## Chapter Three: Time in a Red Coat.

*Time in a Red Coat*, Brown's third novel[1], is unusual in that it is not set in Orkney until the final two chapters. The setting is Europe and the time indeterminate. Medieval for the most part, but shifting and twisting, the text refers to situations and events ranging from the twelfth century to the nineteenth and reaching also into future time. The title refers to the figure about whom the action revolves, a girl travelling through time and a dateless European landscape, attempting to kill the 'Dragon'[2], to stop war and bloodshed in the world.

*Time in a Red Coat* is a romantic text, one which is concerned with myth, and that reminiscences about the past from the personal and the historical point of view. The prose style is intricate and unique, sometimes baffling in its complexities. Brown's characters are not totally explained, investing the text with an underlying mysteriousness, emphasising the fact that his storytelling is largely derived from myth, legend and folktale. The author is at home with

the past, and his writing style, poetic, elegaic, pastoral, esthetic and heavily reliant on powerful symbols, sets him apart from other contemporary western practitioners of the novel.

Time in a Red Coat is structured around the theme of battle. It examines issues related to war and fighting: conscription, the abuse of authority, the irresponsibility of rulers and governments, the experience of being a soldier, and the effects of war on both civilians and combatants. The novel is anti-war and pessimistic about the future. It presents war as archetypal in history, as being endemic in the culture of western Europe, as a sad and evil feature of human existence.

Brown's treatment of time, his interweaving of history and legend in the text, the role he assigns to women as forces for peace, and his use of magic, are all distinguishing features of Time in a Red Coat. Legend is morally more meaningful than formal history and what it records. Stories are timeless and so of lasting value. Women's perception of the reality of war is a truer one than men's, and women should use their power to work for peace in the world. The inclusion of magic and the supernatural in the text enables the reader to view events from the perspective of a haunting folk legend, the little person's point of view, a stance which Brown considers to be more

important than official history, which concentrates on the doings of the powerful.

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The novel opens in a setting evocative of medieval Russia. 'It is the courtyard of the palace of the great Khan.'(p.1) The unnamed kingdom is protected by a Great Wall[3] , which keeps the 'beast-like'(p.1), war-mongering barbarians outside. It is a holiday and the villagers are attending the annual Masque of Peace. There has been peace for so long that 'the sound of iron on stone'(p.9), the fact of imminent invasion, shocks their innocence and makes a mockery of the Masque.

As people flee and the harsh music of war, 'iron on stone'(p.10) becomes louder and more threatening, a Princess is born. It 'is a long labour, full of pain'(p.11), the mother dies, and everyone in the palace flees, leaving Mistress Poppyseed to care for the infant. The tragedy of war is reflected in the circumstances of the birth of the King's grand-daughter. Some salient facts emerge concerning the Princess's fate. She will have a special affinity with water, and she will go on a long journey taking a

flute, given to her by the White Guardian, and silver and gold, given to her by the Black Guardian. Her birth has coincided, fatefully, with '*the time of the dragon*'(p.15), the time of war.[4]

The major theme in Time in a Red Coat, war and warfare, is thus firmly established in the first chapter, 'The Masque'. The reader is also introduced to the novel's protagonist, the girl who will travel through time. The setting, redolent of medieval and Renaissance time, is timeless in its Grimm's fairy tale quality, evoking the distant but still recognisable past.

Chapter II, short, pithy and dominated by Mistress Poppyseed's querulousness, provides further insight into the character and destiny of the Princess. She is 'an ivory doll'(p.16), 'like a corpse'(p.16), 'a dove in a cage'(p.17), cossetted, shut in, ignorant of earth, wind, fire and water, and a girl who at twelve years of age ventures out 'into the sun and wind, for the first time in her life'(p.19). She knows somehow that it is not her destiny to be married and her departure is depicted as an escape from a cloistered and unnatural existence into a life of freedom and adventure. She is dressed in white, indicative of her youth, innocence and purity, and connecting her, symbolically, with peace and with virtue.

'Farewell, Mistress Poppyseed' also adds to our

understanding of the setting. In one sense it is confirmed as central Europe in medieval time, the barbarians being identified as Mongols(p.17)[5]. However, the mention of India(p.19) is also evocative of the time of Alexander the Great[6], reinforcing the unidentifiable time dimension of the text.

The third chapter, 'The Well', is set in a mountain village, unnamed, but yet unmistakenly evocative of peasant life as it existed in central Europe even into the twentieth century. Society is feudal, the village economy being based on agriculture, and the landlord living at the hall. The inhabitants who are named, Ilyich, Vassily, Natasha and Tanya, are obviously Russian, and their named enemy, the Tartars, appears to confirm the setting as medieval Russia.

It is summer, hot and dry, the corn withering in the fields and the people facing starvation if it does not rain. But the village was blessed with 'a good well of water that never dried up'(p.22), water that 'rose in bright circles'(p.22), is 'sweet water'(p.23), 'beautiful stuff'(p.25), 'Living silver'(p.27), 'crystal'(p.28), and 'precious'(p.29). Water is an important symbol in <u>Time in a Red Coat</u>, standing for life and strength and what is truly valuable and naturally good. This reflects the traditional Russian concept of water as a life-giving force, as a substance which has the power to knit together the scattered

pieces of severed bodies, and even to bring the dead back to life.[7] The girl regards water with wonder and delight, an attitude which challenges the reader to reappraise the value and beauty of something we usually take for granted.

War is not far away and the imagery used to describe it is vivid. It is 'a sound of iron on stone'(p.22), 'a black hot stink on the wind after nightfall'(p.22), and 'burning and breaking and blood'(p.23). The girl must go where war is, although the reason, if any, is not revealed, adding to her mysteriousness. Ilyich has orders to poison the well, but he is stopped from doing so by the scorn, arguments, vehemenence and the disbelief expressed by the women of the village. As Tanya says: '"Men are even stupider in wartime than they are in peace"'(p.29).

The style of writing in 'The Well' is evocative of the poetry and sensuousness which characterise the novel as a whole. Personification, simile and metaphor abound. The stalks of corn are 'bronze whispering hosts'(p.21) that yearn 'too ardently'(p.21) upward. The sun is a 'benign fire'(p.21), 'like a tyrant'(p.21) and sunlight is 'his fiery breath'(p.21) and 'pitiless gold'(p.21). The flute is 'long and light as a river-bird'(p.26), the bucket gave three great gulps'(p.26), and with 'gulps and a long gurgle the dust drank'(p.30) the poison. Brown's descriptive prose

is light and beautiful, sketching deftly a medieval scene.

Chapter IV, 'The River', is also especially concerned with water imagery. It begins with three page authorial intrusion, a gentle monologue which speculates on 'life as a river'(p.31), and muses on the metaphor of the river as the tribe, the nation, the human race, as all creation, as time itself.

> More, poets have seen the river as time itself, all legend and history, and tales as yet untold by children's children.(p.31)

The flow of archetypal story is emphasised here, predating history and more enduring, being the stronger current in the river of time. Brown ponders on the 'trivial events'(p.33) concerning the doings of ordinary people, which history does not record. <u>Time in a Red Coat</u> is reflective of the peasant experience and imagination as the great forces pass by.

War is also mentioned in the author's musings. The river's flow is sometimes a 'bitter red liquidity'(p.32) that engulfs 'the simple country folk'(p.32), and we are told that 'next summer the swords and hooves will be in their fields again'(p.32). The connection between the girl and war is also further explained in this authorial intrusion. Echoing Tennyson's 'The Lady of Shalott', the Princess is a 'girl in a white gown that is in need of bleaching and

stitching ... afloat on the river of time.'(p.33) She is 'all women ...who have lived or who will live ...who hate war and war-makers with a bitter hatred.'(p.33) It is by now evident that she should be regarded as a symbol rather than a character, and that it will be her journey which will link the many stories in the novel.

Brown's voice subsides and the story is resumed. It is dusk and the ferryman is taking the girl across the river. As in 'The Well', her wonder at the beauty of the water contrasts with the practical attitude of those peasants, like the ferryman, who view it in terms of its power and its potential, when unleashed, to cause destruction. 'Poor lives knew nothing of beauty'(p.36), except the beauty of the Mass, felt by the peasant women, even if they did not understand it. Brown is here trying to rediscover the inherited past, to scrutinise it from the perspective of the ordinary people. Women are invested with deeper spirituality than men although they lack power.

Women, however, are also fallible. In 'The Well' the young girls viewed war and soldiering as exciting and romantic(p.23); in 'The River' the 'ladies and courtiers were so far removed from the deep earth-essences that they even thought of war 'as a beautiful and goodly thing'(p.36). It is the peasant experience of war that is truth, that makes older women blanch(p.23), and which renders the maimed returning

conscript soldier 'worse than useless in the labour of agriculture'(p.37). Two important strands to the battle theme are here referred to for the first time: conscription, and the many implications and ideas surrounding the circumstances of 'the soldier from the war returning'.[8] Those in power forced 'little' men to fight in their wars, and then abandoned them, disabled and unfit for work, to be cared for by a village community already struggling to survive.

