Primo avulso non deficit alter / Aureus*'. By invoking the authority of Greek and Latin classical authors MacDiarmid implies that in the Irish tradition he has found an equivalent 'classical' tradition. This was an idea which he had found in Corkery's *Hidden Ireland*. In 'Towards a Celtic Front', MacDiarmid wrote:

Professor Daniel Corkery in *Hidden Ireland* stressed the need to 'get back behind the Renaissance' and to undo that deplorable whitewashing whereby Greek and Latin culture has prevented other European nations realizing their national genius in the way Greece and Rome themselves did.¹⁸

He elevates the Irish tradition to the same status of cultural influence as the classics, because he uses the myths of the Irish tradition as the basis for his construction of his 'Gaelic Idea' and his 'Gaelic Muse,' and he deliberately parallels his use of Gaelic literature with the way in which the classics and Christian iconography have influenced Western literature.

The eclectic provenance of the many names of the muse figure point to the plurality of MacDiarmid's vision and to his attraction to the idea of the other. But he faces a problem in that the multi-cultural names of his muse serve to highlight the lack of any

Linda Murray, *The Oxford Companion to Christian Art and Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 288-290.

¹⁸Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Towards a Celtic Front' (1953), in *Selected Essays of Hugh MacDiarmid*, pp. 171-176 (p. 173).

Scottish literary precedents of this figure for him to draw upon. And although the Irish input is justified by MacDiarmid's professed pan-Celtic vision of a common Irish and Scottish ancestry and ethnicity, nonetheless Scotland remains the focal point of his vision: it is 'our Scottish *Gile na Gile*' whom he envisages appearing. There is no consistent vision of a pan-Celtic union to undermine MacDiarmid's belief in Scotland as a nation. The paradox of MacDiarmid's construction is that while he hails Sorley MacLean's *Dain do Eimhir* as symbolic of the return of the Gaelic muse to a land which has long been lacking her, he nonetheless needs to construct for her a convincing and at least partially Scottish genealogy. He finds in Thomas Carlyle's novel *Sartor Resartus* a vision and a phrase which attracts him:

The actual Air-Maiden once more we see,
 Incorporated tangibility and reality,
 Whose electric glance has thrilled the Gaels
 Since time beyond memory. (CP i 658)

Carlyle's 'actual Air-maiden, incorporated into tangibility and reality' (MacDiarmid slightly misquotes)¹⁹ is indeed particularly apposite to MacDiarmid's vision of his muse, as it unites the physical and the spiritual paradigms of femininity which make up his muse. The names 'Air-maiden', and, earlier in Carlyle's passage, 'Sky-born', are uncannily close to the Gaelic *spéir-bhean* (sky-woman). Carlyle's passage makes no mention of the Gaels: the 'electric glance' cast by the Air-maiden is a development of the description of love in terms of 'universal Spiritual electricity'. The extended metaphor of women as insubstantial and ethereal creatures — 'all of air they were, all Soul and Form' — in Carlyle's novel is profoundly satirical at the expense of the character who thus describes them. However, by paralleling the Carlyle quotation with the fragment of O'Rathaille's *Gile na Gile*, MacDiarmid attempts to construct the impression that the

¹⁹In 'The Gaelic Muse' this is unannotated; in *Lucky Poet*, p. 400, he acknowledges his source in Carlyle. The relevant section of Carlyle's text is as follows:

'Thus was the young man, if all-sceptical of Demons and Angels such as the vulgar had once believed in, nevertheless not unvisited by hosts of true Sky-born, who visibly and audibly hovered around him wheresoever he went; and they had that religious worship in his thought, though as yet it was by their mere earthly and trivial name that he named them. But now, if on a soul so circumstanced, some actual Air-maiden, incorporated into tangibility and reality, should cast any electric glance of kind eyes, saying thereby, "Thou too mayst love and be loved"; and so kindle him, — good Heaven, what a volcanic, earthquake-bringing, all consuming fire were probably kindled!' Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* (1831; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 104-105.

Gaelic muse he describes, combining the physical and the ethereal, can be found in the work of the greatest Scottish writers and thus can be truly claimed as a Scottish muse.

IV

The composite ethnology of the muse becomes more complex still when the figure of 'Audh the Deep-Minded' becomes part of the package. Audh's origins in Norse mythology extend the limits of MacDiarmid's 'pan-Celtic' vision. While a continuity has been suggested between Irish heroic literature and certain of the Icelandic sagas, the use of Audh and the Norse sagas allows MacDiarmid to make associations beyond the Gaelic tradition. MacDiarmid indeed claimed that the Edda is 'an ancient British (i.e. Celtic), not Scandinavian epic'.²⁰ Audh is MacDiarmid's Scottish development of the figure of Sophia, the wisdom of God. MacDiarmid wanted 'to serve Scotland — to develop an Audhology comparable to the Sophiology that has been developed elsewhere'.²¹ Audh also allows MacDiarmid to make the transition from Venus to Hecate, or at least to an image rooted in a more mature female sexuality and knowledge, to complement MacDiarmid's 'Mature Art'.²² She appears in two different guises in MacDiarmid's work, firstly 'the young Audh' who is a figure not unlike the 'silken leddy' and the Gaelic muse; and secondly the fully-fledged 'Audh the Deep-minded', more associated with knowledge than sexuality.

Audh is first introduced as the receptacle of the Scottish genius in the chapter 'A Ride on a Neugle' in *Lucky Poet*, in a poem footnoted as 'from the German of Rainer Maria Rilke'. She is described as 'the heroine of this book', in direct opposition to 'her enemy, the villainess of the piece'.²³ This first occurrence of Audh, MacDiarmid clearly informs the reader, is 'not the Audh with whom we are concerned, Audh the

²⁰Hugh MacDiarmid, ed., *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*, 2nd edn (London: Macmillan, 1940; repr. Edinburgh: Canongate, 1993), p. xiv; McCarey, p. 122.

²¹*Lucky Poet*, p. 423.

²²*Mature Art* was supposed to be the name of a long composite poem, never completed, which was to include, among others *The Battle Continues* (1957) (CP ii 905-999); *In Memoriam James Joyce* (1955) (CP ii 737-889); *The Kind of Poetry I Want* (1961) (CP ii 1003-35); *Direadh* (1974) (CP ii 1164-1193); 'Cornish Heroic Song for Valda Trevlyn' (CP i 704-12); 'Once in a Cornish Garden' (CP ii 1102-09). See W.N. Herbert, 'MacDiarmid: Mature Art,' *Scottish Literary Journal*, 2 (1988), 24-38.

²³*Lucky Poet*, p. 387.

Deep-Minded, wife and mother of chieftains Gaelic and Scandinavian...' but the 'young Audh'. The poem continues the echoes of classical mythology, as its description of a goddess being born from the sea very much resembles the story of the birth of Aphrodite or Venus. The birth of this goddess, whom MacDiarmid names Audh, represents the purity of the Gaelic Genius. However, just as Soloviev described an Anti-Sophia, so MacDiarmid cites an anti-Audh.²⁴ Audh's opposite number is

Anglo-Scotland, the *droit administratif*, the pluto-bureaucracy, the mindless mob, the chaos of our great cities, the megalopolitan madness, European civilisation's ruthless and relentless depreciation and denial and destruction of the Gaelic Genius...²⁵

and this is represented by an extended description of Duessa excerpted from Spenser's *Faerie Queene*.²⁶ The false Duessa is stripped and shown to be ugly, disgusting and rotten under her assumed disguise. MacDiarmid's chosen quotations from the poem emphasise a highly negative perspective on female sexuality:

Her dried dugs, like bladders lacking wind
 Hong down, and filthy matter from them weld;
 [...]
 Her neather parts, the shame of all her kind
 My chaster Muse for shame doth blush to write.
 But at her rompe she growing had behind
 A foxes taile, with dong all fowly dight. (st. 47; 48)

While sexual intercourse has the potential to function as a transcendental experience, this seems to be a return to the fear of unfettered female sexuality expressed in 'La Belle Terre Sans Merci' and the 'carline without climacteric' of the *Drunk Man*. The opposition of the repugnant Duessa with the virginal Audh in this sequence seems to deny the

²⁴Samuel D. Cioran, *Vladimir Solov'ev and the Knighthood of the Divine Sophia* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1977), p. 62. Soloviev too associates Sophia and the defeat of her opposite number with the birth of Aphrodite: 'in the end Eternal Beauty will be fruitful and the salvation of the earth shall issue forth out of her when her deceptive likenesses shall disappear like the sea-foam that gave birth to the simple natured Aphrodite.' Vladimir Soloviev 'Iz predisloviya k tret'emu izdaniju', quoted in Cioran, p. 62.

²⁵*Lucky Poet*, p. 389. The emphasis on the virginity of this 'young Audh' is interesting given that MacDiarmid values 'Audh the Deep-Minded' primarily for her fertility and her procreative role.

²⁶*Lucky Poet*, p. 390; *The Faerie Queene*, I.8. Prologue; 39-40; 43; 46-49, with ellipses. Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene* (1596; repr. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981).

inspiration MacDiarmid has elsewhere attributed to female sexuality. The tension between sex for pleasure and sex for procreation addressed in *A Drunk Man* is perpetuated, as the matriarchal figure of the later Audh, while presumably not virginal, is valued primarily by MacDiarmid in her role as progenitrix. He celebrates her fertility and her historical position as the ancestress of generations.

An extended footnote in this chapter of *Lucky Poet* is devoted to the genealogy of Audh, described by Peter McCarey as ‘a determined if rather crude attempt to group the world around Audh.’²⁷ MacDiarmid’s claim that Audh ‘runs through the whole of Scottish history’ and functions to ‘[hold] the story together’ is demonstrated by this genealogy. Through it we see not just the way in which Audh links the Norse and the Gaelic mythologies, but the way in which her ancestors, those ‘generations of men,’ represent the story of human existence. Audh’s fertility makes her a central symbol for MacDiarmid, as he makes clear in the poem ‘Audh and Cunaide’ (CP ii 1047-8) in which Audh, ‘mother of the Hebridean chiefs’ is contrasted to Cunaide, ‘a spinster of thirty-three / Buried fifteen centuries ago’. Cunaide’s virginity is made to contrast unfavourably with Audh’s fertility:

Audh, wife and mother, whose intrepid blood
Still runs in far generations
Of her children’s children.

MacDiarmid contemplates the graves of these two historical figures and the potential for bringing them back to life. He considers that Audh could be resurrected due to her fertility and consequent blood-connection to the present. Cunaide however, since she had no children, and no sexual experience, has for MacDiarmid no connection to the present, ‘having nothing to do with human life / And earth and its history at all.’ Modern culture has smothered her completely: buried ‘by a railway viaduct’, her life and her death have been overwritten by technological advance. Audh, however, is buried under ice; her role in life and in death has been ‘natural’; she is written genetically and spiritually into the present day. It is Audh’s ‘natural womanhood’ and her encapsulation of the ‘richness and

²⁷McCarey, p. 122.

beauty of nature'²⁸ which qualify her to be identified as the 'Scottish genius': her fecundity becomes transmuted for MacDiarmid into the creative vitality of inspiration.

McCarey provides a comprehensive list of MacDiarmid's references to Audh in *Lucky Poet*, and summarises Audh thus: 'So Audh is nature, work, vigour, improvisation, actuality, and she inspires faith and frenzy as well as being the antisyzygy in person; Shestovian metaphysics might help us see her.' McCarey expresses some reservations, however, as to how convincing and how 'real' the figure of Audh appears:

MacDiarmid's description of Audh is as plausible as not, in two-dimensional print, but it does not convince us that he apprehended her in more than those terms. [...] the women in the later poems are much more often literary or historical types, more bookish and less lively [...] MacDiarmid is seeking a coherent view of the world. For this he relies heavily on literature and risks leaving himself with a thin and totally intellectual production — Audh, putative queen of a paper kingdom.²⁹

This objection appears to be based partly on his identification of a lack of physicality and sexual imagery in the later poetry. This particular change between the representations of Sophia and Audh is due largely to MacDiarmid's use of Audh to 'hold the story together'. MacDiarmid's 'coherent view of the world' means not only drawing on literature but placing Audh at the centre of his vision, a place never occupied by his Sophia figure. The Sophia figure or 'silken leddy' functioned as part of a duality, and thus was free from connotations of home, familiarity and motherhood. Audh has to encapsulate both the familial and the ethereal, and this perhaps contributes to the lack of explicit sexuality attached to her. The increasing abstraction of MacDiarmid's ideas and his growing preoccupation with the inability of language to express thought mean that Audh, in her role as literary and linguistic muse, has more to cope with than Sophia. Rather than seeing her as a paler and less interesting construction in comparison with MacDiarmid's earlier female figures, I regard her as a figure who develops, not just from Sophia, but also from Jean and the 'Brightness of Brightness'. In her, MacDiarmid

²⁸*Lucky Poet*, p. 394.

²⁹McCarey, p. 123; pp. 125-6.

acknowledges much of what is at stake in his construction of the female figure and acknowledges, too, that she is a construction, a composite muse with literary precedents, as were the 'silken leddy' and the 'Brightness of Brightness'.

V

Peter McCarey judges that the process of abstraction regarding the representation of the female figure in MacDiarmid's work culminates by 'eliminating any suggestion of a feminine character central to his work until, in the *Dìreadh* poems, Scotland, unpersonified, emerges as the central figure'.³⁰ This claim is not borne out by close study of the sequence, which, imposing a clarity on MacDiarmid's complex and contradictory views of Scotland, in fact culminates with the representation of Scotland as a woman in ecstatic union with the poet. This, as the climax of MacDiarmid's last published volume, can be seen as his final word on the matter.

The *Dìreadh* sequence has a coherence which is lacking in *In Memoriam James Joyce* and *The Kind of Poetry I Want*, though MacDiarmid makes use of many of the techniques he applied in those works: a preoccupation with language, use of obscure vocabulary, lists, and the discourse of science. The 'intense serenity' which Nancy K. Gish perceives as pervading the poem results from MacDiarmid's decision to work in microcosm and thus abandon temporarily the attempt to include the entire world in his poetry.³¹ He states that 'the very object of [his] song' — Scotland — has been from the beginning a microcosm (CP ii 1168), and implies that by celebrating Scotland in its geography, its history, and its 'reality', he will be able to encapsulate everything he has attempted in his career.

MacDiarmid expresses his desire to 'see Scotland whole' in *Lucky Poet*, in the chapter 'Seeing Scotland Whole,' which includes excerpts from all three *Dìreadh* poems. Structuring the poem around the motif of the vantage point allows MacDiarmid to survey Scotland, and also to survey his own life. From this distance he is able to achieve a clear-

³⁰McCarey, p. 115.

³¹Nancy K. Gish, *Hugh MacDiarmid: The Man and his Work* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), p. 203; p. 204.

headed perspective on his subject-matter. He appears to have attained the serenity he sought in the 'Great Wheel' section of *A Drunk Man*. To see Scotland whole it is necessary to step back from it. MacDiarmid translates '*Dìreadh*' as meaning 'the act of surmounting'. At the start of each poem MacDiarmid is at the summit of a mountain, from which vantage point he can survey the surrounding landscape and, by extension, the whole of Scotland. Edwin Morgan links the mountain-top to the role of the prophet-figure, 'the old traditional device of climbing a mountain to receive or to give a prophetic message.'³² MacDiarmid emphasises the all-embracing perspective which the vantage point gives him: 'all Scotland below us' (1164); 'Scotland seen entire, / Past, present and future at once' (CP ii 1167); 'I hold all Scotland / In my vision now' (1170).³³ Starting with a visual perception of the whole of Scotland he then extends this vision to a mental apprehension of Scotland's history and existence as an entity, and finally reaches a metaphorical 'holding' of Scotland within his vision. The dominant but distant gaze upon Scotland from the vantage point eventually requires some more physical engagement. If Scotland is personified as a woman this enables MacDiarmid to 'hold' her.

In *Lucky Poet* MacDiarmid discusses his use of the Scottish landscape and attributes it partly to the 'functional relation between an organism and its environment', but partly to the 'Chinese belief in the essential function of geography as a training of the mind in visualisation.'³⁴ At times MacDiarmid's landscape is inhabited, particularly in 'Dìreadh II', which is populated by, among others, the host of an inn near Coldingham (1179), 'Henderson of Chirside' (1182) and 'an East Lothian bailiff I once knew' (1184). The landscape's 'capacity to uncover for the observer an ultimate human reality'³⁵ is what attracts MacDiarmid and allows him to move beyond surface description and to use the land itself as a metaphor. Edwin Morgan describes MacDiarmid's imaginative method:

Although the first insistence is on the reality of detail in describing or evoking or enumerating the varied aspects of life or landscape in the whole country, and on reminding people of the nature, the actuality of

³²Edwin Morgan, 'MacDiarmid and Scotland', in *The Age of MacDiarmid*, pp. 193-201 (p. 200).

³³See also CP ii 1175, 1176, 1177.

³⁴*Lucky Poet*, p. 310.

³⁵Maxwell, p. 204.

Scotland, islands and mainland, history and present, the matter is then moved out into another dimension, where the poet as seer, with his feet firmly on the ground, can nevertheless invite his readers to consider the entire meaning and destiny of this country, this place, Scotland.³⁶

MacDiarmid's emphasis is on looking beneath the surface appearance of the land and 'feeling' a country (CP ii 1185). To properly convey this sense of 'feeling' a landscape and his very personal communion with a country he represents landscape to us in human terms. The humanised landscape invariably takes female form and thus becomes paralleled with MacDiarmid's gallery of female figures. In the poem 'Of my first love' (CP ii 1046-7) the memory of his first love becomes fixed as the 'Eas-Coul-aulin in Sutherlandshire', the highest waterfall in Scotland, while the harsh landscape of 'The North Face of Liathach' (CP ii 1055-7) stays in his mind 'like a vision' and reminds him 'Not of my mother / But of many other women I have known / As I could not know her' (CP ii 1055; 1057).

The writing of the female figure onto the landscape binds MacDiarmid's perception of Scotland to his use of the female principle throughout his work, and in the *Dìreadh* sequence the female principle functions once again to embody both MacDiarmid's complex images of Scotland and his emotional engagement with his nation. It is in 'Dìreadh III', the climax of the sequence, that the idea of Scotland again becomes materialised in the form of a woman:

I am reft to the innermost heart
Of my country now,
History's final verdict upon it,
The changeless element in all its change,
Reified like the woman I love. (CP ii 1186)

Parts I and II of *Dìreadh* have traversed 'the wonderful diversity and innumerable / Sharp transitions of the Scottish scene' (CP ii 1170), moving through Scotland linguistically, geographically, politically, socially, historically and demographically. In 'Dìreadh III' MacDiarmid must find some symbol to represent his 'multiform, infinite

³⁶Morgan, p. 200.

Scotland' (CP ii 1170), and it is once more the symbol of woman which provides the clarity and wholeness required.

Nancy Gish, discussing the sequence as a whole, identifies 'flowering or fulfilment' as the uniting image of 'Díreadh II', and sees this continue into 'Díreadh III' where fulfilment is identified with the spirit of Gaelic culture.³⁷ MacDiarmid has already raised a toast to 'Scotland fulfilled' (CP ii 1181), but the ultimate fulfilment must come in the union of Scotland and the poet. The consummation of 'Díreadh III' is related in a connected string of images: a rock-pigeon darting into a rock-face sparks off a series of associations from classical literature and becomes transformed into a metaphor for Scotland and himself:

So Scotland darts into the towering wall of my heart
And finds refuge now. I give
My beloved peace... (CP ii 1192)

In a reversal of the sexual act it is the female principle here which penetrates him: as well as having constructed her, he now carries her too. In the poem 'Conception' (1963) (CP ii 1069-70) MacDiarmid also explores this idea, paralleling his discovery of Scotland within himself with his discovery of the other within himself:

— This terrible blinding discovery
Of Scotland in me, and I in Scotland,
Even as a man, loyal to a man's code and outlook,
Discovers within himself woman alive and eloquent,
Pulsing with her own emotion,
Looking out on the world with her own vision. (CP ii 1070)

MacDiarmid's use of the female image is tied to his desire to become one with the other. In his translations from both Alexander Blok and Aodhagan O'Rathaille it is the foreignness, the strangeness of the female figure which makes her attractive to him. In 'Conception', MacDiarmid is able to find the other within himself, experiences the emotion and vision of woman as something at once part of and foreign to himself. In the

³⁷ Gish, *Hugh MacDiarmid*, p. 207.

same way, Scotland lives within him and yet will always be other to him. Thus he describes his relationship to Scotland on the last page of *Direadh* as:

I am with Alba —with Deirdre — now
As a lover is with his sweetheart... (CP ii 1193)

VI

The clarity which MacDiarmid claims to be seeking to impose on his shifting perceptions of Scotland is represented again and again through the figuring of Scotland as a woman. Throughout his work, the female figure represents a safe allegorical territory to which MacDiarmid can return, and the female body, at once elevated and objectified, functions as a personification not only of Scotland but of language and the creative process. Thus MacDiarmid is able to move between considerations of nationality and considerations of the mode and function of poetry: the very form of his metaphor blurs the boundaries between these two and places them in the same category. Stephen Maxwell's statement that MacDiarmid rarely represents Scotland as a person and more often as an intellectual problem³⁸ underestimates the number of times the female figure recurs in different guises as a representation of Scotland, and also ignores the fact that the intellectual problem becomes, for MacDiarmid, closer to a solution when he is able to frame it in female form.

His poem 'A Vision of Scotland' (*A Lap of Honour*, 1967) conflates the tropes of Scotland-as-puzzle and Scotland-as-woman:

I see my Scotland now, a puzzle
Passing the normal of her sex, going erect
Unscathed through fire, keeping her virtue
Where temptation works with violence, walking bravely,
Offering loyalty and demanding respect.

Every now and then in a girl like you,
Even in the streets of Glasgow or Dundee,

³⁸Maxwell, p. 203.

She throws her headsquare off and a mass
 Of authentic flaxen hair is revealed,
 Fine spun as newly-retted fibres
 On a sunlit Irish bleaching field. (CP ii 1096)

For Peter McCarey, this is ‘a last glimpse of a creature that recalls both Audh and the Brightness of Brightness,’³⁹ and although, as I have demonstrated, this is not strictly speaking our last view of MacDiarmid’s female principle, the figure in this poem does possess the heroic and mythic qualities which Audh and the ‘Brightness of Brightness’ bring to MacDiarmid’s composite Scotland as woman. Scotland remains a ‘puzzle’, but the puzzle is gendered, its mystery merged with the mysterious space MacDiarmid has so often found in women. In problematising this short poem we may draw together many of the strands which are braided together in MacDiarmid’s construction of the Scotland-as-woman figure throughout his work.

The figure in this poem, like the ‘Brightness of Brightness’, brings together the domestic-familiar and illicit-ethereal paradigms of femininity set up in *A Drunk Man* and MacDiarmid’s earlier poetry. The pride, bravery and virtue attributed to her in the first stanza place her in MacDiarmid’s idealised and unattainable category of women; however, the second stanza reveals her to be ‘a girl like you [...] in the streets of Glasgow or Dundee.’ Thus MacDiarmid finds the mythical qualities of his Scottish muse to be contained in an arbitrary girl from the street, a democractic distribution which recalls *A Drunk Man*.

I am like Burns, and ony wench
 Can ser’ me for a time.
 Licht’s in them a’ — (*A Drunk Man*, ll. 933-5)

And although in *A Drunk Man* this statement is immediately qualified with the acknowledgement that ‘It’s no’ through mony but through yin / That ony man wuns fer’ (ll. 939-40), the assumption that the bodies of all women are there to be used governs MacDiarmid’s metaphorical use of the female body. As in ‘A Vision of Scotland’, the bodies of all women become implicated, if not specifically used, in MacDiarmid’s

³⁹McCarey, p. 126.

attribution of muse-like qualities to all women. Thus the 'vision of Scotland' is something he may see in any woman at any time. MacDiarmid's iconography privileges both a male position regarding nationality, and the position of the male poet.

What makes MacDiarmid's 'vision of Scotland' immediately strange in this poem, however, is the fact that her 'authentic flaxen hair' is as 'fine spun as newly-retted fibres / On a sunlit Irish bleaching field.' The Scottish muse is taken out of a Scottish context in the last line of the poem and compared to an *Irish* field. Her authenticity is rooted in her Irish associations and not in her hypothetical location on the streets of Glasgow or Dundee. This making of foreign associations highlights once more MacDiarmid's seeming need to draw on extra-Scottish sources to create his 'vision of Scotland'. This is evident in the earlier period of his work in his recourse to the work of writers such as Dostoevsky and Rilke, and his construction of his muse around the figure of Sophia, drawn from the Russian of Soloviev, but is perhaps even more obvious in this later period in his unashamed borrowing of his two principal muse figures from Irish and Norse mythology.

Thus MacDiarmid's use of the female figure is both experimental and traditional. In reaching out to other cultures and seeking to make them part of his vision of Scotland he removes Scotland from a narrow parochial context and instead opens the way for dialogue and intercourse with other cultures. However his medium for this openness, his governing metaphor, remains his use of the female body and the tradition of the female muse, and his manner of doing this does not leave the way clear for Scottish women to envisage their nation. MacDiarmid establishes a Scottish muse — who is the muse of nation as much as of inspiration — in the early twentieth century to fill a gap which he perceived to exist, and his lead in filling this gap was followed by writers such as Lewis Grassie Gibbon. The dominant male vision of nationhood that the use of the female figure only serves to emphasise, however, did not make it easy for female writers such as Naomi Mitchison to engage with problems of national identity on the same intellectual level. MacDiarmid's openness to intellectual otherness was not universal; and the construction of woman as nation which he created existed to be overcome or undermined by subsequent nationalist writers of the twentieth century.

Chapter Five

'A Woman of Scotland' or 'Alba our Mother'?: Naomi Mitchison and 'The Cleansing of the Knife'

I

Naomi Mitchison's personal and creative engagement with Scotland from the late 1930s onwards demonstrates the difficulties faced by a woman writer as a result of the sometimes oppressively male climate of the Scottish Renaissance movement and the pervasive influence of MacDiarmid's construction of a gendered ideology of Scotland. Her biography complicates the definition of the term 'Scottish writer'. Mitchison is interesting because she makes a choice to be Scottish, a choice aided by her geographical move from London to Carradale, Kintyre, and compounded by her decision to write novels and poems which are definably Scottish in subject matter and theme. The process of 'writing herself into Scotland' which Mitchison undertook required her to evaluate what constituted a 'Scottish tradition' both in literature and in historical scholarship. As far as literature was concerned, the 'Scottish tradition' was in the process of being redefined by MacDiarmid. The gendered ideology of MacDiarmid's construction is also reflected in the predominantly male composition of what constituted the Scottish literary scene at this time. Mitchison's position not only as an outsider but as a woman writing into a masculine construction of Scotland clearly influences her reactions to and negotiations with such a tradition.

If a *woman* uses the allegorical structure of Scotland as woman to support her representation of the nation, this changed standpoint affects the political reading of the allegory and the functioning of the image itself. Mitchison uses the allegory by taking on the voice of 'Alba our mother' herself and this creates a tension between her own perceptions of Scotland and her appropriation of an existing tradition, leaving us strangely unsatisfied as to the location of her own politics of desire within her Scottish texts. Mitchison's biography thus inevitably becomes more significant than that of

MacDiarmid, since it is her use *as a woman* of the gendered trope of Scotland as woman that is of key importance in this treatment of her work.

