‘Pine Again for that Dread Country Crystalline’: Displacement, Replacement and the Problem with Home in the Poetry of Edwin Muir

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Abstract

The classical myths persist today as an immutable bank of cultural narrative that breach national and linguistic barriers and, as a result, say something shared across time and space. Many modernist writers, perhaps Joyce most famously, used the cultural authority of these myths in order to try and speak *through* them to the modern world and attempt to elucidate the place of humankind within it. This essay seeks to examine the particular ways in which the poetry of Edwin Muir sought to bring together the emergent nationalist discourses of inter-war era Scotland with ‘near yet distant Classical equivalents’ (Crawford 2011, pp.135-136) in order to shed light upon Scotland’s often problematic relationship with its own national myths.

Starting from an investigation of the modernist writer’s relationship to place in towards reaching an understanding of how the native and the foreign place work differently on the literary imagination, this essay seeks to explore Muir’s work in terms of a desire to reassert a functioning national consciousness away from empty national clichés towards meaningful political and social change. Raising concerns about the depleted state of the empty national home of 1940s Scotland, Muir offers a vision for the national home based on the will of the people of Scotland to save themselves from a pervasive inertia by establishing a spiritually and politically functioning national home.

Keywords: poetry, modernism, Scotland, myth, nation, home.

Displacement

This essay seeks to investigate the particular resonance of the homeland as the first store of one’s identity and, as Edwin Muir delineates, the predominance of its place in the individual psyche as our original home. In this way, displacement is the condition

of being simultaneously aware of where one is in relation to the idea of where one 'belongs'. One might find harmony in a home away from home, or equally be left with a longing to return to one's native place. Either way, as Alan Riach (2005, p.240) observes, the psychological persistence of our homeland resonates as a 'curious, unanswered question, the unfinished business of home'.

In the early twentieth-century, the understanding that the homeland provided a unique experience of place led to modernist writers and artists performing their own displacements. Alex Davis & Lee M. Jenkins (2000, p.12) have observed that to distance oneself from one's native place seemed almost a 'precondition' for many literary modernists such as Joyce, Eliot and Pound. Out of context, as it were, the writer of the early twentieth century seemed better able to articulate the modern world and the place of humankind within it. The foreign or unfamiliar space offered an essentially different experience for the displaced individual from that of the homeland. 'Place' in this sense becomes more than a geophysical reality but a richly layered and accessible historio-cultural bank of identity. What marks one place from the next are the differences in the cultural and psychic substance of the land; what layers of memory and myth, like a readable sediment, have built it up to be distinct from everywhere else.

Muir's desire to portray inter-war era Scotland as one of these inherent geo-literary places distinct from the synthetic political aggregate of the United Kingdom is one which situates him fully in the stream of European modernism. The greater European site of Greco-Roman myth, was of particular importance to peripheral modernisms such as those within the British Isles (Davies & Jenkins 2000, p.6). For the Irish and Scottish modernists of the early twentieth century the Classics provided a way around the problem of English Literature as a loaded and suffocating term. In the words of Robert Crawford (2011, pp.142-43):

> The Classics provide not the escape of exoticism but a deepening, at once a paralleling and an opening that is subtly different from the vistas afforded by English Literature. However loved, the literature of England for Scottish and Irish poets gets bound up often with the pressures of English dominance in British Unionism. If that dominance encourages the provincialisation of the non-English parts of the British Isles, then a direct relationship with the Classics promises imaginative independence as well as interdependence.

Classical myth provided the means to slip the collar of the quadripartite nation-state and to enter the mainstream of European modernism as a solo national voice. The Scottish and Irish modernist poets understood that myth has a resonance and permanency which places it beyond the control of political or cultural levers. It says something shared across time and space and provided the means by which these so-called peripheral places could be represented as three-dimensional nations. Thus the 'imaginative independence' of the Classics allowed for the articulation of complex Scottish and Irish issues with the constraints of unionism only part of a wider pool of national concerns.