The brutal realities of war are underlined by the discovery of a soldier's corpse floating down the river. The girl farewells him and plays a few notes of flute music, unperturbed by her contact with his dead and bloated body, realising that his life has been lost but his story will endure. The ferryman associates her with the world of folk-tale and legend. 'She gladdened him ... put a small flame about his heart.'(p.39) But his meeting with her has no effect on his avariciousness, the fare he charges her rising with each sentence he utters. She can, to a certain extent, see into her future and her next destination is an inn. It has begun to snow and the expectation is that the war will abate during the winter months.

'The River' is very similar in content and in imagery to the preceding chapter, 'The Well'. The girl is a traveller, a discoverer, innocent, an agent of peace, a person trusted and helped by

children(pp.27&41), someone both strange and a stranger, and possessing a special affinity for water. The style is poetic, reflective, descriptive and philosophical. The setting appears to be central Europe in a medieval time or in the Thirty Years War, but it is also out of time, connected to the legend and folk-tales of the ordinary people, and reconstructing history in the guise of story, as the peasants recorded and remembered it. Also, both chapters are dark in that the threat of war is noticeably present and starkly inevitable.

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Chapter V, 'The Inn', begins, like 'The River', with a brief authorial intrusion. 'It is a worn metaphor too, that sees life as an inn ...where we stay for a few nights'(p.42). This opening sentence contains an echo of words recorded by Bede in the eighth century, that in pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon England, life was like

> the swift flight of a single sparrow through the banqueting hall .. on a winter's day .. In the midst there is a comforting fire to warm the hall; outside

> the storms of winter rain or snow are raging. This sparrow flies swiftly in through one door of the hall, and out through another. While he is inside he is safe from the winter storms; but after a few moments of comfort, he vanishes from sight into the wintry world from which it came.[9]

The dominant image is of the inn as a place of safety and comfort, an image also found in J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings.[10] This image is reinforced by the child's description of the girl as a 'white lost bird'(p.51), a traveller soaked through and encrusted by snow and ice, seeking refuge from the wintry weather.

The inn is also a meeting place, where the seven types of people, 'seven, to name a number that is beautiful and mysterious in itself, and seems to be man's favourite among the ten ciphers'(p.42)[11] , may come together and swap stories and be a microcosm of society. The inn described here is ageless in that it could have existed anytime between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries. The mention of Mitzi and the Cracow Fair(p.44) suggests that the setting is still central Europe, and it is the age of imperialism, for the innkeeper is an important and, compared to the peasants who labour in the fields, a wealthy man.

The innkeeper and his young grand-daughter, are not named. Only the name of his dead wife, Mitzi, an identity briefly assumed by 'the snow princess'(p.51),

is made known to us. Time in a Red Coat is not concerned with individual identity and character. The innkeeper is all innkeepers, the child all children sent away to safety, just as the girl 'is all women, all the girl children and the old ones'(p.33). The novel is a reappraisal of past events in the form of a fable of war.

The innkeeper's memory reaches back before his own time and includes the stories his father told him, and by implication, the stories which his father knew from his father and grandfather. In such a way does he muse on the plague which occured before he was born. It is as real to him as if he had experienced it: 'That such a thing might come again puts a shudder on our landlord; the dread of it dulls his eyes.'(p.44) His memories of his life are universal and include love, marriage, work, death and war. When he was a lad there had been war and the soldiers, 'that locust-cloud'(p.45) had stolen from the inn and damaged it, and now he is very afraid - as are all the people of central Europe who live with the fear or have experienced the reality of invasion.

The innkeeper is comforted by the fact that 'inns are of great importance in history'(p.48) as the 'Word that was to flood the whole universe with meaning'(p.44), Jesus Christ, was born at an inn. He reconstructs, in his own mind, the meeting of that

innkeeper with Joseph and Mary, and it comforts him. 'He smiled to himself, and nodded over into sleep again'(p.49). The Bethlehem proprietor was the 'first innkeeper'(p.51) and, reminded of him, the old landlord bids the girl welcome. These are the first explicit references in the text to Christianity, although the story of Christ's birth, the greatest story of all, is presented as another, albeit collective, cultural memory. The innkeeper uses his imagination in his reconstruction of events, in the same way that Brown does in his journey through time in Time in a Red Coat.

The inn, in folk tales associated with safety and good fellowship, is not in reality, or in history, immune from the effects of war. Three soldiers arrive, demanding food, drink, shelter and female company. The leader is Major Luntzen, his name as harsh and brutal as he is. They, like the girl, seem to belong in a fairy-tale. 'The three wicked snowmen were three soldiers.'(p.54) However, Luntzen's attitude to war is very human. 'The soldier and the service of the god were all.'(p.54) He was 'an acolyte of war'(p.54), even though he had not yet fought in battle. He believed he had the right to use his power ruthlessly when necessary. Brown is not here referring to the Christian God. He associates true Christian faith with peace, not war.

Luntzen and his soldiers are rapists, thieves and

arsonists, all activities justified in the name of war. This reality contrasts with the soldiers about whom the child is reading, 'tall handsome heroes with silver scars on their cheeks, stigmata of honour, not at all like the lingering trash who had just come to the inn'(p.56). Brown is again weaving legend with history, showing that myth and experience are not one and the same.

The girl, not the soldiers, is the fairy tale figure. Her innocence, her guise as Mitzi, the old man's momentary conviction that she is his dead wife, and that magical quality about her, protects her from Luntzen. She is given safe haven in a Christian household for the winter.

Chapter VI, 'Forest', begins quietly enough, Brown musing that 'Time is a dark wood'(p.60), and that the phrase 'dark wood', was coined by a poet in Florence in a time when people believed that each soul followed one of three woodland paths, to heaven or hell or limbo. The forest is life's journey, a place of hope and 'of joy and peace'(p.61), where 'birds sing too, as if the gods had given them new throats'(p.61) and the animals are 'clothed in beauty'(p.61). The forest is a place of harmony and safety, a kind of garden of Eden, but, 'something is wrong in the forest today'(p.61).

Brown uses 'red' imagery to great effect in this chapter, as elsewhere in his work. Red is symbolic of

death, war, pain, fear, threat, suffering and disruption; in fact it is linked in the text to the existence of evil. Red is the colour used to describe the soldiers. There are five deserters in the forest and they are 'like a red clot'(p.61), are 'five redcoats'(p.61), 'red-coated'(p.64), 'red with mirth'(p.64), dressed in 'five red coats'(p.64), 'red-faced'(p.65), 'red with anger'(p.66), they inflict 'a ragged red wound'(p.70) on the girl, and one has a 'strong red back'(p 71).

They, alien to the forest, shatter its tranquillity. At first the girl thinks that they are 'five red trees'(p.61), then that they are five 'ordinary men'(p.61), and then soldiers. She hides from them, blending in with the trees, perhaps becoming a tree herself. Their experience of war has affected the men adversely. They 'slink like dogs that have fled from some hard master'(p.61). They will try to find food and to sleep 'and forget for a while the horror behind and a worse horror to come.'(p.61) They are deserters and will, if found in the forest, be hung 'from five trees.'(p.63)

Trees, in this chapter, are symbolic of both hanging and of possible protection, but the soldiers seeking refuge in the forest do not feel safe in it. Their feelings of unease, of danger lurking, reflects the age old belief of the Russian peasant that the forest was

the most dangerous place to live in.[12] The girl, conversely, appears unaware of any danger. She is looking for the boy's lost dove and wanders to where the soldiers are, innocently assuring them that they need not be frightened of her, nor, since they are in this 'green place'(p.67), of the war. They, all except one, try to rob and rape her - 'she staggered forward like a young doe to the axe'(p.67) - but she escapes.

The soldiers have been given a range of personalites and backgrounds. One is a 'reluctant deserter'(p.67), left behind while he was in a drunken sleep, and now, unjustly, he faces execution. He tries to protect the girl and to return to his unit, but this behaviour, although morally commendable, does not earn him praise.

> 'Go anywhere you like,' said the girl. 'Save the city. Knock the city down. Yes, go. The war's waiting for you. Be a hero. Go on to the fires. See how many you can kill.'(p.71)

The others behave criminally and cruelly, turning on the one who thwarts their rape of the girl and trying to kill him. They have lost any awareness of spirituality and are without hope. Fleeing from the horrors of war, they will be executed if caught.

Brown is here exploring the effects of the experience of war on ordinary soldiers, men who give the best years of their lives, fighting. Such experience affects them adversely. Their faces reflect 'terror',

'recklessness', 'apathy', 'malice', and most significantly, 'outrage and betrayal.'(p.61) Their conviction that society and those in power have misused them, their realisation that death is not heroic and is a needless sacrifice, and the bitter irony of being hunted by their own side, all portray the disillusioning reality of war. Similar themes are explored in the somewhat analogous Serjeant Musgrave's Dance,[13] a play in which the leader of a small group of deserters embarks on a mission to awaken his countrymen to the futility and cruelty of war. Brown, in Time in Red Coat, aims to do the same, using, as we shall see, a male and a female representative figure.