Mitchison's re-invention of herself as Scottish and as a Scottish writer was based on her Scottish ancestry and heritage as much as on her physical move to Carradale in 1939. Her ancestors on both sides were Scottish. Her mother was a Trotter, her father was a Haldane and although she grew up in Oxford, her early summers were spent on the Haldane estate of Cloan in Perthshire. When she and her husband moved to Scotland to take on the Carradale estate she in a sense grew into her Scottish heritage. In the 'self-portrait', which she wrote for the Saltire Society Self-Portraits series, she traces the development of her sense of Scottishness and describes how moving to Carradale 'strengthened my growing feeling of being a Scot and a Haldane at that.'¹ In her diary she records her pleasure at being regarded by the librarian at the National Library 'as part of Scottish history, descendant and representative of the Haldanes and indeed of all the great families whose blood is mixed in mine...'² Mitchison's position as a woman writer in Scotland at this period is particularly interesting because she made a conscious decision to be Scottish. No-one with twenty-first century hindsight would dispute the fact that Naomi Mitchison is an important Scottish writer, but had she stayed in London and not moved to Carradale, and not started writing definably Scottish books, she would no doubt have existed on that hazy margin of Scottishness reserved for good writers with Scottish parentage. This perhaps serves to illustrate how fluid the idea of 'being Scottish' is. Mitchison's self-conscious explorations of her own Scottishness illustrate her readiness to create a 'role' of Scottishness for herself.

Jenni Calder, Mitchison's biographer, talks in terms of Mitchison as an actor who enjoyed taking on different 'roles', and discusses the 'potential' that Carradale offered her in this respect. And if Mitchison's arrival in Carradale allowed her to forge a 'new role and, in effect, a new identity,'³ it is in her writing of this period, both autobiographical and fictional, that she is able to accomplish this. The main

¹ Naomi Mitchison, *Naomi Mitchison: Saltire Self-Portraits 2* (Edinburgh: Saltire Society, 1986), p. 3.

² Naomi Mitchison, *Among You Taking Notes...: The Wartime Diary of Naomi Mitchison 1939-1945*, ed. Dorothy Sheridan (London: Gollancz, 1985), p. 169. All subsequent references to this volume are in parentheses in the text marked AYTN.

³ Jenni Calder, *The Nine Lives of Naomi Mitchison* (London: Virago, 1997), p. 145.

biographical source for Mitchison's life during the period of the second world war is the diary she kept for Mass-Observation, selections from which have been published as *Among You Taking Notes....: The Wartime Diary of Naomi Mitchison*. Calder's assessment that this diary 'gave [Mitchison] a splendid opportunity to write the script of her life as she was living it, and to do so with a purpose' highlights the element of self-construction inherent in the diary, which Mitchison of course knew would be read by a wider audience than merely herself.⁴

Mitchison's autobiographical self-construction feeds into her literary construction of Scotland in the long poem 'The Cleansing of the Knife 1941-1947'. Manifesto-like, she declares here: 'I am a woman of Scotland',⁵ thus asserting her own position within Scotland and within the poem. In this poem and her other Scottish work, Naomi Mitchison, as Jenni Calder puts it, tries to 'write her way into Scotland.'⁶ The figure of Mitchison herself is thus embodied in her texts, and, as in the quotation above, she insists upon the femaleness of her body. The interaction of the subject positions of woman and Scot create a powerful dynamic within her writing, because her insistence on her existence as a 'woman of Scotland' stands in direct contrast to MacDiarmid's effective polarisation of the terms 'woman' and 'Scot' in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*. By bringing the two terms together, Mitchison defines a place in society for herself and defines herself in terms of the two aspects of her existence she feels to be most important. Not only do being Scottish and being female independently define her, but on more than one occasion in her diary she explicitly connects the two because of the emotions they generate within her. In November 1942 she writes of a visit to the doctor:

I said my worst symptom was losing my temper. [The doctor] says this is common at the menopause. Said what about, I said feminism and Scotland, the things I *feel* about. (AYTN, p. 217)

And in August 1941:

⁴Calder, p. 151; p. 166.

⁵Naomi Mitchison, 'The Cleansing of the Knife 1941-1947', in *The Cleansing of the Knife and Other Poems* (Edinburgh and Vancouver: Canongate, 1978), p. 39. All subsequent references to the poem will appear in parentheses in the text.

⁶Calder, p. 149.

In the afternoon talked about nationalism and about the kind of books I want to write, about the language I want to use for them, about the tradition of writing, and so on. I feel nervous about it; there is something deep down, I feel defensive and passionate, as I do about being a woman. (AYTN, p. 159)

This latter example introduces writing into the equation and makes a strong connection between 'nationalism' and 'the kind of books I want to write'. In her poetry and fiction she explores ways in which Scotland and its history have been constructed, and at the same time she is concerned with constructing a positive and practical vision for Scotland's future herself. In her diary, which covers the years of the second world war, she often analyses what it means to be Scottish; and debates how she, through her writing, can 'do something for my own people in Scotland' (AYTN, p. 159). Her approach to Scottish culture and politics is very much influenced by her personal experience which is coloured by her class and by her gender.

Mitchison's position is further complicated by her social position as the laird, the 'lady in the Big House'. The 'role' she took on at Carradale was a totally new departure from the life she had hitherto led in London. She became a Highland laird, albeit a very unorthodox one. She had ideas for improving Carradale which were socialist in origin, which she was able to push for and implement due to her social position. She wished to improve the life of the people in the village and also to be accepted by them on equal terms. In many ways her relationship with Carradale can be seen as a microcosm of the relationship she wanted to have with the whole of Scotland: she had a very strong idea of what should be done and saw herself as the best person to implement change. But her desire to be at once a beneficent laird and a part of the community caused tensions, both in her life and in her writing.

Mitchison wanted to overcome the class distinctions between herself and the village. She opened to the public paths through the estate which had hitherto been private; and wrote with pleasure in her diary about 'being first-named' by the fishermen (AYTN, p. 46), joined them for night-time poaching trips, opened her house for parties and involved herself in village affairs. She also took on the work of the farm herself

rather than tendering it out. But she was unable to entirely bridge the gap that existed between laird and village and overcome the traditional respect for and distrust of 'The Big House'. She had very ambivalent feelings about Carradale, and felt frustrated when the people resisted her plans for improving the village. This is perhaps best expressed in her 1952 novel *Lobsters on the Agenda*⁷ which describes infighting and backstabbing in a district council. We can see from both her autobiographical writings and her poetry that Naomi Mitchison was not entirely comfortable in her role as lady in the big house: in the poem 'Living in a village' she sees herself as: 'being / The big stag, the twelve-pointer, / Watched on, edible, spied and lied to'.⁸ The clash between her two roles of socialist and Laird is somewhat poignantly illustrated by the fact that although she formed a Labour Party branch in Carradale, she acknowledged that most of the support probably came because it was an initiative of the Big House rather than from any genuine support for Labour.⁹

Her Labour sympathies did not preclude her from supporting the Nationalist cause: she supported the nationalist candidate William Power in the 1940 Argyll by-election, and endorsed John McCormick's all-party Scottish Convention launched in 1943. She wrote: 'I was not much in the full swing of the thing until the days of Scottish convention starting, I suppose, in the early 40's' along with people like Agnes Mure Mackenzie 'then busy on her big history', Compton Mackenzie, James Barke, 'and above all, Neil Gunn'.¹⁰ Neil Gunn was the only major writer of the Scottish Renaissance who gave Mitchison any encouragement about her writing, and she resented her sense of exclusion from the centre of things. In her *Saltire* self-portrait she says: 'although Hugh MacDiarmid was always very friendly, I was definitely not one of the bright and coming-up young people'.¹¹ The correspondence between MacDiarmid and Mitchison shows no evident meeting of souls. In *Among You Taking Notes* she writes: 'I think that this body of poems I have written about Scotland are adding up into something pretty good, though the highbrows won't think so, and it is in a way hard to

⁷ Naomi Mitchison, *Lobsters on the Agenda* (London: Gollancz, 1952).

⁸ *The Cleansing of the Knife and Other Poems*, p. 26.

⁹ *Saltire Self-Portrait*, p. 4.

¹⁰ Naomi Mitchison, 'A Self-Interview', *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 14 (1979), 37-51 (p. 39).

¹¹ *Saltire Self-Portrait*, p. 9.

go on without encouragement from one's fellow writers. I get it from Neil Gunn though' (AYTN, p. 145). This 'body of poems' was the sequence 'The Cleansing of the Knife', and as it functions in a sense as her entrance into Scottish literature, it is understandable that she sought some recognition for it.

The writing of this sequence spans six years, 1941-1947, and parallels the writing of *The Bull Calves*, Mitchison's Scottish historical novel, which will be considered in the next chapter. In both works she is engaged partly in a process of establishing herself within Scotland as a writer. In the poetry sequence, however, the various tensions acting on her life are more raw, and the gaps in what she is trying to achieve are more obvious. For this reason perhaps, 'The Cleansing of the Knife' is not a great success as poetry. Ian Crichton Smith described the sequence and the other poems with which it appeared as 'in its own way an astonishing achievement [although] not I would say the book of a practising professional poet'.¹² 'The Cleansing of the Knife' highlights not only Mitchison's own problems during the period in which she was writing, but also the way in which she participated in problems shared generally by women writers of the period. Most marked, for the purposes of this thesis, is the fact that in creating a semi-mythical structure in the poem in order to explore Scottish history, she casts *herself* in the role of woman as nation, with the appellation 'Alba our mother'.

As I have said, commentary on Naomi Mitchison's writing requires some reference to details of her biography, and this is particularly the case with 'The Cleansing of the Knife'. Certainly, the notion of motherhood, both actual and metaphorical, spills over from Mitchison's personal life into her writing in a way which can be very emotive and which also complicates her own vision of Scotland and herself. This personal element consists of the fact that in July 1940 Mitchison gave birth to her seventh child, a girl who died a few hours after she was born. Mitchison wrote in her diary a few days later that 'All this was meant to be a kind of binding between me and Carradale, and now that's smashed'. The doctor suggests that she should start writing a book, and in response to this she writes: 'If only I had my baby I

¹²Iain Crichton Smith, 'Review of *The Cleansing of the Knife*', *Books in Scotland*, 4 (1979), 17.

wouldn't need to write a book that probably nobody wants to read' (AYTN, p. 73).¹³ So it seems legitimate to suppose that her inscription of herself into history both practically by her actions in Carradale and literarily by her writing is an alternative method of binding. And the metaphor of motherhood that runs through her work and which is evident in her attitude towards the people of Carradale can be seen to be displaced from her dead daughter and applied to Scotland instead.

II

Although not great poetry, 'The Cleansing of the Knife' can be classed as a Scottish Renaissance text. The poem as a whole functions as a process whereby Mitchison identifies the problems facing Scotland and, after working through a series of options, finishes by proposing a solution. Within this basic structure she uses images and vocabulary which locate the poem firmly within a Renaissance context. She draws on much Celtic imagery which MacDiarmid also uses in this period and makes reference to Neil Gunn's *The Silver Darlings*. In her attempt to 'bind' herself to the Scottish tradition she situates herself in a Renaissance context whose parameters had been fixed some ten years earlier. However, she struggles to accommodate herself within this context because of her paradoxical political position and because of her gender. The sequence of poems is thus torn between her desire to integrate herself and her text into the Scottish Renaissance and her desire to assert her own feminist and socialist beliefs within this Scottish context. It is in the gender politics of 'The Cleansing of the Knife' that this tension becomes most evident, because the sexual problematics of the poem become entwined with those of class.

The narrative structure of the poem is based on a relationship between Mitchison¹⁴ and a man called 'Donnachadh Bàn', to whom much of the poem is addressed. Donnachadh Bàn is based on a real person: Duncan Munro, who was the

¹³See also the poem which fronts *The Bull Calves*, 'Clemency Ealasaid': 'This was to have been a binding between me and Carradale' (l. 67).

¹⁴I am calling the narrative voice of the poem 'Naomi Mitchison' for ease of reading; the correspondences between this poem and Mitchison's own biography make the use of any convoluted turns of phrase to get around this seem unnecessary, even though her poetic persona may be slightly fictionalised.

head forester at Carradale with whom Mitchison had a relationship that was somewhere between the friendly and the sexual.¹⁵ Within the poem, Mitchison attempts to cast Donnachadh Bàn as a potential hero for Scotland. The change of name, while serving to protect the innocent, links her Highland hero to Donnachadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir (Duncan Bàn MacIntyre), the eighteenth century Gaelic poet. This reference to the Celtic past is one way in which the poem exhibits thematic similarities to MacDiarmid's Celtic period, as he translated MacIntyre's *Moladh Beinn Dobhrain* into English with the help of Sorley MacLean.¹⁶

The title of the poem and the metaphor of a blood promise was drawn from the play *A Matter Between MacDonalDs* which Mitchison wrote to be performed by the people of Carradale in the new village hall.¹⁷ This is an instance of Naomi Mitchison involving herself in the life of the community, or as Jenni Calder puts it 'writing herself into Carradale's life'.¹⁸ After the performance the cast presented Mitchison with a *sgian dhu*, which for her symbolised the fact that they trusted her as one of their own, and she envisaged the knife cutting out 'the jealousies and quarrels and divisions in Carradale' (AYTN, 106). As the play was her way of writing herself into Carradale, so 'The Cleansing of the Knife' can be seen as Mitchison writing herself into Scotland. Her vision of the knife cutting out the divisions in Carradale can be transferred to Scotland, since Carradale in many ways functioned for Mitchison as a microcosm of Scotland:

I am beginning to wonder whether the tangled affairs of the Scottish nobles in the middle ages and after [...] aren't immediately explicable in terms of Carradale... (AYTN, p. 76)

Mitchison had already made symbolic use of the imagery of the knife in an actual blood oath made between herself and Duncan Munro and recorded in her diary. This blood oath was one of Mitchison's attempts to stop Duncan Munro drinking, whereas the oath in the poem is never clearly defined. The erotic quality of the description of the original

¹⁵See Calder, p. 167.

¹⁶Hugh MacDiarmid, 'The Praise of Beinn Dobhrain', *Complete Poems I*, p. 587. First published in *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* (1940). See also Hugh MacDiarmid, 'In Talk with Donnachadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir', *Complete Poems II*, pp. 1098-1102.

¹⁷ The play was performed on 28 December 1940. *Among You Taking Notes*, pp. 104-6.

¹⁸Calder, p. 132.

blood-oath as Mitchison cuts her hand and Munro drinks the blood tints the poem although it is never explicitly developed.¹⁹

The socially unequal relationship between laird and estate worker highlights the problems Mitchison faced in trying to reconcile her role as laird with her wish to be accepted within the community of Carradale. Her anxieties regarding her situation are clearly written into this poem, as she charts the disintegration of the relationship with Donnachadh Bàn, and refers to herself more than once as the interfering woman from the Big House.²⁰ While it is evident that she is speaking to a lover, she nonetheless urges him to act on behalf of Scotland, in an admonitory tone which reflects her higher social position. Within the structure of the poem, this authority is translated into the voice of a mother speaking to her son, but the mythologised mother, the voice of mother Scotland. Thus Mitchison casts herself as 'the voice of Scotland, / Alba our mother' while Donnachadh Bàn becomes the archetypal 'Highlander, son of Alba' (p. 40). The social difference between them is written into the poem as a relationship between mother-nation and citizen-son.

The relationship of 'Alba our mother' to her son solves, at least temporarily, Mitchison's two problems of identification. Her social position is removed from its political implications and instead gains a mythical status. To speak with the natural authority of 'Alba our mother' overrides the ironies of her actual situation as an aristocratic incomer imposing her ideas for improvement upon her local community. The persona of 'Alba our mother' also gives her an acceptable position which had already been established within the Scottish Renaissance context from which she can find a voice to speak. One of the anxieties which this poem charts is her need to feel

¹⁹ 'After a while he said yes, he would promise from Thursday to New Year, and then he would see; I took out my knife and opened it and said promise on the knife, so he said yes, and he would not break his promise to me... I said now you shall have the end of the oath as it should be. So I cut my hand across twice with the knife. It was sharp and I must have cut a fairly deep scratch and he put his lips down on it and must have got enough of a mouthful of blood to count. He said You did this for me, why did you do it? I said I could do more for you if I knew what to do. We'll see what comes of this. He held my hand and watched the drops of dark blood trickling over it and under the strap I wear on the sprained wrist, and he said I am seeing a plan for my life in your blood. Then he picked up the knife and shut it and gave it back to me and said The Knife will remain clean to us.' Naomi Mitchison, 'War Diary' (Nov 16 1940), Mass Observation Archives, quoted in Jill Benton, *Naomi Mitchison: A Biography* (London: Pandora, 1990), p. 124.

²⁰ 'Yon woman, / Her from the Big House, / Why must she interfere?' (p. 49); 'take your eyes from the life / Before you get my curse, / Woman from the Big House!—' (p. 51).

qualified to talk about the problems of Scotland, to dictate possible solutions. She states:

I am a woman of Scotland,
I have read my history through,

but this is immediately followed by:

Have turned to the last page (p. 39)

So although she asserts her existence as both female and Scottish, and her reading of history qualifies her intellectually for the task which she has set herself, the following line seems to impose some limits on the usefulness of written history and also on her own ability to put what she has learned to use. Her inability to act and to speak are related to her sense of exclusion from the community and her inability to find a subject position within the community which she can admit to occupying. In the fourth verse of the poem she asks:

How will I make you hear
The echo out of your heart
Put into words of my own? (p. 40)

She has no confidence in the power of her own voice to convince Donnachadh Bàn or the wider community, and so she assumes 'a voice not of mine /... the voice of Scotland' (p. 40). This sense of exclusion from the community and her eventual resolution of her subject position can be traced through the pronouns she uses to represent the people of Scotland. From the very first page of the poem we can identify her ambiguous position as both part of and not part of the people she is seeking to represent. She is 'a woman of Scotland' and she is remembering 'your like and you' (p. 40), that is, Donnachadh Bàn and people like him. This immediately puts her at a remove from Donnachadh Bàn and 'his like'. He is part of a group, the people of Scotland, while she is a solitary 'I' — the lady in the big house. This 'I' initially seems to be an impossible position from which to speak, and so she takes on either the authority of 'Alba our mother' or the group voice, mediated through the thoughts of Donnachadh Bàn. Donnachadh Bàn functions as a screen on to which she can project

her version of the thoughts of the common people, while at the same time he serves to screen Mitchison's individual opinion.

In this first section of the poem Mitchison presents us with an exceedingly melancholy and defeatist view of Scottish history. Verses 3 and 5-11 of 'The Cleansing of the Knife' together might form the chapters of a book of Scottish history. The topics covered, chapter by chapter, are: oppression versus freedom, Wallace; exile, Bruce; emigration; the Highland clearances; Scottish literature and the futility of writing; Calvinism; the Union; our shame today. Even the positive elements of Scottish history which creep into this catalogue of failure are given the most pessimistic clothing: 'Bruce' is qualified with the tag 'that died too soon' (p. 40); likewise 'the makars' are appended 'who are dead' (p. 42). Thus Scotland's golden ages, of various kinds, are seen as ultimately useless because they came to an end. It seems that death and ultimate failure are the best to which any Scot can aspire. Hence Donnachadh Bàn's 'wish [...] to be dead' (p. 39); his 'wish for death and passion' (p. 47). Each verse in Part i begins with the line 'Tears in the glen, tears' and ends with the idea of drinking to forget.

When we begin to think
Of the way they were killing Wallace,
We know we had best forget;
We lift the glass and we drink. (p. 40)

The 'we' of lines like this does not seem to include Mitchison. Although it is the 'we' of the people of Scotland, it seems rather to be her representation of the thoughts of a group to which she does not fully belong, particularly since in the last two verses of Part i (using her own voice?) she denounces 'the depressive alcoholism of the Highlands: 'When a thing is used for life [...] / Then it is water of life/ It is not that today' (p. 44). At times she excludes herself more explicitly from the people of Scotland by using the pronoun 'they':

Men and women of Scotland
Through city and country-side,
Waking *their* fellows... (p. 49, my emphasis)

She is here excluded from the ‘men and women of Scotland’, and indeed she uses no first person pronoun in the whole of Part iv. In Part iv — ‘What are you doing?’ — she is separated from Donnachadh Bàn (he is in Carradale, she in London), and as the relationship disintegrates she seems unable to make words out of his thoughts, as she has been doing. The first verse of Part iv is constructed almost entirely by questions, representing a sense of insecurity which is paralleled by Donnachadh Bàn becoming tired of her interfering and chiding:

Time that thing ends. [i.e. his affair with her]
 Empty the glass, let the bright whirl-pool hum
 See: she will disappear! (p. 49)

This imagined disappearance is marked by the lack of first-person pronouns and emphasises the flaws inherent in her suppression of her own writing self and own marked subject position. If she has been screened by the persona of Donnachadh Bàn this can only be temporary, because the process she is working through has to result in both a reassessment of Scottish history and a location of herself within that history. Her exclusion from the ‘we’ of Part i is most clearly marked when she says:

When we begin to think
 Of the Highland clearances,
 Of *lairds* and money and sheep... (p. 41 my emphasis)

She (and her ancestors) must be counted among the ‘lairds’ and her folk voice cites lairds explicitly as a chapter of the despondent overview of Scottish history which makes up Part i. Mitchison assumes a voice that is not her own partly in order to point out the limitations of such a defeatist attitude, but in excluding herself from the voice of her poem she highlights the problems that she herself is facing, and this reaches a climax in her symbolic disappearance in Part iv. From this point onwards the poem moves towards an acknowledgement of her politicised subject position and towards the creation of a new future for Scotland rather than dwelling on the misfortunes of history or seeking shelter in the structures of myth.

In Part v she acknowledges her own role both in the poem and in the community: ‘Mine was the laird’s hand / The cool hand of the writer’ (p. 51) and from

this point the poem takes a more positive turn. Scotland (still personified) ‘stirs in her sleep’ (p. 54; p. 56) and Mitchison looks to Communist Russia for a model on which to base a utopian future for Scotland (pp. 59-60). Part x of the poem echoes Part i in its thematic historical organisation of verses (agriculture; housing/marriage; fishing; education; the clearances; tourism). A brief look at this list tells us the emphasis here is far more on social history and more recent history than Part i’s references to distinct historical events and historical figures. There is less emphasis on the role of the individual in history and more on history experienced as a community. And the recurring line which (with slight variations) concludes every verse in Part x is:

Alba our mother, what have we done to thee?

Rather than lifting the glass in order to forget, here ‘we’ are accepting a share of the responsibility. Not only that, but the position of Naomi Mitchison herself has shifted. Whereas in Part i her own subject position was never acknowledged, in Part x her social position among the landowning classes is admitted:

Did we think, did we intend,

Putting sheep here in the stead

Of our own hill cattle,

To spoil what we could not mend? (p. 64, my emphasis)

The ordinary people of Scotland cannot be implicated in this ‘we’ since the decision to replace cattle with sheep must be that of the landowning class. And in the next verse:

Our moors to let, burns to sell

Our Big House doors shut fast (p. 65, my emphasis)

And then she explicitly acknowledges her historical guilt:

Fault both of my own

And of those that got and bore me (p. 65)

She has written herself into her nation’s history. The poem up till Part x has been a process of her working towards her acknowledgement of her social and subject position, from which point she can begin to take action.

However, although Mitchison’s own subject position appears to have been satisfactorily resolved, the figure of ‘Alba our mother’ is still being used for emotive

purposes. At the beginning of the poem, Mitchison took on the voice of 'Alba our mother' because it seemed to be the only way in which a female voice could approach the problems facing Scotland today or the melancholy parade of history which she had to survey. In Part x, although she has made significant progress in acknowledging her own determined role in history, Mitchison still constructs Scotland as female and as a victim. The mother-figure of Scotland is someone who suffers the actions of other people. In this section, perhaps the most significant verse in terms of the image of Scotland as woman is the penultimate one which deals with the commodification of Scotland for tourism and sport. Mitchison asks 'Is this the best we can do?' (p. 64) and concludes the verse:

Oh bonny one, oh crowned with living mountains,

Alba our mother, is this all we can make of thee? (p. 65)

Mitchison makes clear throughout the poem that the historical versions of Scotland which fuel the tourist industry are not relevant to a modern, progressive nation. She categorises the romantic Scotland which exists in songs as 'sham tunes and a sham feeling' (p. 65), which recalls Edwin Muir's dismissal, in 'Scotland 1941' of Burns and Scott as 'sham bards of a sham nation'.²¹ Earlier in the poem she has compared the 'sentiment' of such songs to the 'Great music that a man could mind / And be glad of his race and his name' (p. 44), which again recalls MacDiarmid's use of the 'Great Music' as symbolic of the lost Celtic culture of Scotland.²² Although Mitchison's use of the metaphor is fleeting compared to MacDiarmid's extended paean to a Scotland represented by the pipers of Clan MacCrimmon, this is another instance of her placing herself within a nexus of Renaissance imagery. Her attitude to the construction of a Golden Age is refreshingly sceptical, however, and this is one way in which her own voice manages to break free from the structures with which she has surrounded it.

III

²¹Edwin Muir, 'Scotland 1941', *The Complete Poems of Edwin Muir*, ed. by Peter Butter (Aberdeen: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1991), p. 100. The poem was first published in *The Narrow Place* (1943).

²²Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Lament for the Great Music', *Complete Poems II*, pp. 462-82. First published in *Stony Limits* (1934).

The beginning of the poem saw Mitchison trapped in the dichotomy of mother-nation and nationalist son. The only voice she could find for herself as a woman within this construct was that of the mother-nation herself, and any word of action is focused upon the nationalist son rather than on herself. The risk she runs, once she has established herself in a subject position other than that of mother Scotland, is that she will continue to reproduce the gendered ideologies of nation which she has been trapped in up till now. Arguably she fails in many ways to redefine the nationalist figure in a guise that makes it accessible to women. However, she also reassesses aspects of Scottish culture and history with a voice which is identifiably female, and rewrites some themes of MacDiarmid's.

In *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* MacDiarmid elevates the Scottish propensity for drinking to excess to a national symbol, and while he does not wholeheartedly praise it he accentuates its liberating and inspirational qualities. As we have already seen, Naomi Mitchison does not do this. Having witnessed the effects of heavy drinking on the men of Carradale she does not in any way glamorise it. She characterises alcohol abuse as a specifically Highland weakness and explains it partially as a consequence of historical injustice:

I am angry thinking of these gentle and delicate minded Highlanders
who have been oppressed and hurt until they have to drink.²³

She suggests that one reason for the traditional Highland devotion to Bonnie Prince Charlie is that he too embodies this trait:

Nobody in the Highlands knows or cares how, actually, Charles
Edward Stuart died, nor after what degradations, although they know
that he, the same as themselves, used the Water of Life wrongly for
the little death of forgetting.²⁴

MacDiarmid begins *A Drunk Man* by using whisky as a symbol for Scotland, paralleling the decline in the quality of whisky with the decline of the quality of cultural and everyday life in Scotland: 'Like a' thing else ca'd Scottish nooadays / — A'

²³ Typescript of War Diary, p. 328, quoted in Calder, p. 168.