The nationalism emergent in Scotland in the early twentieth century looked to the Classical myths, however, for more than cultural authority. The sense of multiplying the 'insider's and the outsider's view' that reading the Classics demands (Crawford 2011, pp.142-43), allowed for the simultaneous contemplation of Scotland as part of the United Kingdom and Scotland as a nation in its own right as part of the wider European context. Crawford (2011, pp.135-36) observes; '[t]hat sense of compound, or at least generously stereoscopic, vision is one of the most important gifts of the Classics to modern poetry [...] a stereoscopic vision which sees simultaneously modern nationalist conflict and the near-yet-distant Classical equivalent'.

In this way, Muir looked to Greek mythology to elucidate concerns about the variances of the modern 'home' and how one might preserve a sense of belonging to one's native place even when elsewhere. As a result, Muir focuses on the heroic *nostos* or 'homecoming'. In 'The Return of Odysseus', for example, we view the Classical Odysseus-myth as if looking the wrong way through a telescope, focusing on Penelope – the archetypal figure of fidelity in abandonment – as opposed to the hero, Odysseus. In the first stanza we are confronted with a scene of public easement in an ostensibly private home. The rolling alliteration of 'lolling latches' which give 'to every hand' (l.2) creates the impression that it is not difficult to infiltrate 'Odysseus' house' (l.1) and that the swinging doors indiscriminately permit newcomers entrance. As the opening lines permit the stranger entrance into Penelope and Odysseus' house the reader simultaneously enters the poem. We are further implicated in the chaotic 'public market' (l.5) of the outer chambers when, in the only instance of the voice addressing the reader directly, we are told '[t]here you could be yourself.' (l.8). Indeed there is little sign of this being *anyone's* home until in the final

line of the first stanza, the voice shifts its focus away from the decrepit home to look out and observe that '[a]ll round the island stretched the clean blue sea.' (l.13). Recalling the reader to the circumstances of Odysseus' absence makes it clear that the house's state of disrepair is a result of this. Furthermore, the word 'clean' acts like a bridge into the second stanza when we move from the outer frame of the house into the 'clean' (l.17) inner chamber where Penelope sits weaving.

Moving from the chaos of the outer passages in the first stanza into the calm of Penelope's chamber in the second, makes the latter into a site of comparatively transcendental import. Penelope's work to make 'an emptiness | Amid disorder' (ll.18-19), in short, to preserve the home for Odysseus' return, necessarily requires the forfeiture of her own life. As Penelope sits weaving 'sole at the house's heart' (l.14) she *becomes* the heart of the house. Living and weaving are indissolubly bound, for as long as Penelope weaves, the home lives. Her belief that Odysseus' *nostos* will revive the home is kept alive in her 'endless undoing | Of endless doing, endless weaving, unweaving' (ll.15-16) at her loom. Penelope's whole life becomes a ritual act of devotion and self-sacrifice as she seeks to preserve even the *possibility* of a redemption for the home. In the final stanza, unknown to Penelope, Odysseus mirrors her actions by "weaving" his way on the 'winding road of the world' (l.28). 'The Return of Odysseus' ends not with the realisation of Odysseus' *nostos*, but with the preservation of Penelope's hope that the home can be saved.

'The Return of Odysseus' purposefully subverts the expected narration of the homecoming of Odysseus the 'archetypal exile' (Jin 2008, p.64) by investigating the condition of the home in abandonment as opposed to the psychology of the displaced individual. As Hugh Trevor-Roper (2008, p.xx) suggests, myth is not an insular form of narrative, but one that 'requires a continuing capacity for invention'. Poetic use of this Classical stereoscopic vision does not afford the opportunity for revision (after all the basic facts and narrative frame of the original myth remain) but rather the opening out of the possibilities that myth affords for the expression of modern concerns. Thus the vision of the static home with a constant, living heart at its centre – the untold Penelope-myth – afforded Muir the image which would later echo in his vision of the preserved national home in 'The Emblem'; '[f]or that scant-acre kingdom is not dead, | Nor save in seeming shrunk' (Muir & Hall 1960, pp.230-31, ll.5-6).