Chapter VII, 'The Smithy', describes a rural, agricultural community both at peace, and in time of war. Such a community, at peace, is eulogised in a perfect pastoral - it is summer , the hills are gentle, and the region 'is the very heart of peace and plenitude'(p.72). There is a 'shepherd boy under the tree with his pipe'(p.72), a milking-girl, a farmer whose only concern is that it has not rained for a week, and young and virile men who test their skill and daring breaking in the horses. The author's voice intrudes into the text:

> Ah, happy rich countryside, where such
> things happen with a sure and sweet

> monotony, year after circling year. ... So the life of this blessed countryside goes on, year after year, childhood to grey hairs.(p.74)

The scene is idyllic and may be compared to that of Perdita's girlhood, created by Shakespeare in The Winter's Tale. The girl too, travelling by in pursuit of the Dragon, is like Perdita, being similarly elusive and mysterious.

However, war is soon to intrude, to be imposed upon the peasants, and to disrupt and destroy their ease and happiness. A soldier arrives, 'so handsome and so richly accoutred'(p.75), to requisition the men and materials which the emperor needs. The setting is evocative of Reformation time, as the war is between 'Fat Luther and the fat Pope'(p.83). The ordinary people do not understand what it is all about, nor do they expect to. It is implicit in the text that those in power care nothing for the common people, that they exploit them ruthlessly and cruelly. The reader is well aware that the smith, labouring night and day to make cannonballs for the prince, will never be paid.

The girl returns a month later to find the people fled to the hills, the crops ruined by marching columns of soldiers, the church burnt out, the inn looted and all the animals slaughtered. War then assailed her senses, with the 'Stench of guts and scorching everywhere'(p.78) and 'blue maggot-flies about her in a

cloud.'(p.77) She meets a child in a field, a child who thought the war and the soldiers the most exciting thing she has ever seen in her life, another comparison of the romantic view of war and soldiering with the grim reality of it. The child does not realise that there will be no bread and butter that winter. The implication is that it is evil on the part of those in power to take advantage of such innocence and, for their own gain, to foster the deceit that war is heroic, exciting and rewarding. The girl perceives what is true and good, telling the child to stay in the fields as they are the happiest place.

'The Smithy' also contains music imagery. The sound of the flute is calming, beautiful, the music of peace. In contrast, the sounds of war are a 'black music'(p.81), 'a mad irregular music'(p.80), 'the terrible din'(p.80), 'the black song'(p.82), and 'the insane clangour'(p.80). The smithy's furnace is a 'red caged beast of a fire'(p.80), his activities obviously - in terms of the imagery in which they are expressed and because they are motivated by material gain - evil, ugly and unnatural. The condition and colour of the girl's gown 'that once at time's beginning might have been white but was now like old ivory and old snow', reflects her acquiring of experience and loss of total innocence. Her coat has become torn and dirty, tarnished by the world.

Chapter VIII, 'The Taken Town', is a serious, objective, and brutal description of the effects of war on the civilian population. It is medieval in that it refers to a siege, plague, city walls and hot burning tar, but it is out of time in that it describes an event that is evocative of all sieges, from Jerusalem or Acre during the Crusades to Stalingrad in 1942. In this chapter war is not romanticised. The defeated general, 'a figure of great heroism and splendour'(p.89) and the ceremony of surrender itself are portrayed ironically. The grandeur of war, and the formal cessation of hostilities, are seen as empty and irrelevant when compared to the suffering of the ordinary people.

The besieged soldiers suffered too. Most had died from wounds, lack of medical care, and starvation. Some were taken prisoner some shot by their own side when they went mad, while some deserted. The civilian population also died from starvation and sickness. The wealthier ones bought food on the black market, the poor, sustained as their ancestors had been by the image of 'the golden cornstalk'(p.87), endured somehow, often by crime. The defeated army marched out of the city and the victors marched in. The people were afraid to come out, although some stole out at night to kill sentries. In punishment for this the city's prominent citizens were executed, a reprisal centuries old but

arguably particularly evocative of Nazi occupied Europe in WWII.

The girl is also mysteriously present at the execution. The reader is aware that she must be where the Dragon is and that her mission, if such it may be called, is to kill the Dragon. Yet it is never spelled out how, or even if this is to be accomplished. She is an extremely nebulous and an arguably ineffectual pacifist, occasionally seen by soldiers, a beautiful girl who plays a few notes of poignant flute music, and then disappears.

The usual reaction of the ordinary soldiers is to view her as a physically desirable woman, although one that is too attractive to be interested in the likes of them. A woman like her, they feel, would want to be with an officer, and to share in his wealth and power. However, it may be significant that many of the soldiers feel that they recognise her from a past campaign'(p.94), or that she reminds them of a girl they love in their home village, or of something 'beautiful and good which they dream about'(p.94). Perhaps this is her power, that she is a symbol of a better love, a comfort to the soldiers, a reminder of their other, truer, peacetime life.

The girl is the last figure the chancellor sees before he is shot and this vision, like a benediction, helps to make his death easier. When the army has left

the city, the girl is there as 'the sewer folk'(p.100) emerge. She speaks to a boy and offers to take him to a safe place, 'a good place near the sea'(p.102), far away. This is the first intimation that her journey may include Orkney and it also underlines her compassion and the special affinity she has with children.

Death is all too prominent in this chapter. It is always around, so much a part of war that the soldiers 'had all glutted themselves with death in all its shapes and on this battlefield and that'(p.95), and such was their apathy that they did not care, except a few who said a prayer, about the executions in the town square. Such an attitude is understandable, but morally inexcusable. Legend and fairy-tale, except as they relate to the haunting figure of the girl, are entirely absent in 'The Taken Town'. War is portrayed in terms of its cost. Soldiers and civilians alike gain nothing from war but death and suffering.

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Chapter IX, 'A New Field', is gentle, meditative, poetic narrative, containing elements of pastoral, folk and fairy tale. The authorial voice is most marked, Brown philosophising about the value of language in

communication, and using his intrusions to explain his characters. The setting is now Spain, the action having moved across Europe, from east to west. The war or a war is in progress, although the huge number of refugees - 'It seemed as if all the peoples of Europe were trekking from place to place, into ever deepening squalor and incomprehension'(p.105) - and the mention of Leipzig, may well indicate that it is now the time of Napoleon.

The new field is being prepared by 'two earth-toilers'(p.104), a man, a scrivener by profession, and a woman, a former seamstress, both refugees from the war. They are digging stones out of the field and somehow understand each other despite speaking different languages. They have turned their backs on war and are going to create 'a little green kingdom of peace'(p.107), although they are all too aware that the lord will soon come to claim his share. They symbolise the family, tolerance and love, good sense, hope for the future, and the ability of the peasant, or those with peasant forebears, to survive. Their spade 'was the little bell of peace'(p112), in contrast to the strident and 'evil iron clang and the pandemonium'(p.112) of war.

The girl 'who has come from who knows where'(p.104) joins the little family in the field. She gives them money, 'good wholesome lawful gold, that is used in the

commerce of open simple people ... to buy the daily bread with.'(p.111) The use of this money contrasts with 'the proper distribution of gold and silver'(p.110), which, along with 'the staking of claims ... is the root of all wars.'(p.110) The flute music is described as 'the sound of corn growing and of cabbages and apples and hidden children.'(p.110) It is also 'a fragment of the language that knows no frontiers ... the language of the stars in their courses'(p.111). The flute sounds would here appear to symbolise, and to evoke briefly in the hearts of those who hear them, the peace, happiness and contentment associated with simple living, free from fear.

In 'A New Field', the authorial intrusions are also of interest. Brown discourses on the value, or otherwise, of language. It may be turned 'into all manner of lies and bad contrivance'(p.104), an observation particularly apt when one considers the impact and use (or misuse) of wartime propaganda. Of special note, however, is his observation that a writer is constantly tempted 'to write the facile fiction and poems that the public demand'(p.104), a temptation he has obviously resisted. He compares a piece of writing to a field which has been dug, seeded and harvested, and says that 'the rare true writer'(p.104) will, metaphorically, plant 'yet another acre, stony and unpromising, that ought (he thinks) to be opened to the

sun and rain and wind ...'(p.104)

The reader must assume that Brown is referring to his own experience, that he realises that he is not acknowledged as a mainstream writer and is justifying that decision. Time in a Red Coat, a kind of fairy tale about the suffering and brutality caused by war in history, is not, in all fairness, a popular fiction, or even well known. It is deeply meaningful, beautifully written, and totally sincere, and Brown is obviously writing about an issue which greatly concerns him. He wishes his readers to be concerned as well, and he aims to raise our awareness about the efects of war on society. It is not at all difficult to believe, especially given his lifestyle, that he is motivated to write for selfless and deeply spiritual reasons.