²⁴ Notes to *The Bull Calves*, p. 493.

destitute o' speerit juist the same' (*A Drunk Man*, ll. 19-20). Mitchison, however, concentrates on the negative aspects of using whisky as a lens through which Scotland is seen. The beginning of 'The Cleansing of the Knife' is refracted through the eyes of Donnachadh Bàn as a representative Highland male, and therefore is also refracted through the whisky glass. But Donnachadh Bàn does not have the soaring, spiralling thoughts of the Drunk Man. Rather, his view of Scotland is stuck in a national quagmire of gloom and apathy. This vision of alcohol and the Scottish psyche, based on sociological observations of its effect on a Highland community, written from a maternal or maternalistic point of view, can be read in direct contrast to what Aileen Christianson describes as MacDiarmid's 'explicit glorification of the creative and liberating capacity of drink'.²⁵

The second way in which I perceive Mitchison's voice to be particularly female is in her criticism of romantic and gendered constructions of the past. Through the thoughts of Donnachadh Bàn she constructs a memory of the past, of a time when life was simpler. For 35 lines this picture of the past epitomises the phrase 'Golden Age'. The fishing was good, and a kind of proto-socialism governed the workplace: 'No skipper a master / But every man his share...' (p. 54). Stories were told at night by the fireside, and everyone spoke Gaelic. However Mitchison shows this Golden Age to be rooted in idealised gender roles:

the soft-foot women pause
To hear what their men are saying —
[...]
When the men seemed to be free men
And the women gentle and tall,
And kinder than today (p. 54; p. 55)

The soft-footed, gentle and kind women of this Golden Age fantasy are subordinate to the work-life and to the story-telling of the men. The past which Mitchison has Donnachadh Bàn remember so fondly is based on a series of gender divisions, rather as Neil Gunn, in the words of Christopher Whyte, 'uses an imagined retroactive vision of

²⁵Aileen Christianson, 'Flying with *A Drunk Man*', *Scottish Affairs*, 5 (1993), 126-135 (p. 133).

Gaelic society to underpin a gender ideology based on division, polar oppositions, and the safeguarding of a masculinity he evidently felt to be endangered.’²⁶ This is not to suggest that Mitchison herself endorses the reactionary vision of the past which we see through the eyes of Donnachadh Bàn. The narrative voice of the poem is distanced from this myth of a gendered Golden Age society, and this picture is built up only to be undercut, with the clear suggestion that it is a false memory:

Ah, Donnachadh Bàn,
The years have brought you forgetting!
You will need to mind on it right... (p. 55)

She challenges what she perceives as the fatalistic nostalgia of the Scots which ‘thirls’ us ‘to the past / To the mist and the unused sheiling’ (p. 65), and in Part iii she opposes Donnachadh Bàn’s romantic devotion to failure and gloom with her own determination to be the pragmatic voice of change.

Your wish for death and passion —
Deirdre, Mary Stuart
And the girls in the old songs —
Flares with my sense of life... (p. 47)

His romantic commitment to a glorious past is characterised in terms of female figures from song and from history, by Deirdre, whose name is repeatedly used by MacDiarmid as one aspect of his Gaelic muse, and by Mary Queen of Scots, who occupies the ultimate romantic and tragic female role in Scottish history. In contrast to ‘the girls in the old songs’ Mitchison presents herself, a living, practical and politically committed woman whose belief is not in these ‘phantoms’ but in ‘direction steadily kept / And a steady righting of wrongs’ (p. 47). Here Mitchison produces a powerful criticism of the romantic image of woman as muse; but throughout the course of the poem, she never manages to deal the death blow to woman as nation.

Although Mitchison, perhaps unwillingly, abandons fairly early in the sequence the illusion that Donnachadh Bàn might function as the hero for whom Scotland has been waiting, she does not depart from the imagery of a prophet-like figure who will be

²⁶Christopher Whyte, ‘Fishy Masculinities’, in *Gendering the Nation: Studies in Modern Scottish Literature*, ed. by Christopher Whyte (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), pp. 49-68 (p. 57).

the saving of Scotland. Thus the insistent image of 'Alba our mother' is granted a dutiful nationalist son in the two final sections of the poem. Politically and stylistically Mitchison's vision is progressive, but as regards gender politics she ultimately returns to the fixed patterns she has dismissed earlier in the poem.

Part xii of the poem is titled 'The New Song'. Mitchison uses the phrase 'the end of an old song', the oft-quoted comment of Chancellor Seafield as he closed the last Scottish Parliament in 1707, and expands the song imagery to its limits.²⁷ Post Union Scotland hears the echoes 'of an old and bad song' (p. 68), and Mitchison describes the defeatist and maudlin attitude of the Scots, which she has already denounced, as

... the lilt of a great old song
Sung by a good singer,
But his judgement overcome
By drink and sympathy. (p. 68)

Scotland needs to 'hear the clear music / Of the start of a new song'. This new song is awakened, for Mitchison, by the coming of Tom Johnston to Carradale.

Tom Johnston was a Scottish Labour MP, the original editor of the socialist journal *Forward*. He was appointed Regional Commissioner for Civil Defence in Scotland in 1939 and became Secretary of State for Scotland in 1941. He visited Carradale in September 1944, and was a charismatic figure who obviously made a big impression on Naomi Mitchison. In his biography of Tom Johnston, Graham Walker describes him as 'the last outstanding Scottish Labour leader' and Russell Galbraith says that 'Tom Johnston looked and acted and talked the part of a modern-day Scottish hero.'²⁸ Mitchison was evidently attracted by this heroic quality, and his vision for Scotland's future, of 'a vibrant, small nation full of self-supporting small communities.' was entirely in line with Mitchison's own community-based socialism in Carradale. Walker adds, however: 'But Johnston's vision for Scotland, for all its attractiveness, never entirely detached itself from a quasi-kailyard celebration of traditional Scottish

²⁷ 'There's ane end of ane auld sang'. See Michael Lynch, *Scotland: A New History* (London: Century, 1991), p. 318.

²⁸ Graham Walker, *Thomas Johnston* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1988), p. 179; Russell Galbraith, *Without Quarter: A Biography of Tom Johnston* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1995), p. 50.

virtues.’²⁹ Johnston was a pragmatist and Mitchison was drawn to him because of this; but the ‘quasi-kailyard’ element in his vision of Scotland comes across, perhaps, in this conversation which Mitchison reports in *Among You Taking Notes*:

[Tom Johnston] talked about Scotland, rather inspiringly, I thought, about people coming back from Canada and America to find ancestors, about part of our job being to trace them. I said we mustn’t make Scotland into an antique. And he said we would even do that, to buy her future. (AYTN, p. 294)

The language which Mitchison uses in Part xii of the poem characterises it as a ‘new song’: it departs from traditional poetic language, quoting from Tom Johnston’s speech to Carradale:

“Scotland will only be free
With jobs and houses and health.” (p. 69)

The use of phrases like ‘civil-servants’, ‘ethic of service’, and ‘N.F.U.’ (pp. 69-70) challenge poetic convention and the romantic and blood-tinged conception of Scotland and Scottish history which has dominated the poem until this point. Lines such as

Local authorities
Have powers to plan and act (p. 69)

stand in stark contrast to the start of the poem:

Dreams of you and your life
And the wish you have to be dead:
Blood, blood on the sgian. (p. 39)

Scottish history is brought up to date with local authorities, the County Council and politicians. Instead of the chapter by chapter charting of the disasters of Scottish history, Part xii looks like the last chapter of a different book — a modern, social, forward-looking history. Mitchison concludes that while the past is important and should not be forgotten, at the same time there is no point dwelling on the death and glory of the past in default of action in the present. She proposes that we ‘thirl ourselves to service’ (p. 70; p. 71) instead of to the romantic past (p. 65).

²⁹ Walker, p. 181; p. 179.

Throughout 'The Cleansing of the Knife', recurrent references to 'the poem's ending' (p. 46; p. 52; p. 72)³⁰ suggest that this is an event which has some extra-textual significance: that the poem is a process and its ending will, if all goes well, involve some change for Scotland. This progressive ending does allow Mitchison herself to find a role in the creation of a future for Scotland: 'the County Council for me', she cries (p. 71). However, she is once again relegated to a supporting role, as the centre stage is taken by the man she constructs as the male saviour of Scotland. His coming has been foretold, messiah-like, earlier in the poem. Mitchison hopes for the arrival of 'the man / With courage to speak and strike' (p. 60) and 'another man / To shock and shake and to ding / Us to action' (p. 64). Then Tom Johnston arrives to fulfill this prophesied role:

Could we make him the one we need
 This man from Kirkintilloch, this man
 Is he able for our, for Scotland's plan? (p. 69)

Mitchison herself is once more written out of the story. To Tom Johnston are attributed the words of motivation and inspiration for which she has been searching. The creation of history is seen as a process involving the actions of men, and Tom Johnston takes his place as the last of a series of great men in this poem.

Mitchison's modernising influence and debunking of false constructions of the past is valuable and yet only goes so far. Although she succeeds in finding a voice for herself within 'The Cleansing of the Knife' she still leaves many problematic gender issues unresolved. Yet the problems that surround the sequence of poems and the sense of an unsatisfactory conclusion all serve to highlight the difficulties facing a woman trying to write specifically about Scotland in this period. When she speaks 'with the voice of Scotland, / Alba our mother' (p. 40), this could be seen as a positive strategy whereby the hitherto passive personification of Scotland is given a live female voice.

30

You say you will try to do it,
 The pity it would be
 For a poem to have no ending. (p. 46)
 We begin to understand;
 Our thoughts take words and shape.
 Show me a hand or a thought,
 Let me have my poem's ending! (p. 52)
 And I see my poem's ending
 And the cleansing of the knife. (p. 72)

However, even if this was her intention, such a reading cannot be maintained, as Alba quickly assumes the position of innocent victim who has suffered many wounds and disappointments over the centuries. It seems that Mitchison is incapable of breaking out of the structure of mother-nation and nationalist-hero son, because she is trying too hard to write herself in to the structures of Renaissance myth which surround her. She does not, in the end, manage to give Alba an entirely new and female voice, but she does open up a dialogue with her, and by giving Alba a voice she paves the way for a more active and effective Alba to take her place. This is allowed to happen in her Scottish historical novel, *The Bull Calves*, which will be considered in the next chapter.

Chapter Six

From Woman as Nation to Woman in History: Naomi Mitchison's *The Bull Calves*

'Yet, Aunt Kirstie, was it not vastly romantic and sublime in the old days?' [...]

'You will need to be making up songs about it yourself and set up as rival to Lady Wardlaw and Lady Grizell Baillie!' said Kirstie. 'But those days did not seem in any way romantic to us; we were over near.'

— *The Bull Calves* ¹

I

Naomi Mitchison's uneasy negotiation between the dominant tropes of the Scottish Renaissance and her own personal, political and creative vision of what it meant to be Scottish reaches a more mature and sure-footed realisation in her novel *The Bull Calves* (1947). Mitchison is in her element in the genre of the historical novel, returning to a field in which she had already published four novels before her move to Carradale in 1939.² If in this book we may determine a 'binding' to Carradale which equals or replaces that which Mitchison envisaged as a result of the birth of her baby, the 'binding' which results is that of her professional career as a writer and her involvement in Scottish community and politics both at a local and a national level. Thus the novel which results from this 'binding' is perhaps truer to Mitchison's own sense of Scotland than the poems in which I would argue her creative voice is compromised by her attempts to conform to what she perceives as an 'authentic' Scottish tradition.

Beth Dickson describes *The Bull Calves* as 'a late example of the novel of the Scottish Literary Renaissance with its emphasis on rebuilding Scotland agriculturally, politically and culturally to make it a confident member of the international community.'³ By writing a Scottish historical novel based on her own family history

¹ Naomi Mitchison, *The Bull Calves* (London: Cape, 1947), p. 39. All further references to this edition appear in parentheses in the text.

² *The Conquered* (London: Cape, 1923); *Cloud Cuckoo Land* (London: Cape, 1924); *The Corn King and the Spring Queen* (London: Cape, 1931); *The Blood of the Martyrs* (London: Constable, 1939).

³ Beth Dickson, 'From Personal to Global: The Fiction of Naomi Mitchison' *Chapman*, 50-51 (1987), 34-40 (p. 38).

and set in the uncertain political climate immediately following the Jacobite uprising of 1745-6, the fictional compound of kinship, history and nationality which Mitchison creates is largely opposed to the mythologising approach to nationhood which she appropriated from MacDiarmid and used in her poetry. And in this fictional construction of history, Mitchison draws attention to the fact that every account of history, and indeed of nationhood, must necessarily be a construction. Within this, she manages to incorporate her attraction to the idea of Scotland as a woman: the figure of Kirstie Haldane is at times endowed with a role similar to that of 'Alba our mother'.

Kirstie is an idealised version of Mitchison herself, as perhaps are all the central characters in her books.⁴ On the title page of the first edition of *The Bull Calves* there is a small cameo, supposedly of Kirstie and William, but bearing a striking resemblance to Mitchison herself and Denny Macintosh, one of the Carradale fishermen, another of her Carradale conquests. Indeed, Mitchison 'specifically asked Louise Annand, the book's illustrator, to model her depictions of Kirstie and William on Naomi and Denny'.⁵ The cameo was removed from later editions. Like 'The Cleansing of the Knife', *The Bull Calves* is invested with many of Mitchison's personal concerns of the period 1940 to 1947, not least the loss of her baby in 1940. The poem 'Clemency Ealasaid', which prefaces *The Bull Calves*, effectively dedicates the novel to her dead daughter, and the very structure of the novel speaks to a preoccupation with family, heritage and maternity. The novel is based on her own family history, and her principal characters, Kirstie and William, are named after people in her family tree who died as children (p. 407). In the novel, not only does Kirstie lose the two children born in her first marriage, but in her second and ideal marriage to William Macintosh of Borlum, she gives birth to a daughter in her early forties, the same age at which Mitchison gave birth to her daughter, and Kirstie's baby is called Elizabeth (in Gaelic, Ealasaid) which inscribes Mitchison's daughter firmly into her vision of Scotland.

In the poem 'Clemency Ealasaid', Mitchison attempts to contextualise her loss by imagining it as a small event in a history book which is as yet unwritten, and looks a

⁴Jenni Calder emphasises the close relationship between Mitchison's life and her novels. Mitchison herself described the two as 'tangled together'. Calder, p. 61.

⁵Calder, p. 176.

hundred years into the future to see a time when she will be subsumed in the virtual anonymity of history, existing only as a name in the index of a history book. She compares her personal grief with the world-wide losses incurred during the second world war, paralleling the death of her baby with the death of French soldiers at Oran on 3rd July (the day before the baby died). The British fleet opened fire on the French naval force at Mers-el-Kebir near Oran, the French having refused an ultimatum to either sail to a British port or scupper their own fleet to avoid it falling into German hands. 1300 French sailors were killed.⁶ Mitchison imagines the grief of French mothers for 'babies who had lived / Through the years of hope and pride and delight, boyhood and manhood' (ll. 50-1), and after extending a maternal empathy to these unknown mothers she goes further by imposing her grieving maternal body onto the world map. Her breasts 'tingle and stab with milk that no one wants, / Surplus as American wheat' (ll. 62-3); and Western Europe is seen as too old for another birth. Mitchison rationalises her own grief by putting herself and her personal loss at the very centre of the losses caused by the war, losses not just of life but of liberty, culture and nationality. Thus the female body is used as a metaphor for global suffering, and Kirstie's body becomes used in a similar way in *The Bull Calves* with regard to Scotland. Kirstie has suffered, as we learn in the stories which are told throughout *The Bull Calves*, but in the present day of the novel her maternal body is a symbol of hope and of regeneration.

II

As the central character of the novel, Kirstie is at the centre of a web of threads of Scottish history. Both through her own personal experience and through the political lives of her Haldane brothers she is connected to many of the major events in eighteenth century Scottish (and in some cases, extra-Scottish) history. The art of *The Bull Calves* lies in the fact that this does not come across as false or overly synthetic, but each separate story fits as a coherent part of the narrative as a whole. The narration of history

⁶ A. J. P. Taylor, *The Second World War: An Illustrated History* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1975).

is crucial to the regeneration of Scotland envisaged at the end of the novel, as this is to be based on an understanding of the past and a knowledge of history. The parallels between 1747 and 1947 are evident: both are periods of recovery after conflict, laden with old grudges and suspicions. The emphasis on the rebuilding of Scotland which runs through the novel has relevance not only for contemporary Scotland but for contemporary Europe. But this rebuilding is to be based on a sober reading of history and not on the perpetuation of the romantic construction of old feuds and jealousies. Mitchison's explication of the difference between Lowland and Highland ways of life, which formed part of 'The Cleansing of the Knife', becomes even more pronounced here. The history which Mitchison presents is composed of stories, and she draws attention to the construction of all history, but at the same time expresses the view that history should be used to read and understand the present.

This idea governs the writing of *The Bull Calves*. In the early stages of planning the book, Mitchison wrote in her diary (27th July 1940):

I also wonder whether perhaps the book should be written completely backwards: whether I should take the village first, take an incident, and hunt back to what it was really about. I could make a fascinating book that way; I would call it *The Roots of the Present...* (AYTN, pp. 76-7)

Her initial impulse was to write about Carradale, and the feuds and rivalries there, but the idea is equally effectively transposed onto a national stage. The phrase here 'the roots of the present' comes from the General Preface to Agnes Mure Mackenzie's *The Foundations of Scotland*. We know from her diaries that Mitchison was reading Mackenzie's history at this time. In fact, in her diary, we see a close parallel between her reading of history and the death of her daughter, as she writes, 'They said she should not come to me but must stay warm all day: I was rather sad about it, but began reading Agnes Mure Mackenzie's history of Scotland. [...] I had got to the chapter on the Bruce when the Nurse came in saying Baby's not so well.'⁷ I will quote the whole

⁷ Naomi Mitchison, *Among You Taking Notes...: The Wartime Diary of Naomi Mitchison 1939-1945*, ed. Dorothy Sheridan (London: Gollancz, 1985), p. 71.

first paragraph of Mackenzie's preface because I think it is significant with regard to Naomi Mitchison's view of history:

History is more than a study of things past. It is a study of the roots of the present, of the seeds of the future. No man can guide present or future who forgets it, and one major cause of Scotland's unhappy present is that, though her sense of the past is still keen and vivid, she recalls it only confusedly and in part. If she is to shape her future worthily, that past must be recalled and understood, not as a series of highly coloured stories but as a consecutive process of event.⁸

It is very tempting to consider *The Roots of the Present* as an alternative title for Mitchison's *The Bull Calves*. The novel is set on two days in June 1747 in the aftermath of the Jacobite rebellion. There is a 'plot' which involves the sheltering of a fugitive Jacobite, Robert Strange, in Gleneagles, the Haldane family home. We also, however, witness certain tensions between the older characters in the book, which are slowly explained through stories told by various characters in conversation. About half the book is composed of these stories and it is in these that the real drama lies — particularly in those told by the two principal characters, Kirstie Haldane and her husband, William Macintosh of Borlum. Kirstie tells her life story to her niece Catherine, but omits from this narration a part of her life which she tells only to William: that she became involved with witchcraft and believed herself to be responsible, by witchcraft, for the death of her first husband, Andrew Shaw of Bargarran. William, on the other hand, keeps from Kirstie part of the story of his life: the fact that at the time of their marriage he was already married to an American Indian woman and that therefore his marriage to Kirstie is invalid and their child is illegitimate. He tells this not to Kirstie but to her brother Patrick. The telling of these and other stories traces the roots of the present-day tensions within the family. This plot development, explaining the present in terms of the past, corresponds to what Mitchison said she wanted to do in her projected book *The Roots of the Present*: to 'take an incident, and hunt back to what it was really about.'

⁸ Agnes Mure Mackenzie, *The Foundations of Scotland* (London and Edinburgh: W&R Chambers, 1938): vii.

III

In *The Bull Calves*, Mitchison moves from the use of woman as a symbol of nation to the representation of women as characters in history. She attempts to narrate a history which is relevant to women. Both the emphasis on the oral transmission of history and the domestic setting of the Haldane family home give a new perspective to a period which is more often overshadowed by the very male fields of politics and war. Of all the various stories narrated in the novel, Kirstie's is by far the largest sustained narrative in the book. Most of Part One, 'The Smooth Mid-Century,' is taken up with Kirstie telling her story in two large sections comprising 88 pages. Although there are also stories told by and to men in the novel, it is Kirstie's story which is privileged, and it is Kirstie who functions as a linchpin between all the different strands of narrative, between her husband and her family, between Highlands and Lowlands. Her central position makes her truly a 'woman of Scotland', the position Mitchison claims for herself in 'The Cleansing of the Knife'.

Kirstie is also able to take on the mantle of 'Alba our mother' as Mitchison herself did in 'The Cleansing of the Knife'. But there is a difference between Kirstie and the projection of herself used by Mitchison in her poem. This is partly related to genre, as the symbolic figures of poetry often do not transfer satisfactorily into the psychologically realistic characters of fiction. With regard to the symbolic aspects of Kirstie, Mitchison encounters problems similar to those faced by Lewis Grassie Gibbon in his creation of Chris Guthrie in *A Scots Quair*. Beyond the question of genre, however, the radically different use of the female figure in the two texts illustrates Mitchison's increasing ability to translate the relationship between gender and nation into her own terms.

Only twice in the novel is Kirstie explicitly compared with Scotland, although there is also an extended symbolism involving her marriage with William in which their home is constructed as a utopian space which is connected to Kirstie's maternal body. In each of these explicit instances the comparison rests on Kirstie's status as victim and

the political position of Scotland. William recalls his first meeting with Kirstie after his return from America. Her mental confusion at this time and her belief in witchcraft are represented physically by her almost wanton appearance as she opens the door of her house in a state of undress. William does not take advantage of the situation (although the implication is that almost any red-blooded male would have done), but rather thinks, 'And maybe, lassie, you were like poor Scotland herself, and one more betrayal would have spoilt you clean' (p. 170). Kirstie's vulnerable female body, sexualised and left open to attack from outside, clearly conforms to the flip side of the chaste and impregnable body of the defended nation. Scotland is not defended, and is open to betrayal from both without and within. William's rhetoric of betrayal also locates Kirstie, and Scotland, in the position of innocent victim. Like Alba our mother, she is *done to*, she suffers the actions of others.

The other explicit parallel drawn between Kirstie and Scotland comes earlier in the book. Kirstie's unhappy marriage to her first husband, the minister Andrew Shaw of Bargarran, moves Lachlan Macintosh of Kyllachy to remark, 'Ah, poor lassie, poor wee lassie [...] She is fast in her trap as poor Scotland herself, and as fully eager to bide there' (p. 106). Again the parallel is based on Kirstie's position of victim, but Kyllachy's comparison goes in a slightly different direction from that of William and allows for the interpretation that both Kirstie and Scotland are to some extent responsible for their respective predicaments.

Mitchison thus uses Kirstie's story to suggest an allegory of Scotland as a woman both trapped and betrayed. But unlike the figure of Alba our mother in 'The Cleansing of the Knife', the metaphor of Kirstie as Scotland is never allowed to dominate the narrative or to remain the governing image of woman in the text. Both of these images of Kirstie as Scotland are immediately distanced from the rest of the text and from Kirstie herself because they are both seen through the eyes of Highlanders. Although they are enemies, William and Kyllachy share many stereotypically Highland characteristics, and are constructed as emotionally and even morally different from the Lowlanders — William's tendency towards lying is portrayed as a Highland characteristic rather than a moral lapse. When the two begin to argue, they are described

as 'slip[ping] out of gentlemanliness, out of control, [...] shouting at one another and that with words of the Irish that might mean anything' (p. 312). And later, as they wait for the arrival of Duncan Forbes of Culloden and the climax of the two days' events:

William [...] sat back, waiting, as his kinsman Kyllachy waited, both of them sunk into a kind of Highland daze, letting the minutes float by as mist floats by on the hillside past the shepherd waiting quietly for the break and the sight of his sheep at last. (p. 363)

Kirstie attempts to rationalise the behaviour of the Highlanders in the light of her experience by explaining it in terms of historical wrongs:

if evil is done to a whole race of folk, then they will be bound to do evil again. For, instead of going through with their wrongs, of letting themselves become soc-riven and harrowed by them, ripe for the seed, they will stand against it [...] and their days will be full of hate and destruction and their nights will be dreams of murder and triumph... (p. 52)

The implication here is that the Highlanders themselves occupy the victim position which is constructed for both Kirstie and Scotland. In 'The Cleansing of the Knife' Mitchison challenged what she saw as a peculiarly Highland 'wish for death and passion' which she specifically associated with a romanticism of the female form: 'Deirdre, Mary Stuart / And the girls in the old songs' (*The Cleansing of the Knife*, p. 47). The fact that it is William and Kyllachy who share the perception of Kirstie as the long-suffering nation of Scotland places the metaphor at a distance from the Lowland ethos of rationality, progress and common-sense which the novel generally endorses.

Having described the Highland mentality, Kirstie moves on to outline to Catherine the Lowlanders' idea of themselves:

... we have aye got at the back of our minds, we honest folk, the thought of how things should be, and each individual man and woman secure in the possession of his own soul and his own bit property [...] Everything redded up and the slow, steady righting of wrongs and betterment of life. (p. 54)

This echoes the very words used in 'The Cleansing of the Knife', in which Mitchison proposed that the Highland 'wish for death and passion' should be combated by her own 'sense of life, / Of direction steadily kept / And a steady righting of wrongs / And a cleansing of the knife' (*Cleansing*, p. 47). Mitchison perceives the union of these elements of 'death and passion' and the 'steady righting of wrongs' to be the future of Scotland, and this is why the marriage of William and Kirstie, in uniting Highland and Lowland, has such a symbolic significance in the novel, and why their home, Borlum, occupies an almost utopian space in *The Bull Calves*.

The construction of William (and Highlanders in general) as irrational, passionate and 'other' is both attractive and tending towards dangerous, and it is this unpredictable, irrational quality which William brings to his marriage to Kirstie and her Lowland heritage and values. The element of danger which Mitchison writes into her construction of the Highlands is not fully developed, however, because an over-emphasis of the 'barbarian' aspect of the Highlander, which she hints at, would contrast too strongly with the movement of the novel towards an ideal union of Highland and Lowland. Mitchison explores this barbarian and dangerous construction of otherness, however, in William's story of the time he spent with an American Indian tribe. The close identification between William and the Indians and the explicit parallels which he himself makes between Indians and Highlanders allow us to read the chapters dealing with the Indians as an exploration also of the darker side of the Highlander. When William first meets his Indian wife Ohnawiyo and her brother he recognises in them a quality which he associates with 'the fairy people' and he immediately feels a sense of kinship with them, as if 'they were akin to me or my dreams' (p. 275). It is the difference between the Indians and the respectable life he is leading among the settlers which first attracts William to them, and he is then able to cement this sense of kinship with a political identification between the Highlands and the Indians based on the loss of their respective lands. William's participation in the Indian rites of torture of prisoners and cannibalism represents the association of the Highlands with the barbarian taken to its utmost extreme, but the distance implicit in the fact that this takes place in America and belongs to the practices of another culture allows the association to remain

in the past without jeopardising the harmonious union of Highlands and Lowlands in the utopian space of Borlum which is the symbolic centre of the novel.

Borum exists outside the world of the novel, and yet we are made aware of the changes which William and Kirstie are making there, both on the land and in the community. Kirstie regretted the fact that the Highlanders were unable to find a way of 'going through with their wrongs, of letting themselves become soc-riven and harrowed by them, ripe for the seed' (p. 52). This agricultural metaphor for a less vengeful and more patient reaction to the wrongs of history is extended, and the agricultural improvements of the eighteenth century become a governing metaphor for the rebuilding of Scotland. As Kirstie's brother Mungo muses:

It was strange the way [thoughts about agriculture] came to him during the reading of theology. Yet indeed they were both of them equally profound subjects when taken with all their implications. Aye, aye, Scotland would rise again like a muckle turnip from the seed. (p. 156)

The turnip is thus elevated from the ridiculous to the sublime, and it illustrates the way in which land becomes a powerful symbol for Scotland as a nation.