Replacement

Thus far we have dealt with the term 'home' insofar as identifying the unique place that it holds in the individual psyche as the first store of one's identity. It is necessary, however, to codify this understanding in terms of the largely European view of 'home' as a 'range of concentricities' (Hollander 1997, p.68) that radiates out from ancient regionalisms to the modern expression of the community as nation. This schema makes plain the pan-European paradigm of the manifold expressions of wider and narrower places to which one might feel a sense of belonging: from the Italian expression of the community of a township in belonging to one's *campanile* to the wider still German concept of *heimat.* Without a direct translation into English, *heimat* is a term used to express the feeling of belonging to the place of one's birth, both in terms of one's experience of one's locality and a wider, attachment to the abstract idea of the nation as community. *Heimat* promotes a concentric understanding of home that allows for a full appreciation of what Alex Davis & Lee M. Jenkins (2000, pp.3-6) have called 'the *plural bases* of poetic modernism'. In this light, home becomes a flexible term that respects the asymmetries 'between the particularities of region and the abstractions of nation'.

Muir's admiration for both Romantic and contemporary German literature is especially important in light of Davis and Jenkins' thinking. The unification of the single German state in 1871 triggered an artistic blossoming of celebratory romantic expressions of the new German nation. The numerous states and principalities that had made up the long defunct Holy Roman Empire did not disappear but were adopted as regional demarcations within the new German state. As John Hollander (1997, p.68) observes, the realignment of the many old homes within the new, national home created '[t]he feeling that one's home is itself really the centre of a series of radiating circles of hominess.' It is in this way that Muir is able to move between the regional and national in his poetry; the inner-places sit within the sphere of the national but maintain their own allegiances without necessarily excluding wider ones.

More often than not it is in liminal places that Muir's personas find voice, whether calling out from the walls of Troy, from within the labyrinth, or from outside the captured castle. In 'The Narrow Place' (Muir & Hall 1960, p.101, ll.1-7) Muir

explores this by scaling down the national to become the liminal and, in doing so, making the wider world the encompassing bound:

> How all the roads creep in.
> This place has grown so narrow,
> You could not swing a javelin,
> And if you shot an arrow,
> It would skim this meagre mountain wall
> And in some other country
> Like a lost meteor fall.

It is clear in this poem that the voice is fearful of being further squeezed within an already shrunken place. The claustrophobia apparent in the poetic voice in the opening line is mirrored in the form as the end of line full stop abruptly seals it off from the rest of the poem. This isolated first sentence further disrupts the rhyme scheme (*ababcdc)* by stalling the build-up of any rhythmic momentum which is, in turn, exacerbated by the lack of meter. The implicit weapon imagery ('javelin' (l.3), 'arrow' (l.4)) gives the impression that the voice is attempting to fight its way out of the narrow place as the 'roads creep in' (l.1). The nation becomes so narrow that its mountains are rendered 'meagre' (l.5) and the flight of an arrow might cover hundreds of miles rather than hundreds of feet. Furthermore, it only becomes apparent to the reader that this 'narrow place' is a national, read sizeable, place by the fact that the arrow lands in 'some other country' (l.6) i.e. some country *other* than the one the voice is in.

By introducing the spectre of the foreign place which renders the national home narrow, Muir reminds the reader that the nation is itself subject to the global space. In this sense, displacement is the condition of being removed from the concentricities of home (and the associated feelings of belonging) and released into the wider world. The loss of a feeling of belonging to the home breeds a nightmare vision of the outside world in 'The Labyrinth' (Muir & Hall 1960, p.50, ll.24-25):

> There have been times when I have heard my footsteps
> Still echoing in the maze, and all the roads
> That run through the noisy world, deceiving streets
> That meet and part and meet, and rooms that open
> Into each other - and never a final room -
> Stairways and corridors and antechambers
> That vacantly wait for some great audience,
> The smooth sea-tracks that open and close again,

> Tracks undiscoverable, indecipherable,
> Paths on the earth and tunnels underground,
> And bird tracks in the air - all seemed a part
> Of the great labyrinth.

Contact with the maze renders all the world a terrifying labyrinth where all the paths that one might take home, over ground, over sea and through the air, deviously converge, diverge and converge again. Denied a heroic *nostos,* the voice (which given the poem's post-WWII/Cold War context is at once the Classical Theseus and the twentieth century refugee) is left to dream about a home of which their 'bad spirit' (l. 41) denies the existence. The ultimate terror for the displaced figure is therefore the feeling of not belonging to anywhere, of having 'no place to come to' (l. 44).