Chapter X, 'The Mountain Village', fixes the setting firmly in the time of Napoleon. The girl has travelled from medieval into modern time, into the age of nationalism, large scale wars, mass slaughter and a changing attitude to war and soldiering. The location of the village is not made clear, but it may be in the region of the Pyrenees. Events seem to relate to the time of The Peninsula War (1808-14), in which a series of campaigns were fought in Spain and Portugal.

The chapter initially examines how a small and isolated village community reacts to a large number of soldiers moving into the vicinity. The society is

feudal, but the local lord has failed in his traditional role of leader and protector, having decided that he owed it to his tenants and dependents to travel to the great cities of Europe in order to gain 'first-hand experience of the stylish world and its manners and customs.'(p.115) There is a rare irony present here. His twenty servants, left behind in his 'little turreted towered castle'(p.115), gradually grow extremely lax. Napoleon, moving two armies into the area, himself stays in the seigneur's chateau. The old order is in decay and new forces are sweeping Europe.

Only two of the villagers show any initiative in dealing with the encampment of two armies nearby. The vintner, 'no fool'(p.117), stocks up on his supplies of food and wine, in order to sell to the soldiers at ever increasing prices - much like the earlier boatman's tale. Simon the falconer views the 'war-men'(p.121) as hawks, and he advises his fellow villagers to send the women into the forest, and the men to stay inside their barred and shuttered houses. Both men are intelligent, shrewd and possess considerable foresight.

Soon after the first soldiers appear in the village the men 'panic'(p.122) and pack the women off to safety. Never having experienced war, they nevertheless know that soldiers regard women as bodies to be used, by force as often as not. This realistic view contrasts with that of some of the young unmarried women who were

resentful at being 'herded'(p.122) into the forest. They see soldiers and soldiering as glamorous, an attitude 'deeply engrained in the female psyche'(p.122) and they believed men in uniform to be great lovers. The irony here is that the husbands and sweethearts of the women, although determined to protect them from the soldiers, themselves treat their wives and girlfriends violently - 'Trod hit Jeanne smartly across the cheek'(p.122) - and abusively - 'twisting her wrist until she cried out with pain'(p.123). A main idea in Time in a Red Coat is that women are a force for peace in the world(p.207), but at this point in history, as portrayed in 'The Mountain Village', they lack the power to effect significant change.

The changing nature of warfare is also of interest in this chapter. The soldiers do not steal, paying for all the supplies they need. The major even offers to pay for the girl, rather than resorting to rape. There are tents to sleep in, enough food to eat, and no mention of disease. The atmosphere, in comparison with that of the preceding chapters, is somehow much more civilised, especially given such descriptions as 'young laughing off-duty fellows'(p.122) and the 'corporal was a big jovial man'(p.125).

A 'blue' soldier, 'an old scarred veteran'(p.128), is invested with the insight and the experience to sum up what is happening, the first time in the text that

an ordinary soldier has done so. Brown has here linked Napoleonic time with the beginnings of the age of democracy. The old soldier shrewdly realises that Napoleon has 'changed all the rules'(p.128) of warfare. Previously, there was more manoeuvring than actual fighting, and a negotiated settlement rather than defeat in battle settled the outcome. But now it's 'no fun being a soldier (p.129) as there is a much greater chance of dying, perhaps quickly, perhaps not.

The 'blue' soldier is a mercenary,[14] detached and philosophical about the coming battle. He is in conversation with a 'black' soldier, technically the enemy, but at the present moment his comrade in arms, reminding us of the changing allegiances in those wars. He toasts the young soldier's health, drinks to his 'good homecoming'(p.130) and shares his pipe with him, 'the pipe of peace.'(p.131) Their meeting highlights the fact that the reason wars are usually fought has little to do with why most soldiers are involved in them. The 'blue' soldier does it for a living, the 'black' soldier because he was forcibly conscripted.

'The Mountain Village' introduces to the reader the 'black' soldier, destined to be a protagonist of some importance. He knows 'nothing about war and warfare'(p.129), is 'tall golden-haired handsome'(p.129), and is a fisherman who was press-ganged, 'dragged from a boat at the

shore'(p.129). It is significant that he has seen the girl and heard her music and that he knows in his heart that he will see her again.

Chapter IX, 'The Battle', provides more clues as to nature and function of the girl who must be where war is. It seems that she is most visible at dawn and at dusk, although some may see her at any time and some will never do so. Her special affinity for water, like a river spirit, is highlighted by her night vigil near the village well, and by the vintner's perception of her:

> It was as if the girl and the well had been made for each other: centuries since, when the first water-seeking spade was sunk, there she had been, the guardian of the source, ... Now here she was at last, visible, the incarnate spirit of a sweet mountain spring(p.136)

She is a kind of ancient spirit, one that pre-dates Christianity and that lineage links her somehow with fairyland. The priest's perception of her is coloured by his faith, but is perhaps truer and deeper:

> 'A burnt shadow. She moves among the candles. She lingers a long time at the circle of water in the font. Her face is very old sometimes. Then, soon, she has the look of a child. ... There was never such beautiful music in the church. Peace and joy, ripeness and laughter, loaves and fishes, while the music lasts. Sometimes I think the armies have followed her here to finish her off for good and all. Sometimes I think she's keeping them apart.'(p.136)

The girl is ageless, out of time, evokes goodness and

happiness, and significantly, is here directly associated with Christian godliness. In the spiritual war between good and evil she is a strong force for good, but the forces of evil, of which war is but one manifestation, are very strong, perhaps too strong to defeat.

Hundreds of men have seen the girl who is to them a 'princess in the tower'(p.149) figure. Soldiers have an image of themselves as rescuers of 'innocence and beauty'(p.149) but they soon learn that war is nothing like the image. The girl rarely speaks - it is as if language is alien to her - but, possessing foreknowledge, she does warn Abel the weaver to go to the forest. The girl is an enigma still but it is evident that the reader need not fear for her. She is a spirit of some sort a supernatural creature who does not live fully in the natural world and who therefore cannot be destroyed by it. It is apparent that she has a special bond with the young 'black' soldier, who breaks ranks in his eagerness to see her.

'The Battle' describes the conflict between the two armies on the mountain, and it makes a number of observations about 'modern' warfare. 'The Battle', despite the fact that it is the time of Napoleon, is also evocative of WWI. The large number of men involved, the attacking army's huge casualties, the failure to break through enemy lines, the soldier's

ignorance of what is really happening, the immediate punishment of soldiers who complain or who disobey orders, the gap which exists between those who give the orders and those who do the actual fighting, and the terrible wounds inflicted by cannon, are all reminiscent of the Western Front in the 1914-18 war.

Brown begins by asking: 'How shall a writer who has never seen a shot fired in anger describe what followed?(p.137), answering his own question by analysing how other writers (Tolstoy and Shakespeare) have attempted to do so, but stressing that art, however great, is not necessarily truth, and the reality of war is very different from the words and actions in which it may be depicted. Brown, however, only has words to use, and he manages to use them to convey some of the realities of war. The images help. The mountain 'throbbed'(p.138) and seemed to ring 'like a mad bell'(p.138). The soldiers marched upward 'to the metronome of discipline.'(p.139) 'The younger soldiers had the bolt-eyes of hares'(p.143). There was much suffering but there were also 'wholesome scenes'(p.143) in which comrades helped and comforted each other.

The chapter ends at dusk, with the burning of the village, to signal victory to Napoleon. This wanton and unnecessary destruction underlines the ruthlessness of those in command, and shows their total lack of concern for ordinary existence, or, indeed, for anything that

is not to do with war. The immaculate and impressive appearance of the general contrasts with the total lack of morality in his character. It is also bitter irony that the villagers are initially impressed by the presence of the man who will order their village destroyed, and who will stay and watch it burn.

Chapter XII, 'The Longest Journey', focuses on the individual character of the young 'black' bright-haired soldier, and on the journey of his soul, wavering between life and death.[15] His early life, 'those twenty years in the fishing village in the North Atlantic'(p.158), is described in great detail. The reader is convinced especially by the mention of 'Ottervoe'(p.163), that the wounded soldier, hiding in a pig-sty, is a fisherman from Orkney. He had fallen in love a number of times and dreamed of 'the cottage and the hearth, the board and the crib'(p.162), but 'never once had he known the true raptures of love'(p.163) and so now, dying, he was 'maimed and incomplete'(p.164), his life cut short. His 'soul yearned to get back to that village beside the Atlantic'(p.161), but even if he survived to come 'limping home' he 'would be a burden on the community'(p.162), 'never more able to handle sail and rudder, or sink a spade for potatoes or for peats.'(p.162)

Perhaps it was better to travel the road toward 'DEATH'(p.162), 'for the way was sweet'(p.162) and

would end in 'the fire and comfort of the Inn.'(p.162) The 'kindly Inn of Death', an image of Christian heaven, is an extension of the metaphor of life as an inn, as found in Chapter V. His spiritual journey mirrors that of the girl's through time, the young Orkneyman meeting the dead souls of those who perished as a result of war, and passing by, on the road toward death, the field, the smithy and the taken town. Sadness grows upon both the traveller and the reader as he does so. The couple tending 'A New Field' are 'two shadows', old, their child long dead, still trying to tend their cabbages The smithy, his wife 'gone long since'(p.166) is 'endeavouring to shape ... shapes of peace'(p.165) to take 'some pledge of peace'(p.166) to the Inn.