The move from short leases of the land to long leases for tenants is a significant part of eighteenth century agricultural improvement, and the novel's view of history suggests that this move from short to long term planning should also be considered outwith the domain of agriculture. It is significant that William does not come out in the 1745 Jacobite uprising because he sees more long-term profit for Scotland in staying on his land and harvesting his first crop of turnips and potatoes grown under his new methods (p. 73). Agriculture, and the 'steady righting of wrongs' becomes a viable alternative to war. This link between agriculture and patriotism is personified by William's late father, Brigadier William Macintosh of Borlum, who is admired by Kirstie's brothers, despite being a Jacobite, as 'a true lover of his country and its agriculture' (p. 29).⁹ William's father was an actual historical figure, who published *An Essay on Ways and Means for Inclosing, Fallowing, Planting by a Lover of his Country*.

⁹William Macintosh, *An Essay on Ways and Means for Inclosing, Fallowing, Planting by a Lover of his Country* (Edinburgh: [n.pub.], 1729).

Naomi Mitchison writes in the notes how she identified with his essay as being the same sort of thing as she was trying to do in *Carradale* — and what she envisaged for Scotland as a whole (p. 478). The notes to the novel illustrate, as in this case, the extent to which Mitchison has written herself into her novel. The notes are such an integral part of the novel that Susanne Hagemann suggests that the voice of the notes might be more properly called ‘the narrator’ rather than ‘Naomi Mitchison’, implying that there is an element of fictionality about the notes and emphasising that all written history should be treated as narrative, a central concern of Mitchison’s novel.¹⁰

Kirstie envisages the agricultural changes they are making at Borlum as an important part of planning for a Scotland of the future, and William sees his work there as ‘trying to earn a wee small part of my Redemption’ (p. 297). Hagemann, commenting on the positive space occupied by Borlum in the novel, calls it a ‘utopian, feminine Scotland’ lying ‘outside the realm of history’, and points out that this society is personified by Elizabeth, the child of Kirstie and William. She also calls the birth of Elizabeth to Kirstie in her early forties ‘miraculous’ and therefore, it is implied, a portent of the coming of this perfect society.¹¹ While Kirstie’s daughter is indeed a powerful (though unseen) figure, I would suggest that her birth is not so much ‘miraculous’ as a reference to the birth (and death) of Mitchison’s own Ealasaid / Elizabeth when Mitchison herself was forty-two. As the book is dedicated ‘most of all to those who are only names in a family tree, and, of those, my one’, the emphasis is on considering those ‘names’, who died young, as human beings who had the potential to exist into adulthood. Therefore the powerful figure of Mitchison’s dead daughter demonstrates a kind of potentiality, which allows Mitchison to fictionalise the perfect society. In this sense Borlum does indeed exist ‘outside the realm of history’ because it exists as a parallel universe of potential.

¹⁰ Susanne Hagemann, ‘Woman and Nation’, in *A History of Scottish Women’s Writing*, ed. by Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp. 316-328 (p. 324).

¹¹ Hagemann, p. 324.

IV

Mitchison uses Kirstie's body both to represent Scotland as a victim and as part of the utopian construction of Borlum as the harmonious union of Highland and Lowland. But more important to the overall effect of the novel is that Kirstie is a character who has participated in the history of her nation and who is furthermore able to narrate her own role in this history. The structure of the novel emphasises the female narration. Kirstie's stories to Catherine, occupying the largest single element of the novel, suggest a matrilineal inheritance of history. The stories include the domestic experience of history within the narratives of war and politics of the period. Kirstie tells of the after-effects once the Jacobite army had burnt a series of villages near Stirling, and the help that the family was able to give the villagers (pp. 67-8); she tells of her own efforts to help the miners in Ayr after an accident in the pit (pp. 98-9). She also explains why she sheltered a hunted kinswoman with Jacobite connections in the aftermath of the 1745 uprising (p. 384-5). Such aspects of the narrative have the effect of humanising the processes of history, and it is this sense of humanity and practicality which governs the stories of history that Kirstie tells to Catherine.

Here Kirstie's feminine and maternal reaction to the effects of progress and war provide a counter-narrative to the patriarchal history of Scotland. However, it is in Kirstie's story of her experiences as a member of a witches' coven that we witness the most extreme example of this type of counter-narrative. Kirstie's involvement in witchcraft occupies a similarly ambiguous position in the novel to William's experiences with the American Indians. For although both Kirstie and William describe her association with witchcraft in terms of evil and hell (pp. 163, 164), Kirstie also recognises in it a potential for change:

Yet times I had a feeling that we were near to understanding in the heart of things that could have been turned to good, yet not good of a kind that would be recognized by the respectable and the members of the congregation. Least of all, maybe, by the men. (p. 166)

Kirstie's sense of potential for change is again related to a female challenge to masculine rationality and order. Kirstie is first introduced to the coven by her sister-in-law, Christian Shaw, a strong female figure who contributes to the ambivalence surrounding this episode in the novel. Christian Shaw, an actual historical figure, was responsible for the start of the manufacture of linen thread in Paisley, and represents an independent woman somewhat ahead of her time. She gives Kirstie the courage to escape from her oppressive first husband. Although the witches' coven is ultimately constructed as negative, it presents a potentially liberating alternative to the male-dominated narrative of history.

In the third chapter of the novel, as the men talk about drainage and lint-mills, Kirstie and Catherine return to the story and we are informed that 'The minds of the two women were again on people and not on things' (p. 77). Kirstie's narrative to Catherine begins with her half-joking statement that men are nothing but bairns, whereas women 'are for ever needing to take thought for the morrow, aye and the morrow's morn. We canna afford to be generous and daft the way the men are, more's the pity' (p. 38). Mitchison consistently emphasises women's different vision of history and allows women the possibility of effecting change. She plays with the ways in which women's different relationship to nation and different attitude to history might be represented, and compares the management skills of a housewife with those necessary to run a government:

If a' the governing of the world were left to the women of it, they would never do the daft-like things the men do, throwing away their own lives, aye and others'. The world could surely be managed the way a household is, cannily. (p. 38)

This fantasy is one way of rewriting women's political disenfranchisement and may be read as a vision of a potential matriarchal society, suggested also by Mitchison's emphasis on the female transmission of history and matrilineal line of descent.¹²

¹² See Gill Plain, 'Constructing the Future Through the Past: Naomi Mitchison's *Brave New World*', in *Women's Fiction of the Second World War: Gender, Power and Resistance* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996), pp. 156-7).

Willa Muir, who was writing around the same time as Mitchison and in a similar way trying to find a way in which to bring women into the political sphere, wrote in her 1936 essay 'Women in Scotland'¹³ that the exclusion of women from political life is a result of the relegation of women to the domestic sphere. Her analysis of the structures of male and female authority concludes that 'his is the concentrated authority of an individual, hers is the more diffuse, pervasive, atmospheric authority of an environment' (p. 2). She relates the notion of environment to a Marxist reading of capitalism as an artificially created environment encroaching upon the mother's circle of environmental authority, and then compares the domestic maternal environment with that of the State in terms of money management and responsibility (p. 3). This notion of woman as environment uses the same metaphors as Gunn and Gibbon use when they identify women with landscape and home rather than as individuals within civil society. Rather than dissipate this myth, Muir instead argues that the political world should be able to incorporate the different female relationship to space and authority.

To rectify the lack of recognition of the role of the housewife she proposes a complementary relationship between individual and environment, husband and wife, and extends this vision to a nation composed of such families:

such a national ideal would appeal to the discouraged women of Scotland. Scotland as a nation has been for so long a 'puir auld mither' that Scottish mothers are likely to have a fellow-feeling for her. (p. 4)

Like Mitchison, Muir uses the metaphor of Scotland as mother, but she goes one step further by using it on the level of propaganda to encourage women to become involved in nationalist movements. Muir's invocation of the nation as mother imagery in order to politicise the 'discouraged women of Scotland' occupies an ambiguous position between simply reproducing male imagery and rewriting it to make a political point. Muir's imagery of Scotland as 'puir auld mither' could also be seen as a strategic negotiation with a predominantly masculine political scene.

Mitchison's suggestion, voiced by Kirstie, that all the governing of the world might be left to the women, allows her to visualise a role for women in politics even if

¹³Published in *Left Review* and reprinted in Willa Muir, *Imagined Selves*, ed. by Kirsty Allen (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1996), 4 pp.

this role is only hypothetical and a fantasy. Mitchison in a sense causes problems for herself by exploring the interaction of history and gender in a novel set in the eighteenth century. The movement of the novel is towards a point where every character in the novel is able to acknowledge their individual responsibility towards constructing a future for Scotland. The overall message of the novel is as relevant to 1947 as to 1747, but the eighteenth century context makes it difficult for Mitchison to fully explore the role of women in this future Scotland.

The dénouement of *The Bull Calves* is a pseudo-tribunal held by Duncan Forbes of Culloden, the Lord President, which resolves both the present-day problem of the Jacobite outlaw who has been hiding in Gleneagles house and the tensions which have been aroused due to the telling of old stories. Culloden winds up proceedings with this speech:

We in Scotland have been over much battered to be able to spare any man who will set his hand and mind to the future. Aye, or any woman, Kirstie! We must act together and build ourselves up slowly and surely, by way of the peaceful arts and trades through commerce and agriculture, until we are well of our wounds. (p. 389)

Thus the successful outcome of the problems faced by the Haldane family, and the triumph of reason over the blind application of the letter of the law, symbolises a hope for the healing of the whole country; and the resonances of Culloden's speech for post-World War Two Scotland and Europe are unmistakable. The end of the novel offers a vision of a Scotland which includes women in the vision of a united people of Scotland working together for the future. This tends towards the anachronistic but it signifies Mitchison's vision of a potential Scottish future in which women play a part.

Kirstie herself is clearly represented as a citizen of Scotland with opinions and voice. She is clearly a 'woman of Scotland'. Her pivotal position, both within the Haldane family and in Borlum, is in many ways a fictionalisation of Mitchison's own pleasure at being seen as 'part of Scottish history'. As well as placing her fictional alter ego in this central role, Mitchison also extends the family tree at the front of the book

forward to include herself, thus placing her twentieth century self firmly within this history.

Mitchison's personal achievement in *The Bull Calves* is to break out of the restrictions she seemed to be struggling with in 'The Cleansing of the Knife'. She rediscovers her own voice and asserts her position in Scotland by returning to what she is good at, the writing of historical fiction. The feminised Scotland in the form of 'Alba our mother' loomed large in 'The Cleansing of the Knife', but the instances of Kirstie representing Scotland seem, in the overall context of the novel, like aberrations. They do not function as controlling images for the novel, nor am I reading them as such, and they are integrated into the narrative development of Kirstie as a convincing and coherent character. Perhaps they simply represent the last remnants of a system of myth which Mitchison is in the process of throwing away.

Chapter Seven

Imagined Bodies and the Landscape of Home: Alasdair Gray's *1982 Janine*¹

The cover designer, Alasdair Gray, realized too late that the motto *Scotia Redivivus* on the truncated Scotch pine should be *Scotia Rediviva*, and begs the reader to attribute this to poor Latin rather than sexual misidentification.

— *Studies in Scottish Literature*²

I

In the 1980s and 90s, a sudden rush of talent and productivity changed the face of Scottish literature. While the previous decades were not without literary achievement, this was mainly in the field of poetry and was not given political significance or related to the achievements of the SNP in the 1970s. Christopher Harvie has observed the 'a-cultural' nature of the party during that decade, suggesting that the 'modernising ethos' of the SNP perhaps discouraged writers and artists from participation.³ It is paradoxical that this stream of Scottish writing, which in scope bears comparison with the 'renaissance' of the 1920 and 30s, seemed to spring from the ashes of the 1979 Scottish Home Rule Referendum defeat. The period is nicely framed at one end by this defeat and at the other by the success of the second Scottish Home Rule Referendum and the establishment of a devolved Scottish parliament in 1999.

1979 marked the end of what had seemed a steady growth of support for Scottish nationalism and the SNP in the 1970s, amid accusations of a 'rigged' referendum. Although a majority of those voting did so in favour of the Labour government's 1978 Scotland Act, the 'rigging' of the referendum was contained in a last minute stipulation that the act had to obtain the support of at least 40% of the potential electorate as well

¹Parts of this chapter and the following one have been published as 'Imagined Bodies and the Landscape of Home: Woman as Nation in the Fiction of Alasdair Gray', in *Terranglian Territories: Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference on the Literature of Region and Nation*, ed. by Susanne Hagemann (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. 269-76.

²*Studies in Scottish Literature*, 30 (1997). Gray's correction was sent to the editor Ross Roy on a postcard and printed as it stood opposite the contents page.

³Christopher Harvie, 'Nationalism, Journalism and Cultural Politics', in *Nationalism in the Nineties*, ed. by Tom Gallagher (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1991), pp. 29-45 (p. 30).

as a majority of those actually voting.⁴ As Jock McLeish puts it in Gray's *1982, Janine*: "If you win the race by a short head you will have lost it," we were told, so we won by a short head and lost the race.⁵ While this electoral disaster coupled with the loss of 9 of the SNP's 11 seats in the May election in 1979 dealt a body blow to political nationalism in Scotland both in the form of the SNP and in the form of any moves towards Home Rule, cultural regeneration seemed to spring directly from political defeat. Alasdair Gray has stated that the traumatic events of 1979 cured his writer's block and allowed him to complete *Lanark*, on which he had been working for the past 20-30 years,⁶ and the publication of *Lanark* in 1981 can arguably be said to mark the start of this new wave of Scottish writing. In the 80s Gray, Kelman and Leonard came to public attention; more recently Janice Galloway, A.L.Kennedy, Iain Banks, Duncan McLean, and most famously Irvine Welsh, have all been recognised even outwith Scotland as a cultural phenomenon.

The phrase 'new renaissance' has been used quite deliberately to indicate a parallel with the Renaissance of the 1920s and 30s and also to suggest a link between the political situation of the country and the upturn in the fortunes of Scottish literature.⁷ However the assumptions behind the tag of 'new renaissance' lead to this period being considered in a context which is perhaps limiting. As Catherine Kerrigan points out, almost all accounts of Scottish literature are discussed in terms of national identity. Scottish literature as a discipline is studied as if to reveal something about Scotland as a nation, and the institutionalised canon has a role to play in determining cultural production and representing a coherent picture of national life.⁸ In order to maintain its tenuous position as a distinct discipline in the Scottish academic community, Scottish literature has a tendency to defend its existence by demonstrating a

⁴Ian O. Bayne, 'The Impact of 1979 on the SNP', in *Nationalism in the Nineties*, pp. 46-65 (p. 46). 33% of the electorate voted in favour.

⁵Alasdair Gray, *1982, Janine* (London: Cape, 1984), p. 66. All subsequent page references to this edition will be made in parentheses in the text.

⁶Christopher Harvie, 'Alasdair Gray and the Condition of Scotland Question', in *The Arts of Alasdair Gray*, ed. by Robert Crawford and Thom Nairn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), pp. 76-89 (p. 77); Christopher Harvie, 'Nationalism, Journalism and Cultural Politics', p. 30.

⁷Douglas Gifford, 'At Last — the Real Scottish Literary Renaissance?', *Books in Scotland*, 34 (1990), 1-4.

⁸Catherine Kerrigan, 'Nationalism and Gender: Scottish Myths of the Female', in *Proceedings of the Scottish Workshop of the ESSE Conference Bordeaux 1993* (Grenoble: Etudes Ecosaises, 1994), pp. 105-111 (p. 105).

difference from English literature; the influence of a distinct cultural tradition as well as of different languages. This attitude links the study of Scottish literature to the very negative constructions of national identity which define Scotland as 'not England', and is in direct contrast to the very catholic scope of most English literature departments. This new wave of Scottish writers gave an impetus to the academic study of Scottish literature, which lead perhaps inevitably to its being described in terms of a 'cultural phenomenon' in a way that tied the writers to developments in Scottish politics whether they liked it or not.

II

Alasdair Gray, writing forty years after *The Bull Calves* and sixty years after the publication of *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, approaches the image of woman as nation in a very different way from either MacDiarmid or Mitchison. In many ways he is consciously writing back to MacDiarmid's construction of Scotland, particularly in his novel *1982, Janine* which clearly shows the influence of *A Drunk Man*. But Gray, writing in the 1980s and 1990s, deliberately exploits the provocative nature of his use of female bodies in a way that MacDiarmid does not. Gray, therefore, pushes the limits of taboo in his representation of woman as nation, intending to shock his readers, particularly with his use of pornography in *1982, Janine* (1984), and also with his re-writing of the Frankenstein story in *Poor Things* (1992). Gray's use of woman as symbol of nation is very much tied up with the idea of construction. In both these texts a male narrator constructs a woman and the reader is encouraged to read the stories of these women as political allegory.

Gray is aware of the politics of the exploitation of women's bodies. In *Janine*, Jock contemplates the place of the female nude in art, architecture and the media:

From Aberdeen to London the fronts of Victorian insurance offices are decorated with carved nude women representing truth, fertility and the graces beside an occasional man in robes or armour representing science or fortitude. In art galleries the proportion of cunts to pricks is

fifty to one, and without the male homosexual magazines the proportion in pictorial representations for men *and* women is nearly the same. Yes, art and advertising exploit women's bodies for money, but to do so they promote the idea that women's bodies are beautiful and good. (p. 50)

This passage illustrates the dichotomy inherent in the representation of the body. Gray plays up the irony in Jock's statement that women's bodies are exploited to be idealised, but the explicit language which Jock uses ('the proportion of cunts to pricks') undercuts the idea of bodies functioning as symbols; or bodies being 'beautiful and good'.

Gray provides an example of the use of the female body in *Lanark*, in the picture fronting Book 3 of the novel. A female Atlas-figure labelled 'Magistra Vitae' holds the world above her head. On either side of the globe stands a winged female figure, one entitled 'Fama Bona' and the other 'Fama Mala'. 'Magistra Vitae' is flanked on the right by a naked female figure labelled 'Veritas', and on the left by a clothed female figure called 'Experientia'.⁹ This somewhat hyperbolic use of woman as symbol and the exploitation of the female figure reproduces the abundant representation of women's bodies outlined by Gray in *Janine* but equally illustrates his own fascination with the female form. The use of the female body on public sculpture is so prevalent as to be almost invisible, and these bodies are stripped of character, reduced to representation. In 1982, *Janine*, however, Gray renders the use of the female body visible by making it offensive.

In *Janine*, the metaphor of woman as nation largely depends on the exploitation of women, specifically in sexual terms. 'Scotland has been fucked and I am one of the fuckers who fucked her', Jock says at one point, and he explicitly states that the word 'fuck' is used 'in the vulgar sense of *misused to give satisfaction or advantage to another*' (p. 136). Thus national misfortune is immediately situated in the context of obscenity and sexual violence. However, this is not the only construction of woman in the novel. The use of sexual exploitation as an extended metaphor for colonial exploitation is complemented and paralleled by Jock's attitude to his first girlfriend

⁹Alasdair Gray, *Lanark: A Life in Four Books* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1981).

Denny in the 'realist' section of the novel. Denny is described in terms of landscape and home. As with MacDiarmid's women in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, a clear line can be drawn between Gray's construction of the wholesome, maternal woman associated with the land and with home, and his less tangible 'fantasy' women who expand the possibilities of the metaphor. But while MacDiarmid's ethereal woman possesses a hint of illicit sexuality, Gray's fantasy women are specifically located in the context of sexual fantasy.

These conflicting constructions of womanhood in *Janine* reflect conflicting constructions of Scotland which Gray ultimately fails to resolve. The pornographic sexual fantasies of bondage and rape function as a metaphor for perverted political processes acting upon the stateless nation of Scotland, whereas the images of woman as land which surround the description of Denny draw upon a more traditional figuring of woman as nation, reminiscent of that employed by Grassie Gibbon in *Sunset Song*. By juxtaposing these two different versions of the construction of nation as women Gray brings together two distinct traditions of using the body as a metaphor. In addition to the nation represented as a woman, there is the tradition of representing the state as a body — a body which is generally not gendered, or by default or association gendered male.

Theories of the state and nation have made use of the analogy of the state as a body to illustrate its workings, from Plato's *Republic* to Anthony Sampson's *Anatomy of Britain*. In *Nature's Work of Art: The Human Body as Image of the World*, Leonard Barkan discusses the use of the human body as metaphor, devoting a chapter to the metaphor of the human body used with respect to the commonwealth. Barkan traces the development of this metaphor from a generalised, idealised body (as used by Plato and St. Paul) towards 'a real flesh and blood composite of many parts':

The State [...] is rather an artificial body, a necessary unity which society can evolve and whose terms can be clarified by an understanding of the natural unities of diversity to be found within the human body.¹⁰

¹⁰Leonard Barkan, *Nature's Work of Art: The Human Body as Image of the World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975), p. 70; p. 63.

The state is conceived as being composed of people who all perform distinct functions yet all depend upon each other, as the various organs of the human body working together form a 'unity of diversity'. The image we are left with in the end is of the body of the state being composed of smaller bodies of its citizens. The ultimate representation of this anthropomorphic state is the frontispiece of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1651), which depicts the giant figure of a king rising out of the landscape, wielding a sword and a sceptre. The body of this figure is made up of many smaller bodies: the bodies of the citizens. The introduction to *Anatomy of Britain* recalls *Leviathan* and the image of a body made up of smaller bodies. The two hundred people interviewed by Sampson make up 'the arms and legs and the main blood stream' of the nation, and Sampson uses them to give 'some picture of the metabolism of the anonymous institutions which settle our everyday lives.'¹¹ Gray himself designs a version of the *Leviathan* image which he uses as the frontispiece to Book Four of *Lanark*,¹² but in Gray's image the landscape from which the king rises is recognisably Scottish. Gray comments elsewhere on the preface to *Leviathan*:

[Hobbes] does not believe he is using a poetic metaphor when he describes men and their nations as different sizes of mechanical doll; he thinks he is being modern and scientific. [...] [T]he long sentences of the Introduction keep stimulating us with spiky little aphorisms in the Baconian style, but jauntier and more persuasive than Bacon, because for all the scientific pretension of this metaphor he is using the same sort of wit Donne uses when he describes the body of his mistress as an ocean full of undiscovered lands.¹³

Gray's reference is to Donne's 'Elegy: Love's Progress':

... the streight Hellespont between

¹¹Anthony Sampson, *Anatomy of Britain* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. xi. Magnus Linklater and Robin Denniston, the editors of *Anatomy of Scotland: How Scotland Works* (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1992), although they take their title from Sampson's influential work, do not make use of the same explicit anatomical metaphor elsewhere in the work.

¹²Gray, *Lanark*, p. 355. In *Lanark*, however, the landscape beneath the king-figure is recognisably Scottish (and the king has his eyes closed). The frontispiece to Book One (p. 119) contains the same image but seen from an off-centre point of view; the portraits in the foreground are given more prominence.

¹³Alasdair Gray, 'A Preface to the Anthology of Prefaces: Plus Three Critical Commentaries', *Edinburgh Review*, 78-79 (1988), 208-213 (212-13).

The *Sestos* and *Abydos* of her breasts,
 [...] Succeeds a boundless sea, but yet thine eye
 Some Island moles may scatter'd there descry;
 And Sailing towards her India, in that way
 Shall at her fair Atlantick Naval stay (ll. 60-66).

This imposing of the female body onto the landscape is a recurrent theme in Donne's poetry. He makes a similar use of the metaphor in 'Elegy: To His Mistris Going to Bed', where he apostrophises his mistress's body as 'O my America! My new-found-land, / My kingdome, safeliest when with one man man'd' (ll. 27-8).¹⁴ This particular poem continues the metaphor of the mystery and wealth of undiscovered lands and also makes explicit the theme of domination of the female body: woman, like land, is something to be explored but also to be possessed. By situating his discussion of Hobbes in the same context as the discussion of Donne's poetic conceit Gray proposes both a new approach to Hobbes and a re-assessment of the image of the state as a body. By seeing Hobbes' mechanical analogy as a poetic metaphor Gray links the two separate notions of the state as a body, and land or the nation represented romantically in terms of the female body. The way in which Gray brings these two separate tropes together here is important for reading his own use of the nation-as-woman metaphor, because in *1982, Janine* he uses both allegories in a contradictory way, and in *Poor Things* we see the two concepts interact in the one body of Bella Baxter. Leaving *Poor Things* for the next chapter, I will here consider the way in which Gray's two constructions of woman as nation interact in *1982, Janine*.

III

In the pornographic fantasies of *1982, Janine*, Jock's fantasy women endure a variety of institutionalised rapes and prostitution. *1982, Janine* takes place in the mind of Jock McLeish, as he passes a solitary drunken night in a hotel room somewhere in Scotland. Gray explicitly acknowledges in the 'Epilogue for the discerning critic' that 'the matter

¹⁴John Donne, *The Complete English Poems*, ed. by C. A. Patrides (London: Everyman, 1985). 'Love's Progress', pp. 79-83; 'To His Mistris Going to Bed', pp. 183-5.

of Scotland refracted through alcoholic reverie is from MacDiarmid's *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*' (p. 343). But the latent male chauvinism of MacDiarmid's text is translated into explicit pornographic narrative. This is by no means the only aspect of the novel, but it is the most immediate, and it is understandably the pornographic element of the novel which has excited most critical comment. *1982, Janine* can undoubtedly be defined as pornographic in the terms defined by the first public hearing regarding pornography in Minneapolis in 1983:

the graphic, sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures or words, that also includes women dehumanised as sexual objects, things or commodities, enjoying pain or humiliation or rape, being tied up, cut up... etc.¹⁵

Critical reactions to the pornographic aspect of *Janine* range from downright condemnations of its exploitation of women to a tendency, among more liberal critics, to, if not excuse, explain the pornography. Stephen J. Boyd criticises Gray's pornography as a 'black art', questioning the justification of printing such material which might encourage emulation of Jock's fantasies. Eilidh Whiteford comments that even if Gray's use of the word 'pornography' alludes to the Victorian values the novel seeks to debunk and Victorian inhibitions it seeks to dispel, the issue at stake remains whether or not he is justified in his use of explicit imagery.¹⁶ Those critics who deplore the pornography tend to display a certain prurience, speculating about Gray's own consumption of pornography ('even if it is all a parody, one must have a good working knowledge of whatever it is one wishes to parody') and discussing whether the fantasies are actually Gray's own ('But Alasdair Gray *publishes* his fantasies').¹⁷ The vision this perpetuates, of Gray as a dirty old man thrusting his fantasies upon the world, ignores the political metaphor contained within the pornography. Despite the validity of

¹⁵ *Pornography and Sexual Violence: Evidence of the Links* (London: Everyman, 1988), p. 2. Opening speeches were made by two leading proponents of the anti-pornography movement in America, Catharine Mackinnon and Andrea Dworkin. The purpose of this hearing was to see if pornography should be classed as discrimination against women and therefore banned and a distinction was made between pornography and 'sexually explicit or erotic material generally'.

¹⁶ S.J. Boyd, 'Black Arts: 1982, *Janine* and *Something Leather*', in *The Arts of Alasdair Gray*, pp. 108-123; Eilidh Whiteford, 'Engendered Subjects: subjectivity and national identity in Alasdair Gray's 1982, *Janine*', *Scotlands*, 2 (1994), 66-82 (p. 80).