Salman Rushdie (1992, p.10) has seen the impulse to create imaginary replacement homes as both a natural and inevitable consequence of this loss of a sense of belonging to one's homeland. His conviction that physical distance necessarily entails that 'we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost' suggests that the natural, human progression is the creation of fictional replacements: 'not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands'. In likening the fallible human memory to a fractured mirror, Rushdie makes it clear that to create a whole image of the homeland, however interpretive it may be, demands that the imagination fill in the cracks. In this way, not only are we incapable of physically reclaiming the homeland but we can only ever regain a half-remembered, half-imagined image of it as it was in the moment of our displacement.

We have to be careful, however, of the latent potential for nostalgic retrospection in Rushdie's concept of the imaginary homeland. It presupposes looking back not just to regain a semblance of the homeland but to remould it in the process. His logic, relying on the premise of the fallibility of human memory, is compounded by the psycho-semantic consolidation of *nostos* and nostalgia. Rushdie's suggestion of homesickness has little or no chance of being relieved in *nostos.* It entails not only a retroflexive displaced imagination but one that seeks to romanticise the lost home by whitewashing the inherent negative realities of life (as of life in general) there. The consequences of this romanticising of the homeland is what makes Ithaca *disappointing* as well as unrecognisable to Odysseus after his long absence from it.

Given Muir's position as a writer in exile, Rushdie's argument suggests it would be easy for the poet to attempt a rewriting of Scottish history. The temptation

to replace what Muir saw as the depleted state of Scotland in the inter-war period would prove too much for Rushdie's homesick imagination to resist. Yet Andrew Noble (1982, p.17) observes that Muir's poetry rejects a tendency to nostalgia, instead pursuing the maxim that it is 'the task of the imagination to confront the facts of life and not deviously to evade them'. For Noble (1982, pp.13-14), Muir's poetry portrays the imagination as a tool to be wielded in perspicuity, not something that inevitably falls victim to a tendency on the part of the displaced individual towards romanticising the lost homeland. Muir's poetic portrayal of Scotland is therefore 'less the occasion for a sense of tragedy, it [is] more the stuff of the bathos of half-hearted suicide.'

The trouble that Muir faced in portraying Scotland in verse was the challenge it offered as a pre-treated poetic subject. Muir wrote in 1934 (Muir 1982, p.111) that 'Scotland's past is a romantic legend, its present a sordid reality. Between these two things there is no organic relation: the one is fiction, the other real life.' Scottish history thus presents itself heavily steeped in its own mysteries, making imaginative responses to the national past seem more like an extension of this ongoing project of mythologising than an attempt to find some historical fact. As a result, we have to approach Muir's Scotland as a different kind of imaginary homeland to that which Rushdie formulates, one that is not the creation of a solitary, displaced imagination but rather the product of centuries of self-fictionalising by the national (and international) community.

'Scotland 1941' attempts to peel back the layers of Scottish history to see what chance, if any, there is of re-asserting a politically and spiritually functional Scotland that Muir sees as having last existed with William Wallace and Robert Bruce. In doing so, Muir does not hesitate to attack the massive figures of Scottish history that he sees as having created the abortive reality of 1940s Scotland. The Calvinist zealots John Knox and Andrew Melville, Robert Burns, Walter Scott as well as the Covenanters Montrose, Argyle and MacKail are all implicated in creating '[t]his towering pulpit of the Golden Calf' (Muir & Hall 1960, p.98, l.34). This is itself a powerful image as Muir attributes this overtly blasphemous Scotland to such infamous religious reformers. Furthermore, Muir exploits the oratory aspect of poetry so that the religious rhetoric of the poem, laden with intentionally heavy-handed treatment of stylistic features such as alliteration and repetition, takes on the tone of an energetic sermon; ironically, the kind that Knox and Melville were famed for

giving. As Paul Robichaud (2005, p.147) observes: '[f]or all his criticism of the Reformation, Muir is himself a smasher of idols, targeting those shibboleths of Scottish identity that he feels obscure the nation's actual social and cultural conditions.' In this way, Muir articulates the absence of what he feels made up Scotland when it last functioned as a healthy collective. This is echoed in 'Scotland's Winter' (Muir & Hall 1960, p.68, ll.7-20):

> The miller's daughter walking by
> With frozen fingers soldered to her basket
> Seems to be knocking
> Upon a hundred leagues of floor
> With her light heels, and mocking
> Percy and Douglas dead,
> And Bruce on his burial bed,
> Where he lies white as may
> With wars and leprosy,
> And all the kings before
> This land was kingless,
> And all the songs before
> This land was songless,
> This land with its dead and living waits
> the Judgement Day.