An endless stream of souls travels the 'Road of Death'(p.166), the Orkneyman being quite shocked at 'such multitudes'(p.166) They come from 'The Taken Town' and are all victims, whether directly or indirectly, of war. Brown uses comparison and stark imagery to point out that modern warfare results in huge numbers of both soldiers and civilians dying. In Orkney a few would die each winter, mainly the old and the young. If fishermen died, even just three or four, it was 'a grief to the whole community'(p.166). But the continental town is a 'slaughter-house of death!'(p.166), its dead 'a vast shoal caught in one

dark net!'(p.166), the scene 'a long grey river of death'(p.166). The fishermen is correct in viewing this as 'unthinkable'(p.166) and unacceptable. Brown wants the reader to think so too.

The Orkneyman reviews the actions, both good and bad, in his own life, and they reveal him to be no better or worse than any on his island. However, his life in Orkney, it is implied, was one which was close to nature, simple and fulfilling, and which has, to a large extent, protected his true self. The clinging to his own identity as a fisherman, able to assess objectively the morality of his life so far, and his rejecting his new role as a soldier, all means that he is closer to 'the perdurable seamless garment: Truth itself.'(p.173)

Moving back in time, in contrast to the girl moving forward, Simon(p.173), as we now find his name to be, reaches the forest and finds in that limbo the souls of the five deserters, the five soldiers 'out of ancient wars'(p.174) who have all been hanged for 'mutiny, cowardice or desertion'(p.174). He is met at the Inn by Death, 'a bent hag with a shawl about her, shadowing a withered face'(p.175) instead of the child he expected. Yet a voice of the utmost sweetness'(p.175), from 'a place of greeness and green shadows'(p.175) calls him back.

> 'Come back. I'm here. I'm waiting for you.
> I am keeping the water for you.'(p.175)

His soul returns to his body.

The image of the girl as a spirit of nature is evident here, and somehow it blends in smoothly with the Biblical overtones which underlie 'The Longest Journey'. The girl possesses an undefined power which enables her to renew life.[16] Her relationship with the fisherman is special, reflecting their shared reverence for and strong affinity with the lifegiving, flowing water.

Chapter XIII, 'The Tryst', focuses on the developing relationship between Simon and the girl. Although it seems they speak two different languages, they are portrayed as communicating fully. Suddenly, with him, she becomes talkative, almost loquacious, exhibiting passionate anger, ridiculing and deriding him, and instructing him as to his best course of action. The girl, as portrayed here, is human in her speech and her emotions, and, as reflected in the chapter's title, becomes Simon's sweetheart.

Initially, the girl is angry with Simon, taunting him, calling him 'scum'(p.176) and telling him that he may as well do his duty and die, as that's 'what soldiers are for.'(p.177) However, he convinces her that he is really a fisherman and not a soldier. The words of the Mass form the background of their

conversation, calm the girl, and lend truth to what Simon is saying. The Mass is associated with healing, the girl now tending Simon's wound and the villagers comforted by 'this ceremony of bread and wine' which 'was so perdurable that world-girdling fire or flood was nothing in comparison'(p.178).

Water is life-giving, the girl purifying the sleeve of her smock by washing it in dew, and using it then as a bandage on Simon's leg; and Simon gaining strength from drinking 'good water'(p.181). He tells the girl about his dream, about a child who was waiting for him and 'a girl with a flute'(p.181) who was crying too much to play it. His comment - 'I see in every girl the infant she has been and the old woman she will become'(p.181) - reinforces the image of the girl as symbolising, for him and for us, the essence of all women throughout time. The girl as symbol, as a spirit with supernatural powers, now replaces the more human one who was so briefly depicted earlier in the chapter. The girl must go:

> 'There's worse fires to put out. The Dragon gets hungrier. Century by century he gets more dangerous.(p.181)

The women of the village will nurse Simon, the girl convincing them that he is a fisherman, not a soldier. The fish that she draws in the soil signifies, in the words of the priest 'that this young man is a Christian soul like yourselves'(p.183) and that the men

of the village 'will behave like Christian men, with faith and hope and charity.'(p.183)

The simple life of fisherfolk (and by extension of farming folk), is here invested with an essential holiness, as if it were easier to be closer to God if one led this kind of life. This is a recurring idea in Brown's writing, which generally mourns the passing of traditional (Orkney life, and views modern society as more sinful and unnatural, and capable of greater evil. The common idea of his, that women are more Christian, and so more peace-loving, kind and tolerant than men, is also reflected here. They are the ones who delight in watching the girl kiss the fisherman, 'the way a good story should have its ending'(p.184). They are there when the girl gives Simon her flute, which he should fill with sea-songs which will take him home. Already, in his hands, the flute is making music 'like a gull, like an echo in a cave, like a seal splashing,'(p.185), sounds so meaningfully evocative of his Orkney home.

* * * * *

Chapter XIV, 'The Magus', is lengthy, set in England, characterised by literary allusion, has as its

main character a wealthy member of the English aristocracy, and the narrator is the trusted servant of the English lord. The style of this chapter, in comparison to those which precede it, is higher in its literary manner, more poetical and intellectual; and the content is more dense, mainly because of its huge time span. It also contains many historical references, has much to say about war, and, at its core, there is a mysterious, almost occult element which tantalises and intrigues.

'The Magus' is the only section in which Brown is not the narrator. Events are being recorded, objectively and in detail, by Erasmus, the elderly, caring and trusted servant of the unnamed lord. He is valet, companion, 'shadow'(p.201), and, in his lord's words, 'my friend and brother'(p.205). Born in the kitchen on the same day as his master, Erasmus is his faithful and loyal companion. His writing is intelligent, descriptive and convincing; its high tone conveys a sense of recording weighty and meaningful events; it is elevating prose, even if supposedly written by a quiet, loyal servant.[17]

It is evident, both from the chapter's title and from Erasmus referring to him as such, that 'The Magus' is the English lord himself. In folklore and mythology a Magus is a wise-man and magician, the word being derived from Old Persian and referring to a member of a

priestly caste of Medians. The plural *Magi*

> is used specifically in the Vulgate edition of the Bible to denote the wise men who came to Bethlehem to worship Jesus (Matthew II,1). This use may have been based upon the strong Magian belief in the coming of a saviour.[18]

The term Magus, therefore, is both Christian and pre-Christian, and because it is associated with the ancient powers of the East a Magus is invested with a certain mysteriousness. He is therefore an ambivalent figure, but a wise man, powerful, and a manipulator. The Magus figure has been in English fiction a long time.[19]

It is 'the seventh decade of the nineteenth century'(p.223) but Brown's Magus, two hundred and twenty two years old, lives the life of a Regency buck, being unmarried, often uncouth, and drinking heavily. His guests see him as an obscene leftover from an earlier era. He was born in Cromwell's time and he might be, imaginatively, all the Dukes of Marlborough to date, as he fought at Blenheim and lives near Oxford in the vicinity of Blenheim Palace, the seat of the Churchills. He is an intelligent version of free world determination; he possesses knowledge of the future, yet he is a man of great innocence who has himself been a victim. He is aware that selfishness and brutality exist; he knows what causes wars and why people fight; but, a Tithonus figure, he cannot die until released by the girl, the angel of death.

Erasmus's master, however, is more human than Prospero and a more simple man than Conchis. He extolls the virtues of war and the role of chivalry as a motivativing force,[20] and he regrets that he did not have 'the great joy (p.197) of dying for his country. He is, seemingly, politically naïve, and needs to grow in his outlook before being released from life. The impassioned speech he gives one night at dinner may reflect a new maturity. It certainly gives the reader more facts about the Magus. He describes Erasmus and himself as 'children of war ... doomed to linger and suffer and sweat until the last peace treaty is signed (when) .. the lion shall lie down with the lamb'(p.218). The explicit reference to the Second Coming lends weight to the supposition that this English Lord, although possessing supernatural attributes, is a Magus more Christian than otherwise.