¹⁷ Boyd, p. 112; p. 118.

questions regarding the use and representation of women's bodies, such knee-jerk reactions ignore the subtleties of Gray's project.

Aside from those critics who condemn Gray's use of pornography, at times protesting too much, there are those who act as apologists by explaining its moral function. Christopher Gittings asserts that the pornography in *Janine* is 'not employed to titillate the male reader' but to 'sicken and repulse the reader.'¹⁸ Douglas Gifford describes how the fantasies are

in fact a brilliant way of demonstrating how Jock's sickness is the world's.[...] [The fantasies] are finally meant to disgust, to shame us; we have all helped spawn these stereotypes of male domination...¹⁹

The emphasis on shame, on disgust and repulsion, distracts attention from the fact that these fantasies may indeed titillate the reader and are in fact designed to do so. But, as Christopher Whyte mischievously comments, 'what (heterosexual) critic wants to risk putting his (or her) own fantasies on the line?'²⁰ Of course the readership of *Janine* cannot be assumed to be unanimous either in opinion or in sexual fantasy. However, for Gray's political allegory to be fully understood it seems necessary to emphasise that while disgust, shame and repulsion are elements of the recipe, they should be acknowledged as accompanying a certain sexual pleasure. The pleasure that is derived from pornographic fantasies which include 'women dehumanised as sexual objects, things or commodities, enjoying pain or humiliation or rape' is not divisible from shame. However, it is pleasure nonetheless. If critics and readers refuse to admit that there may be any pleasure at all to be gained from the fantasies — and political correctness may make them disinclined to do so — they are ignoring a vital aspect of the book. Jock's perverse pleasure in the political and social trap in which he is caught is mirrored in his fantasies. Jock does not create his fantasies in order to sicken and disgust; or, if he does, it is only because shame and revulsion are necessary components of his sexual stimulation.

¹⁸Christopher E. Gittings, 'Re-Figuring Imperialism: Gray, Cohen, Atwood and the Female Body', *The Glasgow Review*, 3 (1995), 24-36 (p. 34).

¹⁹ Douglas Gifford, 'Private Confessions and Public Satire in the Fiction of Alasdair Gray', *Chapman*, 50-51 (1987), 101-116 (p. 114).

²⁰Christopher Whyte, 'Introduction', in *Gendering the Nation: Studies in Modern Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), pp. ix-xx (pp. xvi-xvii).

As Eilidh Whiteford points out, 'few if any readers can come to the book innocent of its sexual content.'²¹ However, the chances of anyone reading *Janine* purely for the sake of a cheap thrill seem slim, since there exists plenty of literature whose pornographic nature is not in doubt. In David Lodge's phrase, 'the *coitus interruptus* of Gray's narrative technique' assures that the reader, along with Jock, is never likely to achieve any satisfaction as a result of the fantasies.²² There is no coherence to the pornographic narratives, which are fractured by the intrusion of the memories which Jock is trying to suppress, and by his lapses into political diatribe.

The pornographic narratives are signalled as functioning as allegories for the pointed political commentary of the novel. The 'convincing political structure' of Jock's fantasies is pointed out to him by a woman friend (p. 67). Jock's 'recipe for pornography' (p. 29) described to us at the start of Chapter Two describes his technique for delaying orgasm in comparison with a historian describing the build up to war. As Jock switches between his various fantasy women, building each up to a state of excitement and then abandoning them to begin another story, so the historian switches between countries:

showing depression and dread growing within each for domestic reasons, but distracted by challenges and threats from abroad [...] and then the tanks start rolling through the streets with evacuations, concentration camps, explosions, firestorms, frantic last-minute propaganda and the awful togetherness of total calamity before the last, huge, final, bang. *That* is how a big piece of pornography should go. (p. 29)

This situates Jock's fantasies in the context of the political history of the West. Gray asserts that the very structures and plots of pornography are already inscribed within our society. In the course of the novel he develops the analogy into explicit metaphors for colonial oppression and the political situation of Scotland in the 1980s. Critics recognise Gray's aims but still remain unconvinced as to whether this justifies the

²¹ Whiteford, p. 75.

²² David Lodge, 'Sex and Loathing in Scotland', *The New Republic* Vol. 191. No. 3643, Nov. 12 1984, 43-5 (p. 45).

exploitative representation of women in the novel. When asked whether he intended the pornographic fantasies to be read *merely* as analogies of wider issues; Gray replied:

The pornographic fantasies are intended to be read as pornographic fantasies, the political diatribes as political diatribes, Jock's autobiography as Jock's autobiography. Altogether I hope they'll show a man starting to make sense of his life and society.²³

This is typical coat-trailing on Gray's part since the parallels between the pornography and the politics, and the pornography and the autobiography are made explicit in the course of the novel. However, he makes it very clear in this comment that the pornographic material cannot be sanitised and excused as *simply* political allegory. The fantasies have to be read as pornographic fantasies because only once the reader is engaged in the complex reaction of both pleasure and disgust can he (or she) properly engage with the political message.

It is necessary to engage with the fantasies to appreciate the reversal Gray achieves in suggesting that Jock has, throughout the novel, been identifying with the women in his fantasies rather than the male oppressors they encounter. This is made evident when he describes the development of his sexual fantasies from childhood in a passage which functions, in my opinion, as a far more appropriate 'recipe' for the pornography employed in the novel:

I had started telling myself stories about a very free attractive greedy woman who, confident in her powers, begins an exciting adventure and finds she is not free at all but completely at the disposal of others. As I aged that story grew very elaborate. The woman is corrupted into enjoying her bondage and trapping others into it. I did not notice that this was the story of my own life. I avoided doing so by insisting on the *femaleness* of the main character. The parts of the story which came to excite me most were not the physical humiliations but the moment when the trap starts closing and the victim feels the torture of being in two minds: wanting to believe, struggling to believe, that

²³ Carol Anderson and Glenda Norquay, 'Interview with Alasdair Gray', *Cencrastus*, 13 (1983), 6-10 (p. 8).

what is happening cannot be happening, can only happen to someone else. And I was right to be excited by that moment because it is the moment when, with courage, we change things. (pp. 193-4)

The fantasies are all structured around the idea of the trap, and the 'depression and dread' of Jock's previously quoted 'recipe for pornography' is experienced by his heroines in the moment, narrated by Jock, that they realise the trap is closing and they have become victims. The sections of the novel identified as 'Jock's autobiography' explain the various 'traps' he has been caught in during the course of his life, and the present day narrating instance of the novel sees him as a lonely alcoholic, in a job he hates, in a hotel room in a politically and financially impoverished country. He articulates the traps, both personal and political, in which he finds himself, by displacing his experiences onto a female character who exists in a context in which such traps are not only the norm but the required formula.

Jock's claim to identify with the women in his fantasies, though it could be seen (cynically) as Gray trying to avoid the charges of male chauvinism and exploitation which were bound to be laid against him, stands up to close reading of the text. Bearing in mind Jock's stipulation that in an ideally functioning fantasy his heroines must be abandoned before reaching their climax (p. 29), a rereading of the Janine and Superb stories would suggest that Jock's excitement is not that of the sadistic male villain, but that experienced by the women. In chapter one:

Janine's feeling that she is watching *herself* increases, filling her with a numb, dreamy excitement. The excitement has a spice of fear in it but not much. (p. 24)

In chapter two:

[Superb's] skin tingles and a dreamlike feeling comes to her, for the woman is holding up a white denim, no white suede button-through skirt... (p. 40)

Janine's 'numb, dreamy excitement' and Superb's tingling 'dreamlike feeling' represent the prelude to sexual arousal. Thus the women, although represented as sexual objects, are the narrative subjects of their respective stories; the fantasy narrative is refracted

through the consciousness of Janine or Superb. The women in his fantasies are excited by the moment at which they lose control: 'the moment when the trap starts closing'.

This of course raises another issue regarding the pornographic nature of the novel which perhaps strengthens the case for the prosecution. Jock's fantasies depend upon women being turned on by rape, which could be considered more offensive and potentially dangerous than simply the humiliation and objectification described above. At the hearing on pornography in Minneapolis, a doctor presenting the findings of his research into the links between pornography and sexual violence claimed that exposure to pornographic material, *particularly* that containing the idea that women could be turned on by rape, led to acceptance of these types of myth on the part of the subjects.²⁴

Although such an argument on the part of the anti-pornography lobby may well have some validity, Sara Diamond, writing in *Women Against Censorship*, theorises the phenomenon of women fantasising about rape in a more exploratory and enabling manner:

If we fantasize a partner taking complete control of a sexual encounter, then we are absolved from responsibility for our abandoned behavior. In this way we can mentally break sexual taboos that still remain in place in practice.²⁵

It is this notion of being 'absolved from responsibility' which is crucial to the fantasies in *Janine*. The pleasure and excitement experienced by Jock at the moment when the trap closes emphasises the perverse sense of pleasure which he takes in his own powerlessness. Once the trap is closed there is nothing the 'victim' (whether Jock or Janine) is able to do to change things so (s)he is able to abdicate all responsibility for the situation. Politically, this abdication of responsibility absolves Jock, or the people of Scotland, from admitting participation in the processes which have 'fucked' the nation. The fantasies allow Jock the dual status of both admitting and denying responsibility. Jock retains authorial control of the fantasies, a control denied to his heroines. Thus it is

²⁴Dr. Edward Donnerstein, 'An Outline of the Research', in *Pornography and Sexual Violence: Evidence of the Links*, pp. 11-24 (p. 15).

²⁵Sara Diamond, 'Pornography: Image and Reality', in *Women Against Censorship*, ed. by Varda Burstyn (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1985), p. 51; quoted in Nadine Strossen, *Defending Pornography: Free Speech, Sex and the Fight for Women's Rights* (London: Abacus, 1996), p. 152.

he who creates the trap, but by identifying with the position of the victim he avoids responsibility for it.

Jock's fantasies are dependent upon the helplessness of the individual caught within the trap created by the anonymous power of the institution. His inability to sustain a fantasy about a 'straight-forward rapist', leads instead to his identifying only with 'middle-class rapists who fuck with the help of expensive machines and a corrupted police force and a worldwide financial network' (p. 103). Written into the fantasies is a critique of world capitalism. As he proceeds it becomes evident that the exploitation of women in Jock's fantasies functions explicitly as a metaphor for colonial exploitation. He describes, in Chapter 8, the development of his fantasy persona from a 'a small-time crook to a public benefactor' (p. 122):

We had the capital and could push through the legislation to set up a worldwide chain of completely legal pleasure parlours. Jails and mental hospitals are full of sexually desirable women confined there because they have been too greedy, too active, too eccentric, too stupid to obey or cunningly twist the rules of conventional society. (p. 120)

Jock justifies this system of institutionalised prostitution by claiming that the women within these institutions are happier *and healthier*, not only than women in normal prisons and asylums but than women in the world outside (p. 121), an assertion which reflects post-colonial critics' preoccupation with the structures which support colonialism. Edward Said holds that:

Both [imperialism and colonialism] are supported and perhaps even impelled by impressive ideological formations that include notions that certain territories and people *require* and beseech domination...²⁶

The controlling motif of Jock's fantasies, the trap, functions as a political allegory, and the female body replaces the body of the colonised. In one fantasy, Superb is forced to wear black leather thigh-boots, one black leather sleeve for her arms and a tight corset. 'The Doctor' elucidates:

²⁶ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), p. 8.

The tight enclosing pressure on limbs, waist, throat confirms our Superb of her bodily presence making her intensely of the *here* and *now*. This pressure is experienced as a painful insult but the sensitive flesh and muscles will soon feel the constriction as a form of support... (pp. 180-1)²⁷

The trap is most visually articulated in the description of various forms of bondage imposed on the heroines of Jock's fantasies. One staple ingredient of the fantasies is that near the beginning the heroine is told what to wear by her agent / lover / procurer (p. 13; p. 31; p. 323). In the fantasies, the women are placed in situations in which they are removed from all other contexts, belongings and social paraphernalia which might define them. They are introduced into a new, constructed social situation where they are reinvented by the sexy clothes they are wearing. While Superb's bondage functions as a metaphor for the political bondage of the colonised, Gray extends his exploration of the theme of constrictive clothing across genders to explore the social bondage enforced by clothes which is experienced by Jock personally, and the role of this social bondage in both self and national formation.

Under the marginal heading 'Clothes that are bondage', Jock's description of Janine's attire gives way to an autobiographical passage relating the way in which his mother's choice of clothes for him dictated to a certain extent the pattern of his educational and social life (p. 18). Much later, Jock acknowledges the ultimate benefit of this to him: 'My mother, by a skilful use of clothing and emotional blackmail, trapped me into doing my homework so as to free me from the long town and she succeeded' (p. 215). Just as the dungarees worn by the 'rough boys', the colliers' sons, in Jock's childhood make an appearance in the fantasies on the person of Superb, a symbol of illicit dirtiness and roughness (p. 75), so the notion of clothes as a trap, but a trap which is ultimately beneficial, informs the central motif of the fantasies. The sexy paraphernalia in which Jock attires each of his heroines is the visual manifestation of the trap in which they find themselves. Jock's description of his childhood experience

²⁷Compare Albert Memmi: 'a social institution defines and establishes concrete situations which close in on the colonized, weigh in on him until they bend his conduct and leave their marks on his face'. *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (New York: The Orion Press, 1965), p. 90.

of clothing again implies a certain security in the removal of responsibility. The idea of security, particularly given Jock's job with 'National Security Ltd', is closely linked to the idea of a *trap*.²⁸ Both the sado-masochistic and slavery connotations of bondage become transformed into this sense of security.

The clothes which Jock imagines for the women in his fantasies both display and disguise their bodies. The clothes which he is compelled to wear by his mother and his father express and enforce a conformity to conventions, and, in the case of the three identical suits his father selects for his college career, a certain anonymity which corresponds to Jock's assertion that Scots find it difficult to display themselves:

The Scots could not play this game. It was not a game in which we could be beaten, like football, it was a game in which we displayed ourselves, like beachball, and we had been taught *not* to display ourselves, taught that it was wrong to talk in class, unless the teacher asked a question and we knew exactly the answer he wanted. (p. 256)

Jock's (temporary) escape from societally imposed conventions happens as a result of his friendship with Alan and his relationship with Denny. These two characters function in a sense as spiritual parents to Jock. Alan fulfils a 'masculine' father-like role in expanding Jock's intellectual, cultural and social horizons by example. Denny, on the other hand, provides the security and comfort of home, and functions for Jock as a surrogate mother. The security of this period of his life which involves both Denny and Alan is characterised by Jock's unembarrassed descriptions of sex with Denny and his delight in her (and his own) naked body. This alternative home life is characterised by nakedness, rather than clothes.

When Jock leaves Denny, however, upon discovering her in the act of cheating on him, she is not naked:

²⁸Cf. *Janine*, p. 45: '... suddenly the wrists linked behind her feel like security, for what may her hands do when they are free?'; and p. 185:

'surveillancealarmdefencetrap
securefamilysalarytrap
lovesecuritysex
happiness
trap'

The woman behind him, Denny of course, was not completely nude either. She wore a skirt I recognised with unfamiliar net stockings and high-heeled shoes. (p. 289)

These stockings and shoes make recurrent appearances in Jock's subsequent fantasies. Within the fantasies he evades the description of women's bodies unfettered by sexy accessories. His fetishisation of their clothes means that he does not have to contemplate their bodies. Jock's initial reluctance to even name Denny when she surfaces in his memory is the most obvious indication of his stated intention to remember nothing real. His naked memories of Denny are disguised by his fantasies of Janine, Superb, and others, and his concomitant concentration on their 'clothes that are bondage':

She gags Superb, unfastens, removes her dungarees and I must not imagine her nakedness the nakedness of women does not excite me it stuns dazzles light pours from their nakedness I have never been able to face it since I got rid of Denny... (p. 179)

Jock's innocent home-life with Denny, in the 'realist' section of the novel, introduces a very different representation of woman as nation.

IV

Jock's memories of this ideal period of his life during which he lived with Denny may well be tinted with nostalgia, and his memories of Denny may be no less of a construction than his constructions of the women in his fantasies. Here Denny is constructed in terms of 'home' and her body described as a landscape which is at once sexual and maternal. She functions in the never fully defined role of earth mother. Her body is considered good and is at once exalted and familiarised. Jock says:

Women's bodies do that for me when I am allowed to hold them and I stop being nervous. I am not referring to fucking, I am referring to THE LANDSCAPE OF HOME. Every woman has her own unique scale of proportions but the order of these warm soft slopes and

declivities is the same, and whenever I am allowed to explore one of these landscapes I feel I have never been away from it. [...] the familiarity of Denny's thighs, buttocks, stomach, glens, glades, banks and braes must have been mine when I was born. (p. 167)

Jock's description of Denny's body as 'the landscape of home' raises a whole host of questions which go further than simply the representation of the body as landscape and landscape as the body. Jock has already described every human body as a potential sexual landscape (p. 48), but this passage, while continuing the body as landscape analogy, introduces the factor of *home*: the body as home, the landscape as home. The sense of security and comfort Jock enjoys in Denny's company, described in terms of landscape, echoes his earlier description of his mother as 'not a person but the climate I grew up in' (p. 50). For Jock, 'home' and 'mother' connote each other and his perception of home and nationhood is intertwined with his experience of female bodies.

In *Why Scots Should Rule Scotland*, Gray proposes that 'landscape is what defines most lasting nations.'²⁹ In 1982, *Janine*, it is Denny who says, 'Surely geography is the most important thing? [...] Because if you don't know geography you don't know where you are, so everything you think is wrong' (p. 214). The young and inexperienced Jock dismisses Denny as naive, and even in the present of the novel does not seem to entirely understand her point, saying 'Geography no longer matters' (p. 214). But Denny's words are applicable to Jock's own life. Denny herself, whose 'thighs, buttocks, stomach' are imprinted with the 'glens, glades, banks and braes' of Scotland, provides Jock with a geography that tells him both where and who he is. It is this knowledge of himself and his 'landscape of home' which he has lost in the present day of the novel. Jock is literally disorientated in that he does not seem to know what day it is or in which small Scottish town his hotel room is located. This failure to locate himself in time and space is representative of the fact that everything in his life is wrong and his realisation on page 315 that he is actually in Greenock may be read as indicating that he has reached some sort of internal resolution. If Denny is Jock's 'landscape of

²⁹Alasdair Gray, *Why Scots Should Rule Scotland 1997: A Carnapious History of Britain from Roman Times Unil Now* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1997), p. 1.

home', it can be seen that the disorientation of Jock's life subsequent to his desertion of Denny is related to his loss of the stable background which she provided for him.

Jock's fantasies are not set in Scotland, but in America because, says Jock, 'Seen from Selkirk America is a land of endless pornographic possibility' (p. 17). The fact that the fantasies are set in an America constructed by Jock himself is made clear as Jock struggles to find the correct American idiom for his characters to use. S.J. Boyd suggests this is because 'glamour is elsewhere [...] the repressive atmosphere of Scotland no doubt helps explain Jock's retreat into voyeuristic fantasy.'³⁰ However there would seem to be more to it than that. Jock explains the location of his fantasies on the grounds that 'my most precious fantasies have been American, from Cowboys and Indians and Tarzan till . . . *The Dirty Dozen? Apocalypse Now?*' (p. 17). This is related to the oft-quoted passage in *Lanark* regarding imagination and Glasgow:

... nobody imagines living here [...] think of Florence, Paris, London and New York. Nobody visiting them for the first time is a stranger because he's already visited them in paintings, novels, history books and films. But if a city hasn't been used by an artist not even the inhabitants live there imaginatively [...] when our imagination needs exercise we use [the cinema and the library] to visit London, Paris, Rome under the Caesars, the American West at the turn of the century, anywhere but here and now.³¹

America offers an imaginative escape from the restrictions of Jock's existence: it is a fantasy landscape, a landscape of the imagination, because it exists for Jock through films and books. The physical and imaginative distance of America from Scotland allows it to function as a fantasy landscape, whereas Scotland is too much associated with Jock's concept of home. Scotland is the landscape for real life, real sex, relationships with real women. Scotland is the eternal landscape represented by Denny. As Grassic Gibbon's Chris Caledonia perceived that nothing endured but the land,³² so Denny's identification with the landscape implies both a certain permanence and a kind

³⁰Boyd, p. 109.

³¹*Lanark*, p. 243.

³²Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *A Scots Quair* (1932-34; Edinburgh: Canongate, 1995), p. 119.

of reality. To fantasise about the rape of women in Scotland would be to compromise his suppressed memories of the 'home' (or the woman) which he has lost. The fact that Jock's mental life is consciously located so far from Scotland makes visible the distance between his ideal landscape of home and the customised and distorted land of his fantasies.

Compared to Janine, Denny is a 'real' woman. She exists as a memory as opposed to a fantasy. Jock's natural and uncomplicated relation to Denny is connected to a 'natural' relation to nation, and a nation which is defined, unchangeably, by the contours of its landscape. At one point Jock realises that the map of Scotland resembles 'a fat messy woman with a surprisingly slender waist' (p. 281): this identification is extended to the geography of Scotland in its entirety. Janine and the other fantasy women, however, are invented, and their imagined bodies function as metaphors for more abstract and political processes. There are two different uses of the body of woman here, and two different ways of representing a nation. The nation is seen either as an immemorial and eternal space to which we have a natural connection, or as constructed by arbitrary political processes. In simplistic terms, the body of Denny represents the romantic idea of the nation, while the body of Janine represents the politicised body of the state. The exploitation of women in the fantasies functions fairly explicitly as an allegory for colonial exploitation and specifically the exploitation of Scotland. This is, in the language of the fantasies, a perverted and unnatural situation. However, by the very nature of the fantasies, such exploitation is equally constructed and has the potential to be changed.

The political 'trap' is illustrated by the bondage clothes dressing the naked bodies of the women in the fantasies. Jock's refusal to imagine a naked woman because she (and the memory of Denny) will be 'too dazzling' means that his ideal landscape is forever fettered by the perversions and injustices of political processes which abuse, distort and diminish. But there is always the potential to remove the bondage to reveal the naked and true self. This self may be Jock, or may be his true vision of Scotland. As god admonishes Jock: 'come out of the sexy accessories Jock McLeish! We know you're hiding in there' (p. 331).

Jock has already informed us that the true moment of excitement in the fantasies is 'the moment when the trap starts closing and the victim feels the torture of being in two minds [...] And I was right to be excited by that moment because it is the moment when, with courage, we change things' (p. 194). Janine's final appearance in the novel is a rewriting of that moment:

'Act calm,' thinks Janine. 'Pretend this is just an ordinary audition.'
And then she thinks, 'Hell, no! Surprise them. Shock them. Show them more than they ever expected to see.'

Standing easily astride she strips off her shirt and drops it, strips off her skirt and drops it, kicks off her shoes and stands naked but for her net stockings. I need the stockings. A wholly naked woman is too dazzling so she stands naked but for fishnet stockings, hands on hips and feeling an excited melting warmth between her thighs. She is ready for anything. (p. 341)

The striptease is a transition between clothing and nudity. It is the fact of this transition which makes it erotic.³³ Janine's striptease embodies the process of transition from bondage to freedom. Instead of following instructions she takes control of the situation in which she finds herself, literally displaying herself in the way Jock claimed that Scots find difficult. As Janine is, to a certain extent, a projection of Jock's own psyche, this transition is a reflection of changes in Jock's own life. He has written a letter of resignation from his job and does not know quite what the future will bring:

I will stand on the platform an hour from now, briefcase in hand, a neater figure than most but not remarkable. [...] Nobody will guess what I am going to do. I do not know it myself. (p. 341)

Jock, like Janine, has asserted control over his situation. The extent of Janine's assertion of control is debatable, however. As George Donaldson and Alison Lee point out:

³³Mario Perniola, *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, ed. by Michel Feher and others (New York: Urzone Inc., 1989), II, 237-265 (p. 237).

While her final appearance is marked by her decision to flaunt her sexuality, she is still, in this context, a commodity, and still at the mercy of the audience.³⁴

Janine's behaviour may have changed but she remains a character in a world created by Jock, and he retains ultimate (authorial) control. Jock's authorial intervention to the effect that she must wear stockings because a naked woman is too dazzling highlights the fact that she is still not an autonomous character in her own right. The fact that Janine does not remove these stockings would seem to indicate that Jock has not returned entirely to the prelapsarian nakedness which characterised his time with Denny. The transitional striptease is not yet complete, for Janine, or for Jock, or, we must suppose, for Scotland.

V

As a representation of colonial or institutional exploitation of nations and the citizens of nations, the metaphors of bondage, rape and prostitution of the fantasies in *1982, Janine* provide vivid propagandist material. And by paralleling this vision of the perversion of state processes with the 'landscape of home' interlude with Denny, Gray makes very obvious the gap between our ideal perceptions of nation and the potential for political processes to corrupt this ideal. It remains debatable whether it is valid to use women's bodies as this type of 'index of the state of the nation'.³⁵ However, it is arguable that Gray also makes visible the uses to which women's bodies are put in the iconography of Western society. While many people find the fantasies disagreeable, one of their functions is to make obvious the way in which the female body is objectified. In this sense Gray deconstructs the imagery surrounding the trope of nation as woman. However, this conscious use of the female body sits rather uneasily with the natural identification of woman with nation as home embodied by Denny. Gray does not seem to be interrogating his use of the bodies of women in this section, and to some extent

³⁴George Donaldson and Alison Lee, 'Is Eating People Really Wrong? Dining with Alasdair Gray', *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 15 (1995), 155-161 (p. 157).

³⁵Florence Stratton, *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 41.

the effect of the metaphor of political / sexual exploitation in the fantasies rests upon a belief in the prior existence of a natural relationship between the female body, the home and the nation. Here Gray's construction and deconstruction of the trope seems curiously unresolved, and seems almost to suggest that the political metaphor depends upon a romantic belief in woman as nation. Gray pursues and further complicates this dual construction of nation as woman in *Poor Things*, where the political body and the natural body of the nation become one in the figure of 'Bella Caledonia'.

Chapter Eight

Imagination Objectified: Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things*

I .

'Bella Caledonia', combining in her person both the body politic and the romantic woman as nation, further distorts the image of woman as nation which at first sight she appears to encapsulate. Although the division of *Janine* into 'fantasy' and 'realism' may be somewhat simplistic, it is a useful way to categorise the various strands of Jock's thought. Such a division continues in *Poor Things*, although here the fantastic and realistic readings complement and contradict each other, in the manner of Hogg's *Justified Sinner*. *Poor Things* is a parody of a Victorian novel, which Gray constructs out of three overlapping narratives. The volume is edited and annotated by a fictional editor called Alasdair Gray. The central narrative is the story of the literal physical creation of a woman called Bella Baxter, by the surgeon Godwin Baxter, from the body of a woman and the brain of a child, and is written by her husband Archibald McCandless, M.D. This is followed by a letter by the woman herself, styling herself Victoria McCandless, refuting the entire story of her *Frankenstein*-like construction and giving a perfectly realistic account of her arrival in the house of Godwin Baxter in Glasgow. *Poor Things* pursues the theme of male 'construction' of the bodies of women, addressed in *Janine*, by presenting us with a woman who is, in one narrative, literally constructed by the expertise of surgeon Godwin Baxter. The dual narratives of *Poor Things* allow at least two readings of the novel: the fantastic narrative, based on McCandless's account of the Frankenstein construction of Bella; and the realist narrative, based on Victoria's more straightforward account of her life. Both readings, however, prompt questions regarding women being constructed to correspond to male fantasies, as *either* Bella is constructed by Godwin Baxter, *or* the entire tale is a fabrication of Archie McCandless. In either case, Bella functions as the incarnation of men's fantasies: she is a literalisation of the fantasies in 1982, *Janine*. In its focus on

how selves are made *Poor Things* returns to some of the concerns of *Janine* and suggests that all the characters in the book — and by extension all human beings — are constructed by upbringing or environment. Gray's exploration of the 'making' of the self can be seen in the chapter titles: 'Making Me', which describes the childhood and upbringing of Archibald McCandless; 'Making Godwin Baxter', which suggests the literal construction of Baxter; 'Making a Maniac' which is a letter from Duncan Wedderburn describing his elopement with Bella and charting his descent into insanity; and 'Making a Conscience', a letter from Bella herself in which we witness her growing sense of social awareness.¹ Gray emphasises that we are all constructed both in the sense of what we become and in the sense of how we are perceived by other people. In *Poor Things* both these types of construction focus primarily on Bella.