This is Muir's nightmare vision of Scotland: that underneath the 'layer of debris' of Scottish history since the Reformation the nation might turn out to be a *toom tabard* (2008, p.45).[1] The miller's daughter with her 'light heels' (l. 11) treads upon a 'kingless' (l. 17) and 'songless' (l. 19) land where the graves of Scotland's legendary heroes and kings sound hollow under her feet. The rhyming of 'knocking' (l. 9) and 'mocking' (l. 11) is particularly effective here in transforming the girl's innocent stroll into an act of treason. She unknowingly betrays her nation's past and becomes part of the frozen legions of Scotland's living and dead who can do nothing but await 'the Judgement day' (l. 20). Thus, in contrast to 'Scotland 1941' and 'The Great House', in which Muir rails at the religious and political forces he sees as having ruined Scotland, 'Scotland's Winter' quietly peeks behind the curtain of history and,

[1] *Toom tabard* is Scots for "empty coat". Historically it is associated with the vassal-King, John Balliol (1292-1296) who was often depicted with his crown and sceptre broken to symbolise Scotland's subjugation by Edward I of England.

as Robichaud (2005, pp.147) observes, 'discovers a terrifying and dispiriting emptiness.'

'Scotland's Winter' is thus a poem in which the essentially symbiotic relationship between the people and their national home – which we understand from the concentric understanding of *heim* – is replaced with a void. Scotland is shown to exist *solely* as an imaginary homeland, a 'mere idea of the nation' (Muir 1982, p.107), which has neither political nor spiritual function. To borrow from Hugh MacDiarmid's long poem 'A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle' (1993, p.37, l.320) (which similarly explores the perceived gap between an abstract Scottish soul and the Scottish nation) Scotland is a '*terra nullius'*; a land which belongs to no one but equally a land to which no one belongs.

The Problem With Home

To address what I have outlined as the 'problem with home' in the poetry of Edwin Muir is in itself problematic because Muir does not create a monolithic vision of 'home' in his poetry. His poetic vision is neither static, nor immutable, though it continually orbits around the central concept of *heimat,*[2] namely that the individual is bound to the place of their birth, that home is really one's home*land.* By this definition one is only really at home if in the place of their birth, be that a village, or a parish, or a principality. This concept is not necessarily a geographical one but rather depends on an understanding of, as Julian Young (2011, p.295) observes, 'place not in the sense, merely, of a bounded region of space but in the sense of *dwelling*-place'. This seems to indicate an understanding of homeland at a local or even domestic level. However, it does not mean that the concept of *heimat* cannot accommodate Muir's, or our own, understanding of the homeland as the home nation.

Heimat, as a concept, is not superseded by the concept of the home nation but rather forms the foundation of our modern understanding of the latter. Notions of *heimat* as the pre-modern communities – outlined by Benedict Anderson (2006, p.22) as 'religious communities and dynastic realms' – gave way to the idea of the nation

[2] Due to its appropriation by National Socialism, *heimat* became dangerously associated with the Nazi regime in Germany in the 1930s and during the Second World War. The traditional idea of a love for one's homeland became entrenched with ideas about the German *Volk, lebensraum* and eugenics though Muir himself never engages with the term in this biological/racial sense.

because 'a fundamental change was taking place in modes of apprehending the world' with the advent of print culture. These 'new national imagined communities' had not simply supplanted the earlier religious and dynastic ones but had brought a two-way consciousness of place. As an object for both observation and classification, it provided a means of accessing the non-native place without having any personal interaction with it (Anderson 2006, pp.42-43). The 'other' had essentially been invited into the intimate, and largely unconscious, relationship between the individual and their native home as they sought to capture "national characters" in order to package, sell and disseminate them. As Alan Riach (2005, p.244) observes:

> The word *home*, in this sense, brings into play both geographical location and intellectual apprehension. It is not only place but also the expression of people, the representation of the people, in relation to that place and to each other.