'The lady in the white coat', now in England, has moved northward. Her raiment is black, contact with the world having tarnished and dirtied it. In 'The Magus' she is an 'ancient sybil'(p.187), a seeker of knowledge, a gifted healer, an angel of death; and, dressed once again in white as she ventures into his Lordship's most 'hideous and horrible'(p.227) war gallery, her presence, in this evil and frightening place, evokes the sound of children's laughter. Having been evicted from Howthton Hall in the belief that her

presence was responsible for the child's illness[21] , the lady is welcomed back, loved, and given the freedom of the household.[22]

The battle theme again dominates in this chapter, nineteeth and twentieth century wars being its main concern. This was the time when the British soldier did most of his fighting on foreign soil. It was also the time of 'modern' warfare,'the age of cannon fodder'[23] conscription, artillery and huge casualties, both soldier and civilian. It is possible for the Magus to romanticise some of the battles he has fought in, but, when he looks into the future he can only shudder.

*           *           *           *           *

The final chapters of Time in a Red Coat are set in Orkney. The initial scene is described from the point of view of authority, the factor there meditating on the choices of useless or superfluous local crofters. Basically they could choose to emigrate or to fight in wars.[24] Brown emphasises the deep attachment which the evicted retained for their island, and the community spirit which saw 'that the stricken ones had food and shelter'(p.230). A hint of nationalism underlies events as the exploiters of the island do not belong to it,

and are probably wealthy English. The economy is pre-industrial, socialist, and fosters interdependence: 'They knew, deep down, that they were only as prosperous as the poorest family among them.'(p.230)

Simon Thorfinnson, the Orkney soldier, and, Maurya, as the wandering white-coated lady is named, are reunited and are married in Ottervoe. It is Maurya's money which make it possible for Simon to rent his cottage and his fishing boat. The sea is presented as magical, life-giving and unchanging. It is 'the end of the road'(p.246). The music of the flute is a symbol of peace and refuge, but the future threat of development, the 'men coming at the weekend to make probes into the hill'(p.244), contradicts the likelihood of a happy ending. Even remote Orkney is no refuge.

'Old and Grey and Full of Sleep'[25] concludes the novel. Simon is dead and Maurya is reflecting on their lives. She is now old, marriage having made her mortal. Ottervoe is a dead community, the fishermen having deserted the village to work in the mine. Her coat is now red and she has not worn it for a long time, nor has she played her flute. The dragon has defeated her. She tells her grandchild the story of her past. She is human and she bleeds.

XVI is significant in that it unequivocally juxtaposes formal history and story or legend. The history which the child studies at school is described

by Maurya as 'That rigmarole! Sweetly they sugar it.'(p.247) It contrasts with her own remembered story or view of history, which, bitterly, she describes as 'a lie, like all stories'(p.249), a statement which reflects the state's concept of the unimportance of legend, the record of the ordinary or 'little' people of Europe, in comparison with the doings of the rich and powerful. Brown emphasises that the stories of the poor people are more important than 'history'. Time in A Red Coat examines the relationship between formal history and legend, and, presents one as the antithesis of the other. [26]

It is also of note, at the point of this summing up, that Brown's writing, in style and content, has much in common with the work of Isak Dinesen.[27] Both writers are concerned with myth, began writing when they were somewhat older, are storytellers, reminisce about the past, and write elegy to a vanished and simpler order of life. The Africa or the northern Europe which Dinesen writes about are essentially pre-industrial, pre-revolutionary civilisations and feudal in structure, like Brown's Europe and Orkney. The reflective stories of both authors appear remote from contemporary concerns, and are given in an intricate and unique prose style which is sometimes baffling in its complexities. Both are at home in the past, derive their story-telling method from saga and fairy tale,

have characters not totally explained and write tales which possess an underlying mysteriousness. Brown's writing, like Dinesen's, sets him far apart from any contemporary modernist literary tradition.

Time in a Red Coat is unique in the Brown canon in that it is the only one of his novels which is set, predominantly, outside Scotland and of the old Viking world. Its text contains elements of pastoral, myth, tragedy, history, legend and fantasy. It sees the world in symbolic terms, incorporating ritual, magical thinking and fairy-tale. It reflects a kind of possible peasant personal memory of European history. The setting is predominantly medieval and includes Napoleonic time, Cromwellian time, time in military service, and the galvanic movement of war, which is archetypal for all history. 'The Magus' chapter moves in and out of past, present and future time. In it war is seen as particularly resulting from the Reformation, as a consequence of Britain's rejecting Catholicism.

Time in a Red Coat is dense, multi-faceted, moving, deeply meaningful, intriguing in its use of story as true history, anti-war, bitter about the present and pessimistic about the future, and Christian in its reiteration that we must seek 'the perdurable seamless garment: Truth itself.'(p.173)

To date, there has been but little sensitive criticism specifically of Time in a Red Coat. Murray

concludes that, in terms of style, Brown reached the peak of his attainment in this novel; the saga style gone, and in its place 'a compression that mimics the workings of the mind itself'.[28] D'Arcy, however, does not agree that Brown's style only fully emerged in 1984, arguing that it 'had already attained its precision and effectiveness in his earliest short stories'[29] and he sees the novel's message as one of universal importance, as one that 'is indeed a strong plea for peace in modern times and a protest against the use of war as a political means, especially against unarmed and innocent civilians.'[30]

Profumo is more cautiously questioning of many aspects of Time in a Red Coat: its unity; the authorial intrusions, which distract the reader; certain 'failures of touch',[31] instances when fairy-tale elements plunge the story 'into mawkishness';[32] and of Brown's attachment to the ceremonial, which, in his opinion, slows things up, so that 'sometimes this novel seems to march on the spot.'[33] However, he admires the author's effective use of symbol and motif, his 'strongly metaphoric language'[34] and 'the way he runs together the textures of poetry and prose',[35] commenting that:

> The book's crowning chapter boldly achieves the same aim through a surrealistc survey of martial events past, present and future, that collapses most conventions and is the novel's imaginative *tour de force.*[36]

This comment must, surely, refer to 'The Magus'. Like the 'Bonhoeffer' section in Magnus, it distinguishes Time in a Red Coat as being original and powerful in its ability to reach out to and inspire wonder in the reader, even as it illuminates important themes, both moral and eschatological.

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## Footnotes for Chapter Three: *Time in a Red Coat.*

1. Time in a Red Coat was published in 1984, after Greenvoe (1972) and Magnus (1973).

2. G. M. Brown, Time in a Red Coat, Ringwood, 1984, p.39. Subsequent references to this work will be by the page number in brackets after the quote.

3. The Great Wall 'sometimes hidden in a fold of valley, sometimes eagle-high' is depicted in imagery which is evocative of The Great Wall of China. The Wall in Time in a Red Coat is also evocative of the wall protecting that part of Russia in the vicinity of Kiev, built by the Kievan prince, Vladimir Monomakh, in the 12th century, to protect his people from attacks by nomadic warriors from the east.

4. In his poem cycle, Fishermen With Ploughs (London, 1971), Brown also uses the term 'Dragon' which he says, in the introduction, is symbolic of 'starvation, pestilence, turbulent neighbours', i.e. war.

5. The Mongols were at the peak of their power between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, ruling Rus, which had Kiev at its centre.

6. Alexander the Great (356-323 B.C.) conquered much of Asia, including northern India in 327 B.C.

7. E. Warner, Heroes, Monsters and Other Worlds From Russian Mythology, 1985, p.37. (No place of publication given.)

8. 'The soldier from the war returning' has been described as a motif occurring in Patrick White's writing and further reference will be made to it in this chapter. See J.S. Ryan, 'Patrick White's Recurring Soldier-From-The-War-Returning Motif', in H. Heseltine (ed.), The Shock of Battle, Occasional Paper No. 16, English Department, University College, and University of N.S.W., and Australian Defence Force Academy, Campbell, A.C.T., pp.41-57. (No date given.)

9. Bede, A History of the English Church and People, L. Sherley-Price (trans.), Ringwood, 1968, p.127.

10. In J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings (Part One: 'The Fellowship of the Ring'), 1954. Frodo and his hobbit companions, pursued by the Black Riders, find warmth, help and (comparitive) safety at the inn at Bree, *The Prancing Pony.*

11. The number seven certainly seems to be Brown's favourite number. In Rockpools and Daffodils', Edinburgh, 1992, p. 127, he says: 'I have found the number 7 of great help to me, for so many reasons that it would take another article to explain.'

12. E. Warner, op. cit., p. 12.

13. J. Arden, Serjeant Musgrave's Dance, London, 1960. In this play, set in the 1860's but timeless in its themes, four deserters head north in bitter winter weather. They are sickened by their role as soldiers in a small unnamed British protectorate, a role that includs arresting, shooting and pursuing civilians, including women and children. Musgrave, in particular, wants ordinary people to know the 'truth' about war and soldiering. Arden, like Brown, uses 'red' imagery to effect. A soldier is 'an old red rag stretched over four pairs o' bones'(p.11). Soldiers are 'Bloodred roses'(p.12), 'dead red rooks'(p.28), and 'three redcoat ravens'(p.92). The relationship between soldiers and women is an important theme. Women lie with them and weep for them, are deserted and left

pregnant and alone, are unfaithful to their soldier husbands, and come between a soldier and his duty. The idea that women are perceptive and full of good sense, and are more able to get to the truth of things, is also canvassed. Serjeant Musgrave's Dance also explores the idea that soldiering was a convenient way for a community, or the powerful people in it, to get rid of trouble makers, the unemployed and the surplus population. Religion and death and waste are also important themes in this play.