Gray's use of the nation-as-woman iconography here is not as insistent as in *Janine*. Indeed, he leaves it very much up to the reader whether he or she picks up the 'Bella Caledonia' ball and runs with it, or not. There are many other paths of enquiry to pursue from *Poor Things*, and the book's multi-layered narratives mean that it is able to support — and indeed encourage — a number of different readings and interpretations. The title 'Bella Caledonia' appears under a portrait of Bella on page 45 of the novel. This is a blatant incitement to locate Bella in the tradition of women as nation, but if we were to dismiss the nickname as mere hyperbole, as indeed Victoria's letter insists that we must, then it would be possible to read the entire novel without enforcing a nation-as-woman reading upon it.

Gray never disguises his commitment to the Scottish nationalist cause. Although at some times his style is more polemical than others, there is a strong suggestion that the 'matter of Scotland' can be read throughout his work. The slogan — 'work as if you live in the early days of a better nation' — recurs in a number of his books. It occurs first in *Unlikely Stories, Mostly*, under the dustjacket of the first edition and on the first page of the paperback edition, accompanying a picture of a topless woman who appears to be a mermaid with a tartan tail, perhaps the first manifestation of Scotland as a woman in Gray's work. In 1982, *Janine* the phrase is spoken by God to

¹ Alasdair Gray, *Poor Things* (London: Bloomsbury, 1992), p. 9; p. 12; p. 75; p. 103. Further references to this edition will appear in parentheses in the text.

Jock, in *Poor Things* it appears, again, under the dustjacket.² This simultaneous demonstration and concealment of the nationalist moral to Gray's stories again seems to give us the option whether or not to pursue their political implications. Just as *Poor Things* offers us the choice between a 'blurb for a popular paperback' and a 'blurb for a high-class hardback', so it also lets us choose whether or not to leave the dustjacket on. But once we have looked beneath the dustjacket, and seen not only 'work as if you live in the early days of a better nation' but the pattern of Saltires and thistles which surrounds it, this gives much greater weight to a reading in which Bella is Bella Caledonia, and her Frankenstein construction may be read as a political metaphor.

In *Why Scots Should Rule Scotland* (1992), Gray writes:

Since the 18th century sculptors and political cartoonists have often represented nations as single people, usually robust and beautiful women with names like La France, Italia, Germania. If Scotland were so depicted the head would have to be shown attached to the body by a longer neck than the poor lady's height; moreover the head would also be attached by a neck of normal length to a different and much stronger body. No wonder many Scottish limbs and organs are underfed, numb and disconnected from each other. Too many of them cannot act without orders from a remote head which is distinctly absent-minded toward them because it must first direct a far more urgent set of limbs and organs.³

This passage does several things: it defines and makes visible the tradition of representing nations as women and considers placing a representation of Scotland as a woman within that tradition. It also links again, as in Gray's comment on Hobbes, the two metaphors of woman as nation and body as state. In doing so it suggests that in any political metaphor about Scotland in which Scotland takes on the traditional form of a beautiful woman, the beautiful woman must necessarily be deformed in some way. The anthropomorphic vision of the commonwealth is linked to an organic conception of that

²Alasdair Gray, *Unlikely Stories, Mostly* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984); 1982. *Janine* (London: Cape, 1984), p. 185.

³Alasdair Gray, *Independence: Why Scots Should Rule Scotland* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1992), pp. 58-9.

state. From this it follows that disorder in the state can be represented as a sickness. The idea of ‘unity of diversity’ is dependent upon each member of the state performing his or her function and all parts working together. If each part does not know its place and do its job then the notion of a deformed body (of state) develops.⁴ If a nation’s political system is personified in terms of human anatomy, a nation whose political system is malfunctioning is then personified as a monster. In fact, Gray suggests in the above quotation that she must be deformed in two ways at the same time. Gray demonstrates the political monstrosity of Scotland being remotely governed by a parliament too far from the body of the people to respond to their needs. Such a deformed figure would, however, have been rather difficult to incorporate into a work of fiction. Bella’s ‘tall, beautiful and full-bodied’ exterior (p. 29) qualifies her for the position of figurehead of nation, but her internal construction allows her to function as the incarnation of the monstrous and deformed body of state. The placing of her infant brain within her adult body, on which her ‘monstrous’ construction depends, allows Gray to demonstrate the metaphorical distance between her head and her body without using the physical monsters he describes above.

In *Poor Things*, unlike *Janine*, the woman-as-nation theme is first suggested to us through the romantic description of a woman who represents ‘natural’ Scotland. In the ‘Bella Caledonia’ portrait the emphasis is on external constructions of femininity — dress and appearance — and also on context and connotations. The positioning of the figure and the background of landscape in the Bella Caledonia portrait recalls the Mona Lisa. Bella’s landscape is recognisably Scottish, however, containing mountains and the Forth rail bridge, just as the *Leviathan*-esque frontispiece to Book Four of *Lanark* has a definably Scottish landscape. The composition of the portrait is such that the lines of Bella’s body seem to be a continuation of the lines of the landscape behind her. Like Denny in *Janine*, Bella is related to the landscape, and in the external physical description of her, facing the ‘Bella Caledonia’ portrait her body is glorified:

She shone before me like a rainbow’s end but solid, tall, elegant. [...]

Her eyes were golden brown, her dress crimson silk with a jacket of

⁴Leonard Barkan, *Nature’s Work of Art: The Human Body as Image of the World* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975), p. 61; p. 79.

sky-blue velvet. She wore a purple toque, snow-white gloves and the fingers of her left hand twirled the amber knob of a parasol whose slim shaft, slanting over her shoulders, spun a buttercup-yellow silk dome with a grass-green fringe behind her head. With these colours her black hair and eyebrows, sallow skin and bright golden-brown eyes seemed dazzlingly foreign and right. (p. 44)

The positive representations of women in both *Poor Things* and *Janine* are frequently, though not exclusively, connected with landscape. The colours of the description are those of nature, a particularly Scottish nature. The purple of heather, the amber, the sky-blue and the snow-white could come straight from a Scottish Tourist Board leaflet. The emphasis on the beauty of Bella's appearance throughout the novel and the attraction men feel towards her grant her an archetypal feminine status, and indeed Duncan Wedderburn, in his letter to Baxter, associates her with a range of mythical female figures, including Eve and Helen of Troy (p. 94). In 1982, *Janine*, the idealisation of the landscape of Scotland in the form of the female body is paralleled by the distorted pornographic representation of the female body which functions as political allegory. In *Poor Things*, these conflicting constructions of femininity exist within the one body: the distortion here is that Bella herself has not been created in a 'natural' way.

II

The 'monstrous' construction of Bella in *Poor Things* owes much to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), and in the acknowledgements to the novel Gray cites two other connected sources: '*Ariel Like a Harpy*, Christopher Small's study of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and [...] Liz Lochhead's *Blood and Ice*, a play on the same subject'.⁵ The fantastic narrative of *Poor Things* is based on the fact that Bella Baxter was constructed from the body of a dead woman and the brain of her unborn child by the surgeon Godwin Baxter. The *Frankenstein* influence extends to the biography of Mary Shelley, particularly as represented by Small and Lochhead in the two works

⁵Christopher Small, *Ariel Like a Harpy: Shelley, Mary and Frankenstein* (London: Gollancz, 1972); Liz Lochhead, *Blood and Ice* (Edinburgh: Salamander Press, 1982).

cited. Many details from the life of Mary Shelley make their way into *Poor Things*, and many of the themes raised by Small and Lochhead seem to inform the development of Gray's novel. Lochhead in particular emphasises the extent to which Shelley herself was constructed by her companions — her husband Percy Bysshe Shelley and Byron. Small concentrates on the influence of Mary Shelley's father William Godwin on her life and work.⁶ Godwin was a rather distant parent and at the age of fifteen Mary was sent to stay with William Baxter and his family in Dundee. It should be noted that Bella's creator has the name Godwin Bysshe Baxter, which as well as having the convenient abbreviation 'God' is also a compound of the three men who had a formative influence on Mary Shelley. Echoes of Mary Shelley's life can be seen in Bella's unorthodox upbringing, the absence of any mother-figure,⁷ and her pseudo-deification of the father-figure in her life. And the circumstances in which Bella's body comes into Baxter's hands, the recovery of the body of a pregnant woman from the Clyde, would appear to be derived from the suicide of Shelley's first wife, Harriet, who drowned herself in the Serpentine in December 1816, reportedly while pregnant.⁸ Aspects of Mary Shelley's *Monster* and Mary Shelley herself meet in Bella: she is 'a fusion of contradictions'.⁹ Small and Lochhead are in no way unusual: much *Frankenstein* criticism focuses on the influence of Shelley's life and upbringing on her novel. *Frankenstein* himself is generally considered to embody many of the characteristics of her husband, while Byron has been identified (notably, in this case, by Lochhead) with the monster.

In *Frankenstein* the Monster is generally seen as embodying an aspect of Frankenstein himself. Small in particular makes much of the fact that Shelley achieves this effect without recourse to the supernatural:

⁶*Frankenstein* is dedicated 'To William Godwin, author of Political Justice, Caleb Williams, &c.' Small identifies Godwinian echoes in *Frankenstein*: he sees Godwin's view that education determines character in the description of Frankenstein's family; and traces the influence of *Caleb Williams* on *Frankenstein*. Small, pp. 72-73; pp. 76-78.

⁷Mary Shelley's mother, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97), author of *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), died eleven days after Mary's birth, of puerperal fever.

⁸Small, p. 178.

⁹The phrase is from Gilleen Somerville-Arjat and Rebecca E. Wilson, eds., *Sleeping with Monsters: Conversations with Scottish and Irish Women Poets* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990), p. xi.

The Monster [...] is manifestly a product, or aspect, of his maker's psyche: *he is a psychic phenomenon given objective, or 'actual' existence.* [...] the profound effect achieved by Mary lay in showing the Monster as the product of modern science; made, not by enchantment, i.e., directly by the unconscious, an 'imaginary' being, but through a process of scientific discovery, i.e., imagination objectified.¹⁰

In *Poor Things* Bella is described as Baxter's *anima*, as in *1982, Janine*, Janine can be read as a projection of Jock's psyche, and is indeed described by him in such terms — 'Oh Janine, my silly soul, come to me now' (*Janine*, p. 341). But Bella is also, like Janine, a projection of national and political anxieties. Unlike Janine, though, she has been literally made by her male creator, rather than existing simply within his imagination. In this sense she too can be described as 'imagination objectified'.

The Baxter-Bella relationship has an explicitly sexual aspect which is not present in *Frankenstein*, although there may be a homoerotic subtext to Frankenstein's fixation on his creature.¹¹ Baxter's creation of Bella is inspired by his own paradigm of ideal womanhood, his childhood obsession with a picture of Ophelia in *Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare* (p. 39), just as Jock created Janine to look like Jane Russell in *The Outlaw* (*Janine*, p. 14; p. 19). Bella's physical attractiveness differentiates her from Frankenstein's monster. The monstrous appearance of Frankenstein's monster is transferred in *Poor Things* onto Baxter, and there is a strong hint in the novel that Baxter may himself have been created by his father using the same techniques which he used to reanimate Bella.¹² Baxter is a fusion of Frankenstein and the monster: he fulfils the promise inherent in Frankenstein's dying words to Walton: 'another may succeed'¹³ and at the same time is the embodiment of the Monster's monstrous appearance. Yet the word 'monster' is only used in relation to Baxter four times in the course of *Poor*

¹⁰Small, p. 215.

¹¹See Anne K. Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), p. 122; William Veeder, *Mary Shelley and Frankenstein: The Fate of Androgyny* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 91.

¹²In her letter disputing the fantastic narrative Victoria McCandless writes: '[Archie] wrote a book suggesting that [...] God had always been as Archie knew him, because Sir Colin had manufactured God by the Frankenstein method.' *Poor Things*, p. 274.

¹³Shelley, p. 187.

Things, and only *after* he has created Bella. As soon as McCandless understands that Baxter has created Bella using the brain of a child, Baxter carries him upstairs and McCandless ‘thought [he] was in the grip of a monster’ (p. 31). He then goes on to challenge Baxter: ‘How dare you talk of your lovely niece in that monstrous way.’ (p. 36), which sets up the opposition between Bella’s exterior ‘loveliness’ and Baxter’s monstrous description of her creation. McCandless later, during a conversation about Bella’s creation, says that he felt ‘more of a monster than [Baxter] was’ (p. 40), and the description of Bella opposite the Bella Caledonia portrait is juxtaposed by a description of Baxter:

if she seemed a glorious dream Baxter loomed beside her like a nightmare. When apart from Baxter my memory always reduced his monstrous bulk and shaggy boyish head to something more probable...
(pp. 44-7)

He is described as both ‘dwarfish’ and ‘ogreish’ in the first physical description of him (p. 12), and his physical abnormalities are hinted at, but it is only in relation to Bella that the loaded word ‘monster’ is actually used. In *Poor Things* the word seems to be reserved more for the creator who flouts the laws of nature than for the creature so made. Frankenstein’s Monster appears monstrous, and his appearance recalls to his maker the monstrosity of presuming to create him in the first place. The creation of Bella can be seen as monstrous in that it is contrary to nature, but Bella cannot be physically described as monstrous because she is beautiful: it is Baxter who is described as a monster because he has done this monstrous thing.

Lochhead’s *Blood and Ice* exploits the idea of women as monsters, drawing on feminist readings of *Frankenstein* which suggest that Mary Shelley intended the monster and its outcast state to function as a metaphor for the situation of women. Drawing on Angela Carter in *The Sadeian Woman* (1979), Lochhead’s Mary Shelley says:

Oh Freedom in a man may be all very well, but...

A Free Woman is a loose woman.

A Free Woman in the society of the Unfree will be...

A monster.

In an unfree society the worst monster will be a loose woman.¹⁴

This indeed corresponds to the sexually liberated and powerful figure of Bella Baxter in *Poor Things*. Bella is poised between beauty and monstrosity. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar identify 'the vexed and vexing polarities of angel and monster, sweet dumb Snow White and fierce mad Queen' as the 'major images literary tradition offers women,' and argue that therefore the woman writer experiences writing as a disease and herself as a monster.¹⁵ Bella indeed is strung between these two polarities, described by Wedderburn as his 'Angelic Fiend' (p. 87). The anthology of Scottish and Irish women's poetry, *Sleeping with Monsters* (1990), puts a Celtic twist on the association of women with monsters. The editor writes in her introduction:

Monsters symbolize a fusion of contradictions. [...] The power of monsters is that they jar us out of our own realities. They can scare us, and they can encourage new emotional and conceptual possibilities; they can create, and are created from, both fear and freedom. The woman poet who seeks to name herself and the world around her necessarily sleeps with monsters.¹⁶

Gray goes one step further than Shelley in creating a female monster. It is the fear of female sexuality and consequent reproduction which prevents Frankenstein from creating a mate for his Monster:

she, who in all probability was to become a thinking and reasoning animal, might refuse to comply with a compact made before her creation. [...] one of the first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils will be

¹⁴Lochhead, *Blood and Ice*, p. 31. Angela Carter wrote: 'A free woman in an unfree society will be a monster. Her freedom will be a condition of personal privilege that deprives those on which she exercises it of her own freedom. The most extreme kind of this deprivation is murder'. Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* (London: Virago, 1979), p. 27.

¹⁵Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, 'Infection in the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship', in *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991), pp. 289-300 (p. 289).

¹⁶Rebecca E. Wilson, 'Introduction', in *Sleeping with Monsters*, pp. xi-xv (p. xi). The title *Sleeping with Monsters* comes from Adrienne Rich, who wrote: 'A thinking woman sleeps with monsters. / The beak that grips her, she becomes...' Adrienne Rich, *Snapshots Of A Daughter-In-Law* (1963).

propagated upon the earth, who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror.¹⁷

In *Frankenstein* it is the *potential* capacity of the female monster both to reproduce and to reason for herself which is a threat. The male monster is created: Frankenstein does not consider the consequences of his actions; and then the monster goes on to act on his own account. The female monster, however, exists only as a potential space which Frankenstein and the reader fill with predictions and preconceptions, just as Bella's body exists for the men in the novel as a space to be filled with preconceptions of virtue or vice, and the infancy of her brain within her adult body makes it a space to be filled with the thoughts of others. But she does fulfil the threat of becoming a thinking and reasoning animal: the first woman doctor to graduate from Glasgow University, no less (p. x). Frankenstein's fears about creating a female monster centre on his lack of knowledge of the mysterious and dangerous 'disposition' of the female, and Small suggests that 'though reason and knowledge may put life into men, women must be the work of God.'¹⁸ As indeed Bella is: Godwin Baxter's nickname invites his assimilation to the divine, which is if anything enhanced by Bella's somewhat dismissive, 'You aren't our father which art in Heaven, God' (p. 52). McCandless tells us that he stopped believing in 'God, Heaven, Eternal Pity et cetera' (p. 37) after reading *The Origin of Species*, and Bella's definition of god is 'a handy name for all and everything. [...] But the wholly-est bit of god is movement, because it keeps stirring things to make new ones' (pp. 134-5). Godwin Baxter, then, could represent a new god in the form of science.

The myth of Prometheus, which inspired both Mary Shelley (*Frankenstein* is subtitled 'The Modern Prometheus') and her husband, also evidently fascinates Gray. His short story 'Prometheus' in the collection *Unlikely Stories, Mostly* (1983) is about a French poet, M. Pollard, who undertakes to write *Prometheus Unbound* (apparently unaware that Shelley had already done so).¹⁹ His summary of his work describes a

¹⁷Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. by Paddy Lyons and Philip Gooden (1818; London and Rutland: Everyman, 1994), p. 142.

¹⁸Small, p. 166; p. 50.

¹⁹Alasdair Gray, 'Prometheus', *Unlikely Stories, Mostly*, pp. 197-232. The artwork throughout this story links it to Gray's other work: the Mother Earth picture (p. 222) recalls the dustjacket of *Lanark*; and the picture of 'the crucified Prometheus', which both begins and ends the story, is that on the front cover of

confrontation between God and the titan Prometheus, a confrontation which takes place *on the body* of a Mother Earth figure. The Prometheus story links the themes of creation, taboo and gender. Prometheus fashioned the bodies of men, although he is more widely known for having stolen from Zeus the secret of how to make fire, without which mankind could not have survived.²⁰ As punishment Zeus bound Prometheus to a rock, accompanied by a vulture to eat out his liver. Prometheus, punished for usurping the role of the gods, is the classical predecessor of Frankenstein. The vengeance exacted by Zeus was not limited to his binding of Prometheus to the rock. Extending his displeasure to humankind, Zeus also sent Pandora, the first woman, and with her the box which contained all the griefs and evil now in the world.²¹ Knowledge and sexuality are here closely connected, as in the Judaeo-Christian creation myth. Bella is cast in the Pandora role of female monster by Duncan Wedderburn, whose religious mania causes him to identify her, largely on the grounds of her sexuality, with, among others, Eve, Delilah, Helen of Troy, Cleopatra and Salome.

III

In *Poor Things* we are constantly reminded of the purported literal anatomical construction of Bella by the anatomical drawings from Gray's *Anatomy* (Henry Gray — no relation to Alasdair)²² with which the McCandless narrative is embellished. Alasdair Gray's interest in anatomy is also evident in *Lanark*, and in many of his paintings. It also points towards another influence on *Poor Things*, James Bridie's play *The Anatomist* (1931). The play focuses on the surgeon Robert Knox, who unwittingly purchases corpses stolen, and in one instance murdered, by the 'sack-em-up men', Burke and Hare. Like *Frankenstein*, Bridie's play explores what lengths we are prepared to go to for the furtherance of human knowledge, especially if this knowledge

1982, *Janine*. Pollard's despairing cry 'I am Prometheus. I am lonely' (p. 232), could equally well be uttered by Jock in *Janine*.

²⁰Prometheus made the bodies of men though God put life into them. This appears in Roman and Graeco-Roman iconography and passes into Mediaeval Christian iconography. This is an often ignored aspect of the Prometheus myth, to which Christopher Small draws attention. Small, pp. 48-9.

²¹Roger Shattuck, *Forbidden Knowledge: From Prometheus to Pornography* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996).

²²Henry Gray, *Anatomy of the Human Body* (Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger, 1918).

will ultimately be for the benefit of humankind. The concept of anatomy is dissected and we see in the play the themes of life and death, knowledge and sex, anatomy and art which recur in *Poor Things*.²³ Bridie's play even provides Gray with the title of his novel. Towards the end of the first act Dr Knox, in a moment of compassion for humanity, mutters 'Poor things. Poor hearts.'²⁴ For Gray, anatomy functions as a metaphor for his exploration of the way in which people think and act and he perceives this as being of more value than morbid anatomy. As Baxter puts it to McCandless: 'a portrait painter does not learn his art by scraping layers of varnish from a Rembrandt, then slicing off the impasto, dissolving the ground and finally separating the fibres of the canvas' (p. 17).

In *Poor Things*, the 'monstrous' anatomical construction of Bella is focused upon her brain. It is in planting the brain of a baby in the body of an adult woman that Godwin Baxter has defied the laws of nature. This is the way in which Bella Caledonia is deformed, and it raises several problems, both in the interpretation of the dual narratives of the story and in its implications for a political reading of the construction of Bella. In both the fantastic and the 'realist' readings of *Poor Things*, Bella is presented to us as possessing the mind of a child within the body of a sexually mature woman. In the fantastic narrative Baxter literally creates her by transplanting the brain of her baby into her body, but General Blessington equally praises her attributes with a similar metaphor: 'She had the soul of an innocent child within the form of a Circassian houri — irresistible' (p. 215). The suggestion is made that the brain of a child within the body of a woman is the ultimate male fantasy, a literalisation of the fantasies in *Janine*. McCandless confronts Baxter:

You [Baxter] think you are about to possess what men have
hopelessly yearned for throughout the ages: the soul of an innocent,

²³James Bridie, *The Anatomist* (London: Constable, 1931). There is a reference to Bridie's play in *Poor Things*: the 'Notes, Critical and Historical' to *Poor Things* mention a play by Archie McCandless under his pseudonym, 'A Gallowa' Loon'. In a nice touch it is suggested that McCandless in fact influenced Bridie: '1892 *The Resurrectionists*. This five-act play about the Burke and Hare murders is no better than the many other nineteenth-century melodramas based on the same very popular theme. Robert Knox, the surgeon who bought the corpses, is treated more sympathetically than usual, so the play may have influenced James Bridie's *The Anatomist*' (*Poor Things*, p. 300).

²⁴Bridie, p. 24. Gray (through the voice of his fictional editor) is flippant regarding the provenance of the title: 'I have also insisted on renaming the whole book POOR THINGS. *Things* are often mentioned in the story and every single character (apart from Mrs Dinwiddie and two of the General's parasites) is called *poor* or call themselves that sometime or other'. *Poor Things*, p. xiii.

trusting, dependent child inside the opulent body of a radiantly lovely woman. (p. 36)

The inescapable suggestion of paedophilic tendencies is explicitly articulated by Baxter: 'I did it for the reason that elderly lechers purchase children from bawds. [...] my damnable sexual appetites' (p. 68). This somewhat disturbing aspect of Bella's creation is either mitigated or made worse by the fact that Bella's sexuality is recalled and enjoyed by her body, not governed by her brain (p. 36).

Bella's 'elopement' and travel with Wedderburn is described in her letter to Baxter (pp. 105-189), and also in Wedderburn's letter (pp. 77-98). This tour functions as her education in a far more effective way than the education provided by Baxter during their world tour. It is this section that allows Gray the greatest scope for political satire through the arguments of the American evangelist Dr Hooker and the English Tory Mr Astley. We also witness the development of Bella's brain and are given some clues to pursue an allegorical political reading of her construction — Wedderburn, for example describes their sexual encounters as 'Acts of Union' (p. 83). As quoted above, Gray suggested that Scotland's unhappy history meant that an allegorical female figurehead would have to possess a head attached to the body by an extremely long neck, with this head attached at the same time by another neck to a much shorter body. The metaphorical distance between Bella's body and brain might refer to the remote government of Scotland, but rather than focusing on the question of government Gray instead uses Bella to comment on the plight of a country which has lost touch with its sense of history.

To avoid having to explain to Bella the circumstances of her creation, Baxter fabricates a history for her, telling her that her parents died in a South American railway accident; the same accident which occasioned her own amnesia. Bella is aware that her lack of memory means that she is 'only half a woman' and wistfully wishes that she was 'a woman with a past' (p. 61). Her lack of experience means she has to acquire 'a lot of past fast'. Her literary education on her tour with Wedderburn comes in conversation with a Russian gambler who tells her that 'People who care nothing for their country's stories and songs [...] are like people without a past — without a

memory — they are half people' (p. 116). Bella immediately sees a personal parallel in this: 'Imagine how that made me feel! But perhaps, like Russia, I am making up for lost time' (p. 116). The Russian gambler also proposes that a nation is as old as its literature:

'Our literature began with Pushkin, a contemporary of your Walter Scott,' he told me. 'Before Pushkin Russia was not a true nation, it was an administered region [...] Pushkin learned the folktales from his nursemaid, a woman of the people. His novellas and poems made us proud of our language and aware of our tragic past — our peculiar present — our enigmatic future. He made Russia a state of mind — made it real. [...] But you had Shakespeare centuries before Walter Scott.' (pp. 115-6)

This passage firstly proposes that a nation's consciousness can only be as old as its literature, no matter how long it may have existed in statute, that a national literature is the equivalent of a national soul or, as it is put here, a national *mind*. There is an apparent contradiction in what the Russian gambler says, that Pushkin 'made Russia a state of mind — made it real', which returns us to the opposition between anatomy and imagination. Walter Scott is introduced into this disquisition as a contemporary of Pushkin, but what the Russian gambler says of Pushkin and Russia can quite obviously be applied to Scott and Scotland. In his novels Scott provides Scotland with a new version of its history and landscape, in effect creating a cultural heritage. Scotland's present day conception of itself began with Scott's reinvention of Scottishness.

We are provided here with a persuasive reading of the symbolic status of the age of Bella's brain and the age of her body. The development of Bella's mind, as witnessed in her developing speech and ability to write, corresponds (loosely perhaps) to the development of literature itself. The curiously consonantal mode of her earlier writing is compared by McCandless to 'the ancient Hebrews and Babylonians' (p. 56); later her writing takes on the language and form of Shakespeare (p. 101; p. 105 ff). If her body, as Bella Caledonia, is the form of the nation, the land itself, then her mind is the consciousness of the nation as contained in its literature. On the spine of the dustjacket of *Poor Things* we see the head of a woman, dissected to make visible the brain, held

between the pages of an open book. The difference in age between Bella's body and her brain suggests that Scotland's sense of itself, Scotland's national consciousness, is much newer than the actual existence of the nation.