Print culture had essentially set in motion a change in the meaning of the collective. A concept of the geographical community of those who had been born in the same village or parish was no longer adequate. In the print world, where one was capable if one was literate of conceiving of the 'otherwhere' (Heaney 1989, p.22), a desire for a concrete sense of one's own native place arose. To borrow from Eliot (l.57), people now wanted the *heimat* 'formulated, sprawling on a pin' in order to maintain the identity of their homeland in the newly accessible world of other national homes.

The nation as an imagined community therefore appeals to *inter*nationalism as much as to nationalism. The formulated *heimat*, the full-fledged imagined community, is, for Riach (2005, p.244), a means of expediently communicating an image of the nation to the rest of the world. To be clear, '[s]uch representation finds form in masks that allow us to disclose what homes we have, whether comfortable or unjust, festive or damnable, happy or intolerable.' Muir similarly uses the 'mask' – the imagined face of what Anderson (2006, p.36) calls the 'community in anonymity' – as an image of the constructed nature of national identity.

The potential for artifice, that the mask of the nation might be used less for representation than for concealment, is something which Muir's poem 'The Face' (Muir & Hall 1960, p.106) explores. The poetic voice, the nation itself, laments the gulf between what it is perceived to be and the reality of its ruin:

> See me with all the terrors on my roads,
> The crusted shipwrecks rotting in my seas,
> And the untroubled oval of my face
> That alters idly with the moonlike modes
> And is unfathomably framed to please
> And deck the angular bone with passing grace.
>
> I should have worn a terror-mask, should be
> A sight to frighten hope and faith away,
> Half charnel field, half battle and rutting ground.
> Instead I am a smiling sea
> That sleeps while underneath from bound to bound
> The sun and star shaped killers gorge and play. (ll.1-12)

Here the outwardly benign and contented mask is not only unrepresentative of the real face of the nation, but is in fact harmful. The mask is not a representation of the nation that allows us to express the condition of our *heimat*, but rather a *façade* that works sinisterly to conceal the 'half charnel field' (l.9) below. The superficiality of the mask – not only 'untroubled' (l.3) by the 'terrors' (l.1) it obscures, but evolving 'idly' (l.4) and with 'passing grace' (l.6) – only serves to heighten, by contrast, the horrific condition of the obscured face. Neglected, the true face of the nation left to the mercy of 'sun and star shaped killers' that 'gorge' (l.12) upon it. Trapped under the pressures of this sinister mask, the voice raises an important question: why should a false mask 'unfathomably framed to please' (l.5) be preserved at the expense of facing up to reality, even if it is a sobering one? The risk of not taking off the mask of the national image, of not confronting the reality below, is far greater than preserving the securities of a false identity.

The national mask, or image, works alongside narrative myth to occlude the synthetic nature of the nation so that it becomes an unconscious 'fact' of the modern world. The cultural process of forgetting the historical reality of the nation-as-creation is, for Muir, deeply disturbing. It allows for nations that have become sick to be left to degenerate further, watched by the national community who lament its downfall without realising they can prevent it. The opening lines of 'The Great House' (Muir & Hall 1960, p.230) reflect this as the voice, in a tone of startling resignation, observes '[*h*]*owever it came*, this great house has gone down | Unconquered into chaos' (ll.1-2). Like the voice, the national community is unconscious of its power to chart its own course. For Muir, this unconsciousness is the product of centuries of self-

delusion, where the national community turned to mythic over-indulgence to salve the painful realities of Scotland's condition.

In this way Muir portrays the relationship of Scotland to its national myths as at best unhealthy and, at worst, oppressive. Richard Zumkhwala-Cook (2008, p.10) has observed that although 'mythic narratives and images are nothing new to national discourse', Muir (2008, p.93) paints the picture of a people with an 'unusually strong communal poetic power' who yet have 'perhaps unique powers to abuse and resist the literary imagination' (Noble 1982, p.9). Caught between an impulse to mythopoetics and what we might call a cultural cringe, the Scottish people erect what is little more than an empty house of national myth and image: '[t]his is our work and has become our kingdom.' (Muir & Hall 1960, p.187, l.5). Muir's poetic voices do not speak of the harmony of the Scottish people but of the disunity of a nation beset by both internal and external assaults on its identity. The problem of the imperceptibility of the *heimat* has forced the people to develop a kind of stereoscopic vision, the separate images being two different images of Scotland, namely the 'Scotland of fact and the Scotland of fantasy' (Muir 1982, p.194). These superimpose on one another to create a 'single, disunited' vision of 'Scotland' that is part actuality, part unreality. Once born into this 'semi-vacuum' (Muir 1982, p.106) the people adopt the cultural stereoscopic vision and become anaesthetised by the lack of a sufficient identity.