14. This fact also strongly links him with Napoleon, many of whose troops were mercenaries.

15. This journey is very similar to Samuel Whaness's in Greenvoe.

16. She brings the dove back to life in 'The Forest', p.68.

17. Stevens, the butler at Darlington Hall, in K. Ishiguri, The Remains of the Day, London, 1989, is similar to Erasmus as they are both trusted servants and in charge of staff, both English butlers and narrate the story they tell.

18. M. Leach (ed.), Funk & Wagnall's Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend, New York, 1984, p.664.

19. Shakespeare's Prospero is an archetypal Magus figure. Conchis, in John Fowles The Magus, Suffolk, 1977 (Revised Edition), although predominantly a trickster figure, also resembles the wise old man or magician. The Magus is similar to Chapter XIV of Time in a Red Coat in its wide-ranging literary and mythological allusions, its interest in time and the supernatural, its focus on war and its erigmatic treatment of the masque.

20. The Magus lost his right hand in the Crimean War and says "'*Dulce et decorum est.*'" : 'It is right and fitting (to die) for one's country.' This attitude was prevalent in Europe until WWI. As recently as the Falklands War such sentiments were publicly expressed by the bereaved families of those British soldiers killed in action.

21. The woman as witch and instigator of sickness and death is a feature of medieval history and folktale. Chapter XIV, 'The Magus', is similar in theme to Christopher Fry's The Lady's Not For Burning', London, 1950, where, in a late medieval although timeless community, a wise young woman is accused of being a witch. The viewpoint of Thomas,'a soldier from the war returning' (see footnote 8), shows the moral lessons which involvement in war teaches, principally tolerance and broad-mindedness. While it is true that His Lordship judges his guest hastily, his punishment of her is mild and he is able to readily admit his mistake. In its revulsion at the meaninglessness of the continual sackings and lootings of the period, Time in a Red Coat could also be seen as a kind of companion piece to Bertolt Brecht's Mother Courage and Her Children.

22. Women as nurturers is also a theme in William Blake's 'Songs of Innocence'. See in particular 'The Ecchoing (sic) Green'.

23. L. Turner, Napoleon and Europe, Melbourne, 1973, p. 54. The Napoleonic wars are held to be the beginning of modern warfare. The ranks were filled with virtually untrained conscripts, and cannons and artillery meant that battles were very bloody, Borodino being held by many, including Napoleon himself, to have been the bloodiest. See A. Palmer, Napoleon in Russia, London, 1967, and R.F. Delderfield, The Retreat From Moscow, London, 1967.

24. There is convincing evidence that, proportionately, Scotland contributed more men to

the British armed forces in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries than were recruited elsewhere. This is mainly thought to be due to the economic structure in place in many areas. Even in the twentieth century, it may be argued, the great losses sustained in WWI more deeply affected Scotland which had a high proportion of small communities. See W.H. Marwick, Scotland in Modern Times, London, 1964; and D. Young, Scotland, London, 1971. It is reasonable to assume that Brown, like many Scots, would feel resentful that so many Scotsmen died or were injured serving English interests fighting in distant wars. This indignation appears perfectly plain in 'Ottervoe'.

25. The chapter heading is derived from W. B. Yeats's poem which begins 'When you are old and grey and full of sleep', and indicates to the reader that events will involve a looking back, the end of a life, and, possibly, some regret.

26. In L. Woodbridge and E. Berry (eds.), True Rites and Maimed Rites: Ritual and Anti-Ritual in Shakespeare and His Age, Urbana and Chicago, 1992, the proposition is put that Shakespeare's plays are deeply embedded in an archaic discourse in which meaning is transmitted through recognised signs and symbols. In his plays are the crossroads where magic meets ceremony and literature meets anthropology. Brown, in his style, and especially in his use of symbols (dove, horse, fish, dragon, flute, water), has, it may be argued, achieved the same effect.

27. Specifically, in Winter's Tales, Carnival: Entertainments and Posthumous Tales, Last Tales, The Angelic Avengers, Anecdotes of Destiny and Ehrengard.

28. R. Murray, 'The Influence of Norse Literature on George Mackay Brown', Scottish Studies, (Frankfurt), 4, 1984, p.548.

29. J. D'Arcy, Scottish Skalds and Sagamen, East Linton, 1996, p.246.

30. J. D'Arcy, op. cit., p.253.

31. D. Profumo, Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol.48, 1988, p.60.

32. loc. cit.

33. loc.cit.

34. D. Profumo, op. cit., p.61.

35. loc. cit.

36. loc. cit.

## Chapter Four: Stories and Tales.

Although the main focus of my thesis is to examine George Mackay Brown's five full length novels, no comprehensive assessment of him as a writer would be complete without more in-depth reference to his other writings, most notably the many short stories published throughout his working life. Often these were published singly, in newspapers, magazines or books of essays, before being collected into lots of a dozen or so and published under one title.[1] Eight volumes of short stories, from A Calendar of Love (1967) to Winter Tales (1995), contain about one hundred stories written over three and a half decades.[2]

The short stories and novels are similar in their skeletal form, setting and style. Tradition, history, the cycle of life and the seasons, Christian goodness and ritual, the Vikings and the Sagas, myth and legend, the horrors of war - all are important themes. Orkney is the main setting, and the prose style varies from direct narrative, the descriptive, poetic and lyrical, to an amalgam of these. Often, a story is told by a narrator,

and occasionally, an authorial voice is clearly present. The tales vary markedly in terms of length, structure and import. Some are mere sketches, while others are novellas, with detailed plots and well-developed characters.

Christmas, both the festival and the season, recurs. The birth of Christ is celebrated at the same time as the winter solstice, and is therefore inextricably linked with all renewal, as the days begin to get longer; and with hope for the future, as spring approaches. Brown was well aware that the Christian tradition of celebrating Christmas is pre-dated by, and rests on the foundations of older mid-winter pagan rituals[3] . In late December, inside the neolithic burial chamber at Maeshowe, 'a finger of light touches the chamber of death; there is a hint of a promise of resurrection.'[4] It is 'the most exciting thing in Orkney, perhaps in Scotland'[5] There being no sure guarantee that light would return to Orkney each December, it would have been a great relief to the ancient tribe when, by the 24th, it undeniably had. In later times, the 'early Irish monks ... pointed out, gently that indeed the promised Light of the World had come at Yule; the merest bud of light, a child in a poor stable in the east.[6]

Brown's consciousness of, and fascination with Orkney history is reflected in 'Hawkfall' [7] , which describes

the neolithic burial of a priest-king and emphasises the cyclic nature of life. In early spring and, after the pagan ceremony, the mourners throw off their sadness and get on with practical living. Timelessness is important, for the death, even of a leader, does not interfere with the rituals of existence. 'That same day ... the men prepared for the first fishing of the year.'[8]

'The Fires of Christmas', also in Hawkfall, emphasises that Christianity, although not erasing violence and bloodshed from the world, has brought hope. Drawn from The Orkneyinga Saga, the story contrasts two political killings, one before the martyrdom of St Magnus, and one after.[9] The first is planned and is an accepted Viking method of eliminating one's enemies. The second is unpremeditated, caused by jealousy and alcohol, and perhaps therefore, not as sinful, especially as the innocent in the affair attend Church to celebrate Christ's birth. According to Brown the 'second drama is not so dark and hopeless as the first' as 'Fate had given way, to some extent at least, to grace.'[10] Brown views the Viking acceptance of the Christian faith as a very positive move to a better and more peaceful society.

'The Burning Harp'[11] is also set at Yule and concerns escape from fire, although not one which was deliberately lit. The ordinary Orkney folk whose house is burning help their visitors, a priest and a

poet-harpist, Niall, to escape incineration. Niall, in contrast to the bards of old, sings songs about fishing and salmon, which celebrate the doings of ordinary people, and are so beautiful that the 'gods will hear that music with joy for ever.'[12] This story, although pagan,[13] presents, as worthy of record, the concerns of peasant folk.

'The Christmas Dove' in the collection The Masked Fisherman [14] is a story about a caged dove being let loose and which finds its way to the stable where Christ is born, symbolically associating Christ's birth with peace on earth. 'I'll come to no harm,' said the dove to himself, 'if I stay near this boy.'[15]

In 'The Nativity Bell and the Falconer'[16] Celtic monks prepare to say Christmas Mass even though further Viking attacks appear imminent. The chapel has been destroyed but the ceremony goes ahead inside the charred and ruined walls. Pictish folk are among the worshippers and there features a statue of a Fisherman, a saintlike elevation of ordinary people. The Vikings, rather than attacking, join the congregation in peaceful worship. Christmas and the Mass are here portrayed as powerful enough to replace violence and destruction with harmony and acceptance.