IV

In *Why Scots Should Rule Scotland* (1992) Gray comments that Scotland is the ideal place to set a 'scientific romance', because of the conflicting representations of Scotland as a place of scientific achievement and a place of mythical romantic glens. *Poor Things* would appear to be his attempt at the Scottish scientific romance. The alternative narratives in *Poor Things* present us with a choice, challenging the presumption that there can be one definite truth. Two separate and yet connected constructions of Bella coexist in the text, as (at least) two separate constructions of Scotland coexist. The romantic construction of Bella is complemented by her own realist, pragmatic account of her history; and even within the fantastic narrative we are presented with Bella's external and internal construction. In Victoria's own narrative she is a normal straightforward woman who leaves her first husband, moves to Glasgow, becomes the first woman female to graduate as a medical doctor from Glasgow University and a keen social reformer. No fantastic construction here, except for the extraordinary achievements of *Victoria* McCandless, but a story of a down-to-earth woman who embodies much that is considered typical and admirable about the Scottish character, rather as 'Chris Caledonia' in Gibbon's *A Scots Quair* functions as a representative of national character rather than as an abstract personification of nation. In the realist reading she is shown to be equally constructed, albeit in a less literal sense. Here her character is formed by her overbearing father, by the finishing school she is sent to where 'the nuns taught me to be a rich man's domestic toy' (pp. 258-9), and by her first husband Sir Aubrey de la Pole Blessington, who tries to form her in the image of an ideal and sexless wife. Bella is constructed primarily, though not entirely, by men. In the fantastic reading she is physically constructed by Godwin Baxter, and the development of her mind is aided by the input of Dr Hooker and Mr Astley. In the

realist narrative however, women play a far greater part in her development. Victoria's own letter emphasises the involvement of women in her construction, particularly her linguistic construction:

My own mother had made me Mancunian. The nuns had made me French. The friendship and conversation of Mrs. Dinwiddie gave me the voice and manners of an unprejudiced, straightforward Scotswoman. (p. 261)²⁵

We are all in some sense constructed and history too is necessarily a construction, as the conflicting narratives and concocted historical notes to *Poor Things* clearly illustrate. This emphasis on the construction of history recalls Mitchison's *The Bull Calves* and indeed the notes to *Poor Things* function as a wonderful parodic counterpiece to the notes in Mitchison's novel.

The two narratives of *Poor Things* co-exist and depend upon each other. The fantastic narrative masks the realist narrative just as the romantic external construction of Bella masks the political, anatomical, internal construction of Scotland / Bella. While Frankenstein's monster *appeared* monstrous, Bella's outward appearance is beautiful and good. Her external construction is related both to the Scottish landscape and to the traditional trope of woman as receptacle of the ideals and identity of a nation. She represents the traditionally accepted appearance of Scotland: the romanticised version of Scotland. Her anatomical construction, however, is monstrous in that it is against nature and can be read as representing a monstrous state. She represents the traditionally accepted photogenic and attractive experience of Scotland which masks the monstrous political reality. In *1982, Janine*, it is in the fantasy sections of the novel that women's bodies are used for the purposes of political commentary. In *Poor Things*, it is again in the *fantastic* narrative that the issue of the monstrous construction of Bella arises. There is of course a great deal of overt political commentary in the 'realist' section of *Janine*, as in Victoria's letter in *Poor Things*, but I am focusing specifically on the use of women's bodies in the body-as-state sense. In both novels Gray's use of the female

²⁵In *Frankenstein*, the Monster sees language as 'a godlike science'. Shelley, p. 92. The development of Bella's grasp of language, both spoken and written, is one of the most visible and crucial signs of her growth to mental maturity.

body in this way occurs in the 'fantasy' narratives. In both novels too this political commentary is related to more negative, visceral and distorted constructions of women than the romantic, nostalgic and landscape-related descriptions of the female body seen with Denny in *1982, Janine* and with the Bella Caledonia portrait in *Poor Things*.

There are two separate figurings of nation going on here. The political commentary is connected to the *imagined* body of Bella Baxter as to the imagined bodies of Jock's fantasy women. There exists also the implication of a 'natural' relation to nation which is connected to the 'real' bodies of women. This distinction is made very clearly in *1982, Janine*, and I argued that Gray failed to deconstruct the romantic and idealistic use of the female body to represent a natural national home. In *Poor Things* he manages to complicate matters because Bella's physical body, no matter which narrative we follow, was born in Manchester, which raises questions about the assignation of nationality. The notion of biological destiny which bolsters the natural relation of woman to nation in *Janine* is here overturned. If Bella is indeed Bella Caledonia, it is because she has been constructed in that way. So when the notes quote a fictionalised MacDiarmid describing the elderly Victoria McCandless as 'the one female Scottish healer — apart from Long Mairi of the Glens' (p. 315), this is because it suits MacDiarmid to locate her in a romantic Scottish context. The voice of Victoria warns us against constructing her as Scottish: 'Colleagues who knew nothing of my early years still amuse me sometimes by saying how SCOTTISH I am' (p. 261). She also directs the reader back to the 'Bella Caledonia' portrait and advises us that '[i]f you ignore the Gainsborough hat and pretentious nickname it shows I am a plain, sensible woman' (p. 251). Her body is thus stripped of allegorical significance. The natural body of Scotland is shown to be just as much of a construction and just as open to change as the political body of Scotland. In the text opposite the 'Bella Caledonia' portrait Bella is described as 'dazzlingly foreign and right' which locates her body in the realm of the other and recalls the otherness of MacDiarmid's muse figures. This 'otherness' is further emphasised by Bella's description, by both Wedderburn and General Blessington, as a 'houri' (p. 82; p. 215).

Bella's acknowledged otherness makes us aware of the construction of her role of Scotland as woman. The incompatible narratives of *Poor Things* present us with a spectrum of possibilities for reading the figure of Bella, ranging from the romantic constructions of Archie McCandless to the pragmatic testimony of Victoria herself. The constructed body of Bella Baxter demonstrates all the contradictory versions of nation as woman which are available to us. She is both mother and child, monster and maiden, extraordinary and everyday. Gray uses the body of Bella and her monstrous construction to suggest the political imperfections within Scotland, but at the same time gives us a fairly optimistic reading of what Scotland might achieve. Douglas Gifford describes Bella as 'the girl who becomes the symbolic and potential New Woman of Scotland.'²⁶ Bella's infant brain signifies 'the early days of a better nation', and the social conscience that she demonstrates represents a potential future for Scotland. While Gray makes visible the allegorical use of the female body, and tells a story of Scotland through the body of 'Bella Caledonia', he does not let the female body simplify the story he tells. Rather, through the host of influences and intertextualities contained within *Poor Things*, he creates a body which can never be reduced to symbolising only one thing. We return to MacDiarmid's vision of Scotland as 'one huge incomparable jewel' (CP ii, 1071), one composite muse who was able to symbolise Scotland for him. Bella represents the impossibility of holding the incomparable jewel without it fracturing into its many facets. She can only exist as a series of incompatible impossibilities.

²⁶Douglas Gifford, 'Contemporary Fiction I: Tradition and Continuity', in *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*, ed. by Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp. 579-603 (p. 599).

Chapter Nine

Reproduction and Rejection: Critical and Creative Perspectives on Scotland as Woman

Basic Victim Position Two:

To acknowledge the fact that you are a victim, but to explain this as an act of Fate, the Will of God, the dictates of Biology (in the case of women, for instance), the necessity decreed by History, or Economics, or the Unconscious, or any other large general powerful idea.

— Margaret Atwood¹

I

Bella Caledonia, with the body of a mature woman and the brain of a child, is the epitome of the nation-as-woman figure, as she represents the impossible fusion of all the contradictory versions of the figure. The emotive messages encoded in the figure of the nation as a woman require her to be mother, lover, virgin, victim and whore. These contradictory constructions of female sexuality compound the feminist objection to the metaphor on the grounds that it objectifies and simplifies the bodies of women, and privileges a construction of nationhood in which the nationalist or the citizen is male.

All three authors considered here exemplify the contradictions inherent to the trope. I devoted two chapters to each author as all three of them undergo a marked change of attitude towards the trope. None of the three maintains a consistent version of the nation-as-woman figure, and the split, or fault-line, in the work of each occurs when they try to reproduce the trope in a more coherent form. The split in Mitchison's work is arguably the most profound, as we witness her virtual rejection of the nation-as-woman trope in favour of an attempt to present women as individuals within the narrative of history. Her appropriation of the trope in her idealisation of herself as 'Alba our mother' is ultimately unsustainable in the psychologically realistic context of a historical novel,

¹Margaret Atwood, *Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1972), p. 37.

and although she retains elements of the nation-as-woman apparatus in *The Bull Calves*, the metaphor never dominates the narrative.

MacDiarmid and Gray, on the other hand, do not abandon their use of the metaphor, and the split in the work of each illustrates the tension this causes. *1982, Janine* is in many ways a rewriting of *A Drunk Man*, and although there is no such explicit link between MacDiarmid's later poetry and *Poor Things*, the attitudes of the two writers towards the nation-as-woman trope still follow remarkably similar trajectories. Both Gray and MacDiarmid begin by polarising two female types — the 'earth mother' and the fantasy woman — and then, evidently unable to sustain this division, attempt to reconcile the various aspects of the nation-as-woman allegory into the figure of one woman. In his earlier poetry, MacDiarmid divided the trope into the maternal and physical paradigm of femininity represented by Jean and the ethereal and illicit figure of the 'silken leddy', who also functioned as creative muse. This division is reconciled in his later poetry in one single 'muse' figure, named first the 'Gaelic Muse' and later 'Audh the Deep-Minded'. Although this composite figure is connected to MacDiarmid's desire to 'see Scotland whole', she is diffuse and fragmentary, a composition of so many different models of femininity that she cannot be perceived as a complete figure.

The contradictions inherent in the trope are highlighted in Gray's *1982 Janine*, where Gray's deliberate exploitation of the female body for the purposes of political commentary appears removed from his apparent affirmation of a 'natural' relationship between women and land. The association of the female body with the land, the physical and the reproductive invokes the powerful image of the mother nation, who embodies the safe space of the home(land) and yet has to be defended. All three of the primary authors considered here, by associating the female body with the permanence and fertility of the land, make use of the mother figure, even if it often becomes fused with the figure of the lover. MacDiarmid and Gray in different ways both link the female body to the physicality of the land itself. In *A Drunk Man* the map of Scotland is imposed onto Jean's body, and she herself is associated with the physical, the practical and the domestic. Gray's description of Denny's body as the 'landscape of home'

continues this theme. Both Jean and Denny have an instinctive or intuitive wisdom, but they do not take on the natural authority which is another potential characteristic of the mother figure. In MacDiarmid's work we witness this matriarchal authority in the figure of 'Audh the Deep-Minded', the mother of 'generations of men'. For Naomi Mitchison in 'The Cleansing of the Knife' however, the use of the figure of the mother is more strategic than idealistic. Mitchison transposes the erotic relationship between her poetic persona and 'Donnachadh Bàn' into a symbolic relationship between 'Alba our mother' and her citizen son. She appropriates the voice of Alba in order to attain an authoritative position from which to speak on the politics of contemporary Scotland.

Mitchison's 'Alba' is also a victim, however, representing the double construction of mother as powerful progenetrix and 'puir auld mither'. Mitchison demands, repeatedly, 'Alba our mother, what have we done to thee?' This construction of Scotland as a victim is related to an acknowledgement of personal and communal culpability, an association which recurs in Gray's 1982, *Janine* with the phrase 'Scotland has been fucked and I am one of the fuckers that fucked her'. In 'The Cleansing of the Knife' and *Janine* Mitchison and Gray describe very similar processes of self-realisation which finally culminate with an optimistic tone and the suggestion of some hope for Scotland's future. The acknowledgement of responsibility for the predicament of Scotland is an important step in the process, but in both cases this condition of self-awareness is paralleled by the image of a female Scotland as victim. The nationalist figures need an object towards which their guilt may be directed, and the emotive figure of the female victim is given this role. In *The Bull Calves*, Mitchison's use of Scotland as female victim in the figure of Kirstie is virtually all that remains of her use of nation as woman. The resonance of the metaphor is difficult to escape, and indeed, the earliest Scotland-as-woman figure that I can determine, the 'affligit lady dame scotia' of Wedderburn's *Complaynt of Scotland*, occupies this very role of victim.

Mitchison's use of the nation-woman-victim metaphor is largely limited to that of the mother nation, while MacDiarmid and Gray both make use of the sexual potential of the figure. Both male authors use fantasy women in an eroticised way, but the different ways they do this illustrate better than anything else the differences in their

brands of nationalism and the fifty years which separate their texts. In the figures of the 'silken leddy' from *A Drunk Man* and the *spéir-bhean* from the *aisling* tradition MacDiarmid creates ethereal, fantasy women who represent a potential for change and creative inspiration on both an individual and a cultural level. If the 'silken leddy' may be identified as MacDiarmid's muse in *A Drunk Man*, then the *spéir-bhean*, the Gaelic muse, is the inspiration for an entire cultural renaissance. These vaguely eroticised fantasy women, throughout MacDiarmid's poetry, incarnate hope for the future and a sense of possibility. MacDiarmid's nationalism, though complex, was ultimately optimistic, and his use of the nation-as-woman figure is entirely unreconstructed. Although Gibbon's 'Chris Caledonia' is more a representative of national character, MacDiarmid's figures correspond much more closely to the traditional abstract figurehead, who is distanced from what she represents. The Gaelic muse embodies an unchanging and immemorial Celtic spirit, and she has been waiting, like the *spéir-bhean* in the *aisling*, to share this with the nationalist poet.

For Gray, the dream vision necessarily becomes pornographic fantasy, and the erotic is translated into the sado-masochistic. Gray is fully aware of the politics surrounding the symbolic use of the female body, and he acknowledges this through the extreme exploitation of the female form in the fantasies of *Janine*. And nationalism, for Gray, cannot be merely a question of optimism or of the renaissance of old myths. Nationalism for Gray, as indeed for Mitchison, is a process which involves an acknowledgement of our own historical guilt. Therefore the fantasy figures, who in MacDiarmid represent such potential for the future, in Gray's work become only potential victims, trapped in a nightmare which is of their own making. Such cynicism is qualified in *Janine* by the reaffirmation of the possibility of a romantic attachment to the land in the Denny section of the novel, although Gray's apparently unquestioning equation of the female body with the natural landscape of Scotland in this section sits rather uneasily with his acute examination of the exploitation of the female body in the rest of the book. The process towards acknowledgement of guilt and of self-imposed victimhood in *Janine* results in an ultimately optimistic conclusion, as the implication

of the erotic moment 'when the trap starts to close' becomes transformed from the potential for victimisation into the potential for change.

This aspect of the nation-as-woman trope — woman as victim — is one of the most insidious and problematic constructions of female sexuality implicit in it. It is also one of the most fundamental metaphors contributing to the trope, because the idea that women are always victims or potential victims underwrites almost every representation of nation as woman. Florence Stratton identified two different nation-as-woman constructions in the African context: firstly, woman as container of unchanging national essence, and secondly, woman as index of the state of the nation, in which the exploitation of the female body, usually in a sexual sense — rape or prostitution — functions as a metaphor for the political exploitation of the nation.² But, as I have argued, these two constructions depend upon each other, since the threat of exploitation of the female body is already implicit in images of woman as vessels of national identity. Marina Warner emphasises the way in which the allegorical female figure is reinforced either literally or metaphorically in order to provide a sound container for the concept she contains, whether this be *veritas* or national identity.³ This reinforcement, however, which in the case of Britannia and Helvetia takes the form of a suit of armour, is a means of defence. The threat of attack from outside, of penetration of those boundaries, is already written into the symbol. The nation-as-woman metaphor, therefore, has at its root the equation of woman as victim and nation as victim.

Equating 'being female' with being a victim is not a productive feminist strategy. Female 'bonding' on the basis of shared victimisation merely reproduces the binary opposition of dominant versus submissive behaviour patterns.⁴ Identification with the position of victim is not a progressive strategy for nationalist thought either, and yet Scotland as victim is a myth which continues to permeate Scottish society. Much of the attraction of the Scotland-as-woman figure is in this parallel of Scotland and woman in the position of victim. Not only does the trope simplify and limit lived

²Florence Stratton, *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 41-44.

³Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985; repr. London: Vintage, 1996), p. 258.

⁴See bell hooks, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984), p. 45.

female experience, but it simplifies and limits Scottish history and results in a dead end position where Scottish nationalists abdicate responsibility and point the finger at England.

The editors of *Gender and Irish Writing* ask 'whether the essentialism of mythically produced figures must *inevitably* be reductive and have disabling effects on mere historical women'.⁵ They provide no immediate answers, but one answer might be that any nation-as-woman allegory which depends, even obliquely, upon the equation of woman with potential victim is necessarily reductive and perpetuates a sexist ideology in which women are always the passive recipients of someone else's actions. And yet it is this aspect of the trope which seems the most tenacious, because, as a mobilising symbol for nationalism, it has an emotive power. Even in the work of a writer like Gray, who uses the trope in order to play with assumptions about gender, nationhood and the image of nation as woman itself, this identification of Scotland with woman in the position of victim is reaffirmed. We also see the trope being reproduced in the work of critics who are trying to challenge the lack of gender politics in studies of nationalism.

II

In Scotland, many women seeking to reconcile their feminist and nationalist beliefs have experienced a frustration which is not unlike that experienced by black feminists in America. Using a piece of domestic imagery, Joy Hendry in 1987 described the situation facing Scottish women as the 'double knot on the peeny'. Hendry explicitly situates Scotland within the colonial context by describing it as an 'oppressed colony of England,' and uses the colonial exploitation of Scotland to explain the internal exploitation of Scottish women:

Being a woman is difficult enough. But being a Scottish woman is more difficult still because of Scotland's position as an oppressed colony of England, and a nation with severe psychological hang-ups.

⁵Toni O'Brien Johnson and David Cairns, eds., *Gender and Irish Writing* (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1991), pp. 4-5.

There is this popular myth that the Scottish male is more domineering, his attitudes to women more 'primitive' than other men. Certainly, we have the same problems as women everywhere, but perhaps in more extreme form.⁶

Marilyn Reizbaum uses the same critical approach when she suggests that:

The need to define nationalism in patriarchal terms in countries that have struggled against a colonizing 'father' is perhaps a response to the historical figuration of cultural 'inferiority' in stereotypes of the feminine.⁷

Both articles postulate that the patriarchal nature of Scottish culture is a reaction to stereotypes of cultural inferiority imposed upon Scottish culture. Hendry identifies the loss of Scottish nationhood as 'an experience something like castration' and concludes that this experience, together with poverty, the injustices of Scottish history and the erosion of Scottish culture, has 'brutalized the Scottish male.'⁸ This metaphor works on two levels because, while the individual Scottish male is brutalised, it is evidently the Scottish nation which has suffered castration through the loss of its organ of political power. This image of the Scottish nation as emasculated, and therefore tending towards the feminine, is an interesting corollary to the 'state of the nation' metaphor in which the nation's vulnerability to invasion and exploitation is allegorised in the representation of the nation as a female victim. The titles of each of these articles focus on the idea of 'doubleness' as a crucial factor in women's engagement with their national identity, whether as citizens, readers, or writers. This doubleness is expressed as a double oppression: Scottish women occupy a position of inadequacy not only because they are Scottish but because they are women.

What I want to do here is look at the way in which critics have already addressed the intersection of gender and nationalism in Scotland and situate them in a wider

⁶Joy Hendry, 'A Double Knot on the Peeny', in *In Other Words: Writing as a Feminist*, ed. by Gail Chester and Sigrid Nelson (London: Hutchison, 1987), pp. 36-45 (p. 36).

⁷Marilyn Reizbaum, 'Canonical Double-Cross: Scottish and Irish Women's Writing', in *Decolonizing Tradition: New Views of Twentieth Century 'British' Literary Canons*, ed. by Karen K. Lawrence (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), pp. 165-90 (p. 172).

⁸Hendry, p. 36.

critical context. They can be seen as falling roughly into two categories, each illustrating a different reaction to this idea of double oppression. Firstly, there are critics who focus on feminism and nationalism as part of a system of multiple struggles against oppression. These struggles would ideally complement each other but in practice one struggle is inevitably privileged, and therefore the feminist cause must be sacrificed for the greater good of the nationalist cause, or vice versa. This returns us to the dichotomy articulated by Virginia Woolf, that 'as a woman I need no country', or, in a Scottish context, by Liz Lochhead, who claimed that she did not really consider herself to be a nationalist or even primarily a Scottish poet, since, as she put it, 'until recently I've felt that my country was woman.'⁹

Much feminist theory states that all forms of oppression are linked in society and are supported by similar institutional structures. Black American feminists, by conceptualising feminism as 'a struggle against sexist oppression', allow recognition of the fact that men may be equally oppressed, on grounds of race or class. Thus feminism, as a struggle against oppression, must necessarily incorporate a struggle against all forms of oppression: race, class, and national.¹⁰ Black women may suffer from the male chauvinism of black men, but they can equally recognise that this chauvinism comes from the male's sense of himself as powerless in relation to ruling male groups, rather than expressing a privileged social status.¹¹ However, the idealistic aims of such theorising are not so easy to achieve in practice. The discourse of nationalism is able to subsume the oppression of women into its master narrative and represent it as one of the many injustices which will be overturned when the principal aims of the movement are achieved. Thus in many nationalist struggles we witness the recurring myth which implies or states explicitly that gender oppression follows directly from national oppression. If there is an identifiable oppressor, that oppressor must be responsible for all forms of oppression, including sexist oppression, and if there exists a golden age

⁹Colin Nicholson, 'Liz Lochhead: the knucklebones of irony,' in *Poem, Purpose and Place: Shaping Identity in Contemporary Scottish Verse* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1992), pp. 202-223 (p. 223).

¹⁰hooks, *Feminist Theory*, p. 35. See also bell hooks, *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981); Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984); Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* ([n.p.]: The Crossing Press, 1984).

¹¹hooks, *Feminist Theory*, p. 18.

myth, it is a construction of an age in which no form of oppression existed. In Irish Republican ideology, therefore, the contemporary subjugation of Irish women is a direct result of the conquest of Gaelic Ireland and the destruction of its ancient egalitarian traditions, while Welsh nationalist ideology emphasises the better treatment of women under the medieval laws of Hywel Da.¹² The incorporation of one struggle against oppression within another is merely nominal and one of these struggles therefore becomes devalued and ignored. In such a pattern the feminist struggle is invariably subordinated to the nationalist.

The black American feminist Audre Lorde describes a tendency among those who stand outside the norms of power to 'identify one way in which [they] are different, and [...] assume that to be the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around difference'.¹³ The devaluation of the feminist struggle in the face of the national or racial struggle is not simply because in male eyes the feminist struggle seems un- or less important, but is a choice made by women themselves to privilege one struggle over the other. When women experience both national and gender oppression they tend to privilege the former. The dilemma arises from a perceived need to view the self as a whole and therefore, in Lorde's words, 'to pick out some one aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing or denying the other parts of self.'¹⁴

The nationalist model constructs women in such a way that they have to choose between parts of self, but the feminist movement threatens to do the same. bell hooks' definition of feminism as 'a struggle against sexist oppression' allows for a plurality of selves and of allegiances. However in the Scottish context, the conflicting selves within the subject position 'Scottish' 'woman' 'writer' are still being worked out. In her chapter 'Women and Nation' in *The History of Scottish Women's Writing*, Susanne Hagemann directly attempts to problematise the status of the Scottish woman writer, by focusing on the collection of short stories by Scottish women writers *The Other Voice*.

¹²Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism* (London: Pluto Press, 1983), pp. 254-5; Charlotte Aull Davies, 'Nationalism: Discourse and Practice', in *Practicing Feminism: Identity, Difference, Power*, ed. by Nickie Charles and Felicia Hughes-Freeland (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 156-179 (p.166).

¹³Lorde, p. 116.

¹⁴Lorde, p. 120.

Hagemann finds the editorial policy of selection and definition in this volume to be arbitrary and contradictory, commenting that:

If short stories such as Nancy Brysson Morrison's 'No Letters, Please' and Janet Caird's 'The Deprived' [...] are typical, then Scottishness does not hold much interest for woman writers. If this is the case, however, the editorial purpose indicated by the word *Scottish* in the collection's subtitle, *Scottish Women's Writing Since 1808*, is self-defeating.¹⁵

Hagemann's argument presupposes that 'Scottishness' may be defined (or achieved) by a preoccupation with nationhood or national identity, rather than by birth, habitation or any other material consideration: one can only be 'Scottish' by concentrating on Scottishness. Nationality would seem to be something which can only be consciously achieved. The 'Scottishness' of an author cannot thus be implicit, and any treatment of 'Scottishness' must necessarily be self-reflexive. Any difference in style or 'voice' must be concerned with a conscious appraisal of Scottishness. The (apparently unproblematic) quality of 'Scottishness' then, in Hagemann's reading, is something which can be possessed by texts but not people. The further implication of Hagemann's problematisation of the term 'Scottish Woman Writer' is that women are particularly difficult to categorise as 'Scottish', given the criteria she seems to be applying in the quotation above. She seems to suggest that if women writing in Scotland are more preoccupied with feminist issues than nationalist issues they are less easy to identify as 'Scottish women writers'.

It is the continuing critical desire to read texts according to a uniform standard of 'Scottishness' which still problematises the status of the Scottish woman writer. As the editors of *The History of Scottish Women's Writing* note, the volume provoked the familiar debate as to 'what constitutes a "Scottish" writer or work', in a more extreme form. This could be because, as the editors suggest, the lack of an established canon of Scottish women writers means there is no real benchmark against which to define the

¹⁵Susanne Hagemann, 'Woman and Nation', in *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*, ed. by Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp. 316-328 (p. 321); Moira Burgess, *The Other Voice: Scottish Women's Writing since 1808* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1987).

Scottishness of individual female writers.¹⁶ The tendency towards a 'ghettoisation' of Scottish literature within the Scottish academic community results in the imposition of a uniform definition of 'Scottishness' upon texts, which leads to a very narrow and almost necessarily androcentric canon, into which it is difficult to insert Scottish woman writers. It remains difficult for women to write themselves into the tradition, particularly into a nationalist literature where the 'nationalist traditions of "sonship" are crossed with and reinforced by the vocabularies of patrimony and filiation which inform literary mythology.'¹⁷ Marilyn Reizbaum's study of the 'double cross' suffered by Irish and Scottish women is a specifically 'canonical double cross'. Countries like Scotland and Ireland, struggling against exclusion from and marginalisation within the Anglo-American canon, notably exclude women from their own canons.¹⁸ As Reizbaum points out, there is a strong parallel between the feminist challenge to the male canon and the challenge presented by 'Scotland, Ireland, and other countries like them' to the mainstream Anglo-American establishment. She goes on to suggest that writers who are able to work towards a 'dynamic relation of movements, in this instance, nationalism and feminism' provide a more 'revolutionary' solution to both problems.¹⁹ The parallel which she highlights between women and colonised countries lends itself to further development, and while the initial motivation for comparison of the two seems legitimate enough, extended development of the parallel often risks reproducing conservative ideologies.