Muir's poetic voice attempts to hold up a mirror to this nation of 'fanatics of the frustrate and the half' (Muir & Hall 1960, p.97, l.25) in the hope that there might be a return to a unified vision of the nation when Scotland's mythopoetics were channelled into the collective national consciousness. The opening line of 'Scotland 1941' (Muir & Hall 1960, p.97, l.1) – 'We were a tribe, a family, a people' – is not simply a lament for a time when the national community had a healthy mythopoeic faculty, before a series of historic national-crises weakened it, but an attempt on Muir's part to recreate a functioning, cohesive national consciousness. Muir frequently refers to the events of the Reformation, the Unions of Crown and Parliament and the rise of capitalist-industrialism in Scotland as the chief historical crises that set Scotland on the path to the destruction of its national identity. Crucially, he is careful to emphasise Scotland's own part in its "downfall", never painting the country as a hapless victim. In *Scottish Journey* (2008, p.29) Muir elucidates Scotland's condition in relation to a contemporary, though one might say more successful case, of a nation coming into consciousness in Ireland:

> The unfortunate thing for Scotland is that it is not an obviously oppressed nation, as Ireland was, but only a visibly depressed one searching for the source of its depression [...] Yet in spite of that Scotland is as urgently in need of independence as Ireland was. More urgently, indeed, for if she does not get it she will lose her national consciousness, as Ireland never would have done.

Going home, reclaiming the unifying identity of the *heimat,* is thus a challenge for the collective will to save and reassert itself by knocking down the empty house, to achieve, in short, what Muir believes Scotland once was capable of being and what it might yet be: '[f]or that scant-acre kingdom is not dead, | Nor save in seeming shrunk' (Muir & Hall 1960, p.70, ll.5-6). This is his ultimately hopeful message: that the nation yet lives and that it is only the *perception* that it is lost which keeps us from reclaiming it.

To re-focus the national imagination away from 'the spectacle of beauty in misfortune and the tragedy of a lost cause' Muir wrote of in *Scottish Journey* (Muir 2008, p.9), back to 'successful heroism against odds' is the most vital of tasks for the Scottish community. This is reflected in Muir's poem 'The Good Town' (Muir & Hall 1960, p.185) in which the inhabitants wearied by 'two wars that trampled on us twice' (l.55) resolve in the final stanza to rebuild the town (ll.98-103):

> [...] No: when evil comes
> All things turn averse, and we must begin
> At the beginning, heave the groaning world
> Back in its place again, and clamp it there.

These lines come before an admission that the 'evil' (l. 98) was not an overwhelming force that beset an innocent population but half of their own making and necessitous of their repentance: '[o]ur peace betrayed us; we betrayed our peace' (l.105). The image of the desolate township standing amongst the ruins of their home and resolving to repent and reclaim it is symptomatic of Muir's ultimately redemptive vision that the home, with great toil, can be reasserted. That the nation has been lost, or that it has buried itself in its own mythology, is therefore not so important to Muir's vision as that of the will of the people to strike out to restore the *heimat.*

As Muir observes in *Scottish Journey* (2008, p.232); 'the real obstacle of making a nation out of Scotland lies now in the character of the people [...] And that

obstacle, being the product of several centuries of life, is a serious one; it is, in fact, Scotland.' Alan Riach (2005, p.243) recognises this as the last challenge for Scotland on the path to becoming a functional nation; '[t]o go home, to face its truth and render the account, to recognise its uniqueness and its distortions, requires the sacrifice involved in forsaking its securities.' Like Milton in Muir's eponymous sonnet (Muir & Hall 1960, p.207) what is therefore required is an exultant step into the unknown towards home; '[a] footstep more, and his unblinded eyes | Saw far and near the fields of Paradise.' (ll. 13-14).

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