In 'A Haul of Winter Fish'[17] it is nearly Yule and the weather is too wild for the fishing boats to safely put to sea. Hunger is widespread when a boat appears

from Hoy and a stranger, a black man, leaves three baskets of fish to feed the people of the village. This incident has associations with Christ's feeding of the five thousand and the story is an example of Brown's ability to successfully adapt and relocate many of the stories in the Bible.

An association of Christmas with the supernatural occurs in 'Christmas Visitors'.[18] Since his death by drowning forty-three years previously, the fisherman Samuel has 'visited' his wife every Christmas. As she has been raising three boys alone, these supernatural appearances have been of great comfort to her. As the years passed and her own death draws nearer, the visits become more and more fleeting. She knows this will be her last winter. This story is poignantly and poetically beautiful, moving delicately through a widow's memories and her calm acceptance of approaching death.
In 'Miss Tait and Tommy and the Carol Singers'[19] Christmas is seen to work its magic on Miss Tait, who is transformed from a very severe old lady who frightened children, to a generous, smiling and happy woman. A simple act of kindness by Tommy, who brought her kindling as she had no coal due to a miner's strike, had affected the change. Like Ebenezer Scrooge, Miss Tait, at Christmas time, changes her character.

In 'The Winter Song',[20] which includes many examples of carols in the local Orkney idiom, the child

singer-narrator, after an evening of mixed fortune and varied reception, returns home to a warm croft house and a loving extended family. His mother's kiss is 'a sweet red warm star'[21] and the fire 'flamed like the sun.'[22] This story describes, from a child's point of view, what Christmas should be like: full of warmth, security and love.

In 'The Weaver',[23] a tale with echoes of George Eliot's Silas Marner, a once famous cloth-maker loses his creativity and becomes embittered and anti-social after the loss of the woman he loves. Even after the birth of a baby boy under similar circumstances as that of Jesus in a ruined house in Quoy, he remains seemingly untouched. He appears to represent all of those who are just outside faith, and who are, therefore, unhappy and unfulfilled.

The idea of the Christ child being born in Orkney is developed in more detail in the opening story of The Sun's Net, 'A Winter Tale'.[24] This longer story is given, unusually, a specific time frame, being set in December 1973. There are three narrators, all of them educated, mature men the Doctor, Minister and Teacher on the island of Njalsay. Brown has a distinct tendency, in all of his writing, to portray such people unsympathetically. Being removed from the spiritually rich and natural lifestyle of the fisherman and farmer, these 'outsiders' are often presented as being

intolerant, ignorant and patronising. In this case it is the Doctor who is the exception and it is his version of events which is invested with the most integrity.

Dr Clifton describes the island community as one where literal poverty no longer exists, but which is slowly dying, as most young people have had to leave to find suitable work. He attends many death-beds but no births. The suicide of Ragnar Holm, a fisherman, is symptomatic of the decay, both economic and spiritual, of island society. A man of simple tastes, a bachelor and a socialist, the Doctor finds most enjoyment in the company of ordinary men. Attending a dinner party at the Manse, he is sickened by the lewd jokes, the ridicule of island life and traditions, and the cynical view that Biblical events which cannot be explained scientifically ought not to be accepted as truth.

Walking home he sees a light in what should be a deserted croft and is summoned by a distraught young man to assist at the birth of his baby boy. It is a difficult first birth for his teenage wife but the Doctor leaves 'the little family .. wrapped in their flame of happiness.'[25] In reality, the family does not 'exist', nobody having lived in that house for seven years. Yet one of the points of the literary fantasy is to contrast the Doctor's positive involvement with that of the Minister, who, when the young man comes to him for assistance, keeps him waiting; and the teacher,

obsessed with illness and approaching death, who has no opportunity to help the young man. The rejection by the Church elders of a special Christmas service with a crib and carols and no sermon is also of significance. In this story decay is not only caused by pollution, materialism and the shedding of traditional values, but is also a long term consequence of the Reformation. Thereafter, the rituals of the old (true) Catholic religion were replaced by those of a dour Presbyterianism, denigrating the simplicity of island beliefs and culture and proving the primary cause, along with 'progress', of their abandonment. The Doctor is seen as being redeemable as he is connected with new life, the birth of the child being symbolic of the birth of Jesus. It is an event of great significance to Brown and he deplores the fact that from the time 'of the 17th century and perhaps later, attempts were made to stamp out Christmas altogether, as being an occasion for gluttony and sloth, a lurid Papish remnant.'[26] Christmas was somewhat replaced by Hogmanay, occurring a couple of weeks later, allowing, according to Brown, twelve days of indulgent celebration, instead of only one.

'Master Halcrow, Priest'[27] is a powerful story which depicts and then denounces the abolition of the Catholic faith and makes clear the author's sense of outrage, a new law banning the Mass being 'the final untruth'[28] and, although given the chance to become a Minister in

the new faith, the old Priest cannot see this action as anything other than utter betrayal. The story captures some of the loss, bewilderment and insecurity of the time.

The character of Father Halcrow reappears in another, quite different story, 'A Treading of Grapes', found in the collection A Time To Keep.[29] Three sermons on the same topic, the miracle at Cana, are set forth and contrasted, one against the other. The narrator is anonymous, urbane, non-judgemental and seems to belong to the first half of the twentieth century. The sermon of the current incumbent of St Peters is witty, persuasive, and easy to understand; but it rejects that the miracle actually occurred, explaining the turning of the water into wine as being possible because of Christ's superior common sense and ability to plan. 'He made sure beforehand that the neglected supplies were to hand.'[30] The sermon ends with his recommendation that non-alcoholic wine be used in the sacrament, as this would be more seemly. The sermon is constructed as a slow descent into empty order of service and thus shows, from Brown's point of view, the spiritual history of the faith in Scotland since the Reformation. Even the wine is not real.

Dr Fortheringhame s 1788 sermon gives some insight into the power wielded by the Church. His sermon was a means by which he castigated individuals in his flock

for their sins and warned of the dangers of drink. He is shown to be a law-breaker and hypocrite, when, at the end, he reminds one of his parishioners to deliver a cask of contraband brandy to the Manse. The guilt, intolerance and dourness that such sermons and attitudes developed amongst the Scottish people created a culture of inadequacy and bleakness such as that described in Greenvoe, relating to the McKee family.

Father Halcrow's sermon is biblical, poetic, exhalting, and yet gives parallels to contemporary life, emphasising the marriage of Christ with his Church and the Bread which is the entire Christ. Its planned effect is to inspire, give hope and happiness, uplift and enable every individual to feel important and loved, and as such, it underscores what, in Brown's view, was so tragically lost from the sixteenth century onwards. One of his aims in his stories is to resurrect that religious culture, to make his readers aware that once Scotland was Catholic and that there is much value in this heritage.

Christmas continues to be a focus in Andrina and Other Stories.[31] 'An Epiphany Tale', a mysterious story of a deaf, dumb and blind Orkney child, who, one Christmas, briefly gains the use of each of these senses when three separate visitors, strangers, visit his mother's house. This is a transfiguring experience for the boy who learns that these senses really exist. The

story is a kind of homily about what happened at the Epiphany, that recognition of the birth of Christ opens the door of the spirit to a rich, new world full of previously unimaginable wonders.

'The Magi', a story in three parts, explores the idea that society is committed to rituals which must not be broken. 'The Lost Boy' warns of the consequences of feeling resentment or anger at Christmas time, that one could become as ill-tempered and slovenly as old Jock Scabra.

'A Time To Keep'[32], a pastoral which ends on Christmas Day, describes a rural life that has moments of idyll, and, after the tragic death of a young mother in childbirth, ends on a peaceful note. In this story life is happy but hard, death is an ever-present threat, and love, not romance, is valued. It contains a recurring image, that of the fishermen's wife waiting on the shore.

> And there, through veils of rain and spindrift, I saw the beach and a solitary woman standing on it. The other boats were in a while ago. The shawled woman stood with the protective hills all round her. The valley offered her to me, Ingi, a figure still as stone. And the savage glad hand of the sea thrust me toward her.[32]

In this case the wife does not wait in vain. In 'The Storm Watchers'[33] seven fishermen's wives wait on the shore and, one by one, collect the bodies of their drowned husbands. There is patience and resignation in word and face, and this story, as do others, expresses

the ambivalent attitude of the islanders to the sea. It is their source of livelihood, but also an implacable reaper of husbands and fathers.

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Hardship, suffering and loss are themes explored in many of Brown's stories, even though, ironically, this is combined with a definite nostalgia for the past, a conviction that the traditional Orkney way was spiritually richer, despite its harshness. Ritual was and still is, according to Brown, essential to the vitality and spirit of Orkney society, and to any society. The annual celebration of Christ's birth, one of the most fundamental events in world history, is an inherent part of the ritual, especially so when its foundations are seen to be rooted in the older pagan traditions