This second, more theoretical, approach to the intersection of nation and gender demonstrates that the two struggles in fact contain the same structure, and that lessons might be learned from applying feminist theory to national or post-colonial struggles, or conversely, applying post-colonial theory to the situation of women. This approach avoids the somewhat defeatist attitude of the first school and does provide many

¹⁶*A History of Scottish Women's Writing*, p. x. The bibliography to the *History* emphasises that 'Decisions about inclusion [...] have tended towards openness in the interpretations of Scottishness.' Fiona Black and Kirsten Stirling, 'Select Bibliographies of Scottish Women Writers', in *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*, pp. 677-707 (p. 677).

¹⁷Elleke Boehmer, 'Motherlands, Mothers and Nationalist Sons: Representations of Nationalism and Women in African Literature', in *From Commonwealth to Postcolonial*, ed. by Anna Rutherford (Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1992), pp. 229-247 (pp. 235-6).

¹⁸Reizbaum, p. 166.

¹⁹Reizbaum, p. 168.

valuable insights. However, despite its very modern and theory-driven credentials such an approach contains highly conservative elements, not least its tendency to reproduce the equation of woman with nation, along with all the dangers and contradictions inherent in that trope.

Both post-colonial and feminist criticism have made explicit comparisons between the exploitation of women and of colonised peoples. Each field draws on the discourses and terminologies of the other to express the politics of oppression:

Women in many societies have been relegated to the position of 'other', marginalised and, in a metaphorical sense, 'colonised' [...] They share with colonised races and peoples an intimate experience of the politics of oppression and repression.²⁰

The parallels drawn between the 'othering' of women and the colonised are based on the premise that all forms of oppression are connected and supported by similar institutional structures. They also provide useful insights into ways of ordering resistance against the power structures in action in each instance. Similarities in the very language used to characterise the 'other' in both female and racial oppression also encourage such parallels:

in the language of colonialism, non-Europeans occupy the same symbolic space as women. Both are seen as part of nature, not culture, and with the same ambivalence: either they are ripe for government, passive, child-like, unsophisticated, needing leadership and guidance, described always in terms of lack — no initiative, no intellectual powers, no perseverance; or, on the other hand, they are outside society, dangerous, treacherous, emotional, inconstant, wild, threatening, fickle, sexually aberrant, irrational, near animal, lascivious, disruptive, evil, unpredictable.²¹

The very fact that oppressed nations suffer from many of the same stereotypes and power structures as women do has led many critics to attempt a reconciliation of the

²⁰Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 174-5.

²¹Helen Carr, 'Woman / Indian: "The American" and his others', in *Europe and Its Others*, ed. by Francis Barker and others (Colchester: University of Essex, 1985), II, 46-60 (p. 50).

two fields of study. Instead of emphasising the subordination of one form of oppression, or the 'multiple' or 'double' nature of the female position within the nation, we witness an interchange of critical and theoretical methodology between the two fields, on the level of theory rather than practice.

This type of cross-disciplinary exchange between feminist and post-colonial theory has a slightly longer history than the fairly recent advent of studies which incorporate feminism and nationalism. Nationalist theory in general paid very little attention to gender until the topic began to be tackled from a feminist angle in the late 1980s.²² Studies such as Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* and Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* espoused a modern and constructionist view of nation which, rather than analysing the citizen's relationship to a pre-existing state, began to analyse the process whereby the idea of the nation is created by a communal consensus.²³ While this new method of theorising the nation represents a liberating and exciting approach to the subject, and one which had a great influence on literary critics, all these books may be and have been criticised for their 'androcentric perspective'.²⁴ The perceived masculinity of the processes of the nation state is reproduced in the theory of the construction of nation, which is concerned with a male subject, or at best, an ungendered, universal subject who is assumed to be male.

In *Imagined Communities* Benedict Anderson introduces the question of gender by remarking that 'everyone should have a nationality as he/she has a gender'.²⁵ He does not, however, question this statement, and this almost throwaway use of the word gender has been picked up by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick:

²²Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London and New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd, 1986); Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias, eds., *Woman - Nation - State* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989); Cynthia Enloe, *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the End of the Cold War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

²³Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983). See also Anthony Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (London: Duckworth, 1971) and *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford and New York: Blackwell, 1987); E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalisms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

²⁴'The androcentric perspective of such theorising is discernible at various levels, the most obvious being that of simply leaving women out, a total disregard for women's contributions to the process or how they may have been affected by it.' Davies, 'Nationalism: Discourse and Practice', p. 170; 'as insightful as Ben Anderson's and other landmark books of this era were in charting new ways to think about the creation of nationalist ideas, they left nationalists — and pre-nationalists and anti-nationalists — ungendered. Our understanding of nationalism suffered.' Enloe, p. 231.

²⁵Anderson, p. 14.

To suggest that everyone might 'have' a nationality as everyone 'has' a gender presupposes, what may well be true, and may well always have been true, that everyone does 'have' a gender. But it needn't presuppose that everyone 'has' a gender in the same way, or that 'having' a gender is the same kind of act, process, or possession for every person or for every gender.²⁶

This destabilisation of any normative notion of fixed identity tackles Anderson's unquestioning use of gender as a fixed category and proceeds to use the destabilising thrust of recent gender theory in order to equally call into question the idea of 'nationhood', asking whether any two nations can be said to possess 'nation-ness' in the same way. The gap between Anderson and Sedgwick illustrates the considerable change in both the visibility of gender theory and the theoretical direction of nationalist theory. Anderson was writing in 1983, Sedgwick in 1994. Sedgwick is able to use gender theory to destabilise a fixed notion of national identity, in the same way as feminist theory is now able to access the discourse of post-colonial theory to describe women as 'colonised'.

Various critics have transferred this interchange of methodologies into the Scottish context, despite the fact that defining Scotland as postcolonial is in itself rather problematic. The Treaty of Union is a unique instance in political history and means that Scotland cannot technically be described as a colony. While an analysis of the cultural relationship between Scotland and England could be said to match the colonial model, an extended post-colonial analysis of the Scottish situation seems impossible. Nevertheless, Scottish literary critics have been flirting with post-colonial criticism for some time, some going all the way and some maintaining their critical distance.²⁷ Perhaps the inclusion of Scotland in a post-colonial context is intended to give Scottish studies a legitimacy outwith the immediate (parochial) context of Scotland. The application of feminist theory to Scotland, following the postcolonial model, is intended

²⁶Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 148-9.

²⁷Bertholdt Schoene, 'A passage to Scotland: Scottish Literature and the British Post-Colonial Condition', *Scottlands*, 2.1 (1995), 107-131 and Liam Connell, 'The Colour of Our Vowels: Post-Colonising the Language Debate', published on the internet at <http://pages.britishlibrary.net/liam.connell/abertay.html>, both question the validity of the application of post-colonial theory to Scotland.

to open up new avenues for discussion and also perhaps to find some way of reconciling the feminist and the nationalist in Scottish studies, given the sense of double oppression expressed by critics such as Joy Hendry and Carol Anderson and Glenda Norquay.²⁸

In *Language and Scottish Literature* (1994), John Corbett ‘adapts’ Sara Mills on feminist reading practices in order to promote a *Scottish* reading practice which approaches texts specifically as Scottish texts. He appropriates a passage from Mills in which she proposes a model which might help to discover how texts are interpreted by different social groups.

As feminist readers, therefore, we need two kinds of information to construct the possible readings of a text which might be arrived at. First we need to make a close textual analysis of the text, identifying certain features of form — literary conventions, syntax, lexis, genre and so on: the cues to interpretation. Second, we need to make some generalized predictions about groups of readers’ background knowledge — of language, of literary conventions — and of their models of the world. By uniting these two kinds of information, it should be possible to build up a picture of how specified social groups might read a text.

Corbett suggests: ‘If we substitute the word “Scottish” for the word “feminist” in the above quotation, we can reconfigure Mills’ project for a different “affiliation.”’²⁹ This proposal is not unreasonable, as Mills herself acknowledges that her model may be applied to more than one type of affiliation. However the shift from ‘feminist’ to ‘Scottish’ reader is questionable, firstly because although the reader position ‘feminist’ is necessarily politicised, there is no reason why every Scottish reader (as opposed to Scottish nationalist reader) needs to be politicised. Also, the idea that the substitution of one word can legitimate the shift of methodology from one field to the other is highly problematic.

²⁸Carol Anderson and Glenda Norquay, ‘Superiorism’, *Cencrastus*, 15 (1984), 8-10.

²⁹John Corbett, *Language and Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p. 33; p. 34; Sara Mills, *Feminist Stylistics* (London and New York Routledge, 1995), p. 35.

This method of substitution is developed further by Christopher Whyte. In the introduction to his *Gendering the Nation* (1995), Whyte goes further than Corbett, and illustrates the relevance of gender theory for nationalist theory by taking a passage on gender theory from Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* and substituting 'Scottish' for 'feminist' throughout:

The postulation of the 'before' within Scottish [feminist] theory becomes politically problematic when it constrains the future to materialize an idealized notion of the past or when it supports, even inadvertently, the reification of a pre-Union [pre-cultural] sphere of the authentic Scottish [feminine]. This recourse to an original or genuine Scottishness [femininity] is a nostalgic and parochial idea that refuses the contemporary demand to formulate an account of nationality [gender] as a complex cultural construction. This ideal tends not only to serve culturally conservative aims, but to constitute an exclusionary practice within Scottish theory [feminism], precipitating precisely the kind of fragmentation that the ideal purports to overcome.³⁰

Whyte quotes this passage to illustrate 'how much those working in the related fields of gender, sexual orientation and nationalities have to learn from each other.'³¹ The passage is adroitly chosen, as the situation which Butler describes is almost uncannily appropriate to certain 'golden age' constructions of Scottishness. Whyte's 'emendation' of this passage thus creates the powerful illusion of a link between gender and nation. However the serendipity of this similarity does not mean that gender theory can be applied in its entirety to theories of national identity, within Scotland or without. And while nationality is without question a 'complex cultural construction', it is not constructed in the same way as gender. Although Whyte states that he is simply suggesting ways in which the two fields may 'learn from each other', what he actually

³⁰Christopher Whyte, *Gendering the Nation: Studies in Modern Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), p. xii. He describes this as an 'emended form' of Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 36. Whyte reproduces the deleted words in square brackets immediately after the words which have replaced them.

³¹Whyte, p. xiii.

does is to substitute one term for another throughout the passage, which suggests that the structures and methodologies of one field may be applied wholesale to another, and this is a highly problematic move.

The most extended use of this cross-disciplinary approach in the Scottish context is found in an article by Susanne Hagemann entitled 'A Feminist Interpretation of Scottish Identity' (1994). Hagemann, indeed, explicitly claims that she is 'retaining the structures and arguments of [...] feminism, and applying them to the literature of region and nation in their entirety.' She does not, in fact, go on to fulfil this intention entirely, acknowledging later in the article that 'in some fields, e.g. sexuality on the one hand and political independence on the other, significant correspondences do not come readily to mind.'³² But she takes two feminist approaches to literature, 'feminist critique' and 'gynocriticism' — that is, images of women in literature by men, and criticism of literature written by women — and transfers the methodology of each approach to a regional / national approach to Scotland. Her use of feminist critique falls at the first hurdle because, unable to find a sufficient number of examples of descriptions of Scotland from an English point of view, she is forced to pervert her data and deals instead with texts containing descriptions of the Highlands from a Scottish Lowland perspective.³³ Her appropriation of 'gynocriticism' is more persuasive and follows a similar pattern to the methods used by Whyte and Corbett. She takes Elaine Showalter's periodisation of women's writing into three broad periods, 'feminine', 'feminist' and 'female' and finds corresponding phases in the history of Scottish literature. She identifies a 'regional' or 'provincial' phase, marked by 'conscious Anglicisation', corresponding to Showalter's 'feminine' phase; a 'nationalist' phase — the 20th century renaissance — corresponding to the 'feminist' phase; and a 'national' phase, which is 'self-consciously Scottish to such a degree that it feels no need to define itself in opposition to England.'³⁴

³²Susanne Hagemann, 'A Feminist Interpretation of Scottish Identity', in *Proceedings of the Scottish Workshop of the ESSE Conference, Bordeaux 1993* (Grenoble: Etudes Ecosaises, 1994), pp. 79-91 (p. 79); p. 89.

³³Hagemann, p. 81.

³⁴Hagemann, p. 88. Showalter's periodisation is as follows: 'First there is a prolonged phase of *imitation* of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and *internalisation* of its standards of art and its views on social roles. Second there is a phase of *protest* against these standards and values, and *advocacy* of

It is in the section on feminist critique, however, that this theorising runs seriously aground. Hagemann parallels patriarchal discourse with Anglocentric discourse and discusses the representation of both Scotland and woman as 'other'. Such an approach depends upon transforming 'images of woman' criticism into 'images of Scotland', and comes dangerously close to reproducing the metaphor of Scotland as a woman. The theory indeed requires us to compare Scotland to a woman. Hagemann uses Malcolm Chapman's list of stereotypes of the Celt in order to justify her parallel of women and Scotland. Both women and Celts have been constructed as more emotional than intellectual, as intuitive rather than rational, as closer to nature than culture and concerned more with family than society.³⁵ Chapman's list of binary oppositions does prove that women and Celts are subject to similar mechanisms of stereotyping. However the fact that Celts have been stereotyped *as feminine* should not be used to validate further critical interpretation along the same lines. Hagemann's analysis verges on the ridiculous when she extends her categories of centre and periphery to suggest that we may consider the Highlands by connecting them to lesbianism:

if lesbians can arguably be considered the most radical woman-identified women, the Highlands, more precisely various aspects of Gaelic culture, are very often seen as the epitome of Scottishness.³⁶

Hagemann's article represents an extreme example of this trend of applying feminist theory to Scotland, and it highlights problems which are embedded in the less exaggerated approaches of Corbett and Whyte.

Applying feminist theory to the study of the nation appears to inevitably reproduce the metaphorical equation of nation equals women. Such criticism offers very little that is valuable or positive to a female writer or reader attempting to come to terms with the contradictions inherent in her position. What it suggests is a return to the type of nation-as-woman metaphor in which woman acts as the 'index of the state of the

minority rights and values, including a demand for autonomy. Finally there is a phase of *self-discovery* a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity.' Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), quoted Hagemann, p. 86. Hagemann admits that she is functioning on a different timescale to Showalter, and finds no feminist parallel for Scotland's pre-Union stage of 'non-peripheral autonomy'. Hagemann, p. 87.

³⁵Malcolm Chapman, *The Gaelic Vision in Scottish Culture* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), p. 106.

³⁶Hagemann, p. 85.

nation'. The attempt to escape from oppression through a revisualisation of the problem creates its own problems, and ultimately succeeds only in closing down possibilities for development rather than opening them up. Although the motivation behind such theorising is progressive and intended to break down categorisations, it risks coming full circle and returning to the trope of nation as woman. Criticism which parallels the position of women in society with the position of Scotland perpetuates an ideology in which both women and Scotland are constructed as victims, and thus reproduces the ideologies implicit in the fictional constructions of nation as woman throughout the twentieth century.

III

If women writing in Scotland are more preoccupied with feminist than nationalist issues, does this exempt them from definition as 'Scottish women writers'? To ask whether Scottish women writers are preoccupied with the nebulous concept of 'Scottishness' begs the question of which constructions of Scottishness are available to women. Naomi Mitchison attempted to solve the problem by finding a place for herself within the existing masculine tradition, adopting the iconography of nation as woman to the extent of casting herself as the mother of the nation. She abandoned this strategy but did not entirely succeed in rejecting the trope altogether. While her definitions of Scotland and Scottishness were very different from those of, for example, MacDiarmid, Mitchison still subscribed to similar types of gendered myths of nationhood. Other women writing in Scotland, for example those Susanne Hagemann cited from the anthology *The Other Voice*, choose to avoid any overt political concentration on 'Scottishness', and focus instead on a specifically female experience which happens, incidentally, to take place within Scotland. Existing models of literary constructions of Scottishness do not provide much space for the modern female writer.

For women writing in Scotland, entering the Scottish tradition is no longer such a daunting prospect as it was in the time of Naomi Mitchison, causing not even as much angst as Anderson and Norquay suggested at the start of the eighties. The surge of

activity in Scottish literature in the late 1980s and 1990s included a gender revolution of sorts. Suddenly, the roll-call of new Scottish writers included almost as many female names as male. Writers such as A.L. Kennedy, Janice Galloway and Dilys Rose appear in the new improved canon of Scottish writers, alongside the figure of Liz Lochhead, who for many years occupied the dubiously enviable position of being the token woman on the Scottish literary scene to be considered on an equal footing with her male counterparts.

Lochhead's statement that 'until recently I've felt that my country was woman' illustrates her perception of the inadequacies of the Scottish cultural scene. This is one escape route for the woman writer who can find no place for herself within a national tradition, but it offers no solutions to the woman writer who wishes to locate herself precisely there. Lochhead continues, 'I feel that my country is Scotland as well. At the moment I know that I don't like this macho Scottish culture, but I also know that I want to stay here and negotiate it. [...] I can't whinge about it if I don't talk back to it, if I don't have a go.'³⁷ This notion of 'negotiation' with the history of Scottish literature characterises not only Lochhead's work but that of many Scottish women writers trying to situate themselves within the Scottish literary scene. On the one hand, Janice Galloway has expressed a certain exasperation with the emphasis on 'Scottishness' in discussions of Scottish writers and questions the 'rather tedious single track roads this country's writers are often expected to go down. Who wants to write about *nation* all the bloody time?'³⁸ However, many women writers in the late twentieth century still feel the need to write back to a dominant 'macho' culture which defines perceptions of Scotland both internally and externally. The question is what form this 'negotiation' should take. I will consider two female writers, Liz Lochhead and Janet Paisley, who use the woman-as-nation trope in very different ways. Lochhead, I argue, ultimately fails to escape from the restrictions imposed by the trope, whereas Paisley demonstrates a way in which the nation-as-woman image may finally be exorcised.

In her move from being primarily concerned with feminist issues to dealing also with the problems of national identity, Lochhead too makes use of the similarly

³⁷Nicholson, p. 223.

³⁸Janice Galloway, *Edinburgh Review*, 100 (1999), 71-72 (p. 72).

marginalised status of women and of Scotland, claiming 'Scotland is like a woman; the Scots know they are perceived from the outside.'³⁹ Marilyn Reizbaum uses Lochhead's work, in particular her play *Mary Queen of Scots Got her Head Chopped Off* (1989), to illustrate what she calls the 'historical interaction between the marginalization of culture and sexism.'⁴⁰ Lochhead here parallels the iconic figures of Mary Queen of Scots and Elizabeth of England. The body of Elizabeth, the 'Virgin Queen,' merged both the head of state and the motherland, as discussed in the first chapter, and Lochhead's characterisation of Elizabeth also contains clear references to the contemporary female figurehead of Margaret Thatcher. Mary Queen of Scots was Elizabeth's political counterpart in Scotland, but due to her precarious political position she never achieved the same security in her reign as did her English cousin. While the security of both Elizabeth and England is represented by the chaste body of Elizabeth, Mary's body is sexualised, and thus both her reign and the situation of Scotland are represented as unstable and vulnerable to attack. Lochhead uses both queens to represent their respective countries, but the structure of Lochhead's play emphasises the way in which women have a particular ability to shift from individualised character to figurehead. The actors playing Mary and Elizabeth also play a range of other characters from all ends of the social spectrum. Thus Mary is also Marion, Elizabeth's serving woman; Mairn, a beggar girl; and Marie, a twentieth century schoolgirl. Elizabeth, likewise, plays Mary's maid Bessie, Mairn's friend Leezie and the contemporary child Betty. This fragmentation of the names and the figures of the queens not only humanises the figurehead but serves to illustrate the ways in which the female body may be constructed.

Lochhead's use of the nation-as-woman trope is double-edged. She highlights the element of construction in the use of any such allegorical figure, as Alasdair Gray does in *Poor Things*. Her analysis of construction is more feminist than Gray's, however, and her proliferation of characters demonstrates how all women are

³⁹Liz Lochhead interviewed by John Cunningham, *The Guardian*, Feb. 8, 1990. Quoted in Anne Varty, 'The Mirror and the Vamp: Liz Lochhead', in *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*, pp. 641-658 (p. 642).

⁴⁰Reizbaum, p. 182.

constructed by social forces, and are ‘inescapably subject(s) to (of) the patriarchy’.⁴¹ Reizbaum considers Lochhead’s play as a prime example of resistance to the ‘canonical double cross’, but the play does not really break out of the double cross. In showing how women and nation are equally constructed and oppressed by social and cultural systems, Lochhead reinforces her statement that ‘Scotland is like a woman’ and ends up reproducing once more the old allegory. As with the critics who parallel post-colonial and feminist theory, her use of the trope depends upon both women and Scotland occupying the position of victim. Although Lochhead plays with different possibilities available to women, the play finally offers no escape from the inevitability of history.

The nation-as-woman image has, in a sense, to be exorcised, or at least rendered inoffensive, before women writers can fully engage with national identity in anything other than a combative way. One such approach is offered in a short article by the poet, playwright and short-story writer, Janet Paisley, which appeared in a special edition of the *Edinburgh Review* marking the advent of a devolved Scottish Parliament. Paisley begins her short piece by using the nation-as-woman metaphor, but undermines it and ridicules it in a such a way as to deliberately expose the ideologies of victimhood latent in any use of the trope, and suggests that it is precisely in defeating such assumptions that Scottish literature may progress healthily towards the future. She begins:

It’s the story, you see. There was this nubile young virgin forced into marriage by the big bad landowner next door [...]. And while her feisty heroic kin made a great hullabaloo, an uncharacteristic slowness affected their wits and the dirty deed was over and done before they could unsheathe a claymore.⁴²

The story: the definite article deftly indicates the prevalence of this myth of the Scottish situation. Scotland, in this narrative, is defined as the innocent victim, forced, unconsenting, into Union. The emotive rape metaphor comes into play, and the image of the nubile young virgin emphasises Scotland’s blamelessness. This very symbolism was used in Mel Gibson’s *Braveheart* (1995): in the first episode of Wallace’s adult life

⁴¹Reizbaum, p. 183.

⁴²Janet Paisley, ‘Scots Wha Hinnae to Scots Wha Hae: A Road Movie for the Page’, *Edinburgh Review*, 100 (1999), 74-77 (p. 74).

he witnesses the abduction of a white-faced Scottish bride by a tyrannical English landowner claiming his *prima nocte* rights. Central to such a metaphor, however, is Scotland's powerlessness and inability to escape from the role of victim. The raped virgin is the epitome of victimhood, and this is the key to the nation-as-woman metaphor. But Paisley continues:

Maybe it's this story. There was this knocked about a bit teenage lass who longed for tattoos, bit of body piercing, some easy glamour and whose youthful form had long been coveted by the baldy middle aged git with the bulging wallet next door. So what's a girl to do? And anyway, she wised up soon as she realised when you trade your liberty for brass, brassed off at being another chattel is all you get. So she got herself a divorce, quick as a flash, so she did. Oh, aye?

Actually not. She wimped, and wheedled and whined and, rather than own up to covetousness or risk the poverty of single life, invented story one.⁴³

Here Paisley creates a new version of the nation as a woman and in doing so highlights many of the flaws inherent in the trope. By putting this twist on the story, she strips the Scotland-as-woman metaphor of its key ingredients, Scotland's blamelessness and victimhood. In story two Scotland is culpable not only of covetousness but of a refusal to acknowledge responsibility. This dismantles the ideology of self-perpetuating victimhood which surrounds the trope.

Paisley's use of the Scotland-as-woman metaphor pushes it almost as far as it can go. She ridicules the trope and in doing so dismantles its implicit ideology of victimhood, making it clear that Scotland as woman is not only a negative image for women, but that its implications for our perception of Scotland are also negative. The equation of nation with victim inherent in the metaphor is not a productive nationalist strategy. Paisley's article is only one minor piece of work, but in it she manages to begin the exorcism of the Scotland-as-woman figure and in doing so leaves a space

⁴³Paisley, pp. 74-5.

which Scottish writers, and particularly Scottish women writers, may be able to fill with new versions of Scottishness and new versions of self.

One new version of Scottishness is to be found in the work of A.L. Kennedy, who offers a very different female perspective on nation, choosing to ignore the problem of gendered national identity as irrelevant and distancing herself from engagement with Scotland. She rejects entirely gendered and symbolic narratives of nation and consistently privileges individual identity over any all-incorporating national identity, thus avoiding the difficulties faced by, for example, Lewis Grassie Gibbon in reconciling the symbolic and the realist in his work. Kennedy explicitly states that 'as soon as you start manipulating characters to be examples of all the proletariat, or all Scottishness, they will not be real [...]. You have to create three-dimensional people.'⁴⁴ More than this, she exempts herself from any biographical appreciation of her work, saying 'I am a woman, I am heterosexual, I am more Scottish than anything else and I write. But I don't know how these things interrelate.'⁴⁵ She is aware of the problematic and politicised status of the Scottish writer, and this may account for the marked difference between her earlier work, which is at times overtly concerned with Scottish identity, and her later work, which appears to separate politics and place and elides any overt discussion of the subject of Scottish national identity.

Kennedy's most sustained engagement with the question of Scottish identity is the short story 'The Role of Notable Silences in Scottish History' which appears in her first volume of short stories.⁴⁶ This 'explicitly constructionist view of Scottishness'⁴⁷ suggests that all written history is a process of falsehood and fabrication, and that our lives are governed by the lies we are taught to believe about ourselves and our environment. Kennedy thus firmly removes herself from any construction of essential Scottishness, and at the same time tends towards a universal rather than a local moral: 'there's no point being Scottish if you can't make up your past as you go along.

⁴⁴ Stephanie Merrit, 'The Books Interview: A.L. Kennedy', *Observer Review*, May 25, 1999, 13.

⁴⁵ A.L. Kennedy, 'Not Changing the World', in *Peripheral Visions: Images of Nationhood in Contemporary British Fiction*, ed. by Ian A. Bell (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995), pp. 100-102 (p. 100).

⁴⁶ A.L. Kennedy, 'The Role of Notable Silences in Scottish History', in *Night Geometry and the Garscadden Trains* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990), pp. 62-72.

⁴⁷ Susanne Hagemann, 'Woman and Nation', p. 323; p. 325.

Everyone else does.’⁴⁸ The progression away from dealing with questions of national identity is reflected in her novels. Her first novel and earlier collections of short stories deal quite explicitly with national identity, though never from the perspective of gender. In *Looking for the Possible Dance* (1993), and also in her second novel *So I Am Glad* (1995),⁴⁹ the nationalist centre of consciousness is female. Particularly with the figure of Margaret in *Looking for the Possible Dance*, Kennedy is able to break down the binary opposition which demands that nationalists must be male while nations are female, by providing us with a nationalist daughter with a problematic relation to nation. However she makes no symbolic use of gender whatsoever, and simply ignores the gendered models of national identity which form the backbone of the Scottish canon even in the present day. Kennedy’s references to the construction of national identity become more oblique in her second novel and subsequent work, and in this sense her work illustrates a tendency among Scottish writers wishing to expand their possibilities and move away from the constant need for self-definition. Her ability to write about Scotland without resorting to, or even reacting to, tired symbolic constructions of the gendered nation suggests that the nation-as-woman figure may have finally exhausted its usefulness for the younger generation of Scottish writers.

⁴⁸ Kennedy, ‘The Role of Notable Silences in Scottish History’, p. 64.

⁴⁹ A.L. Kennedy, *Looking for the Possible Dance* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1993); *So I Am Glad* (London: Cape, 1995).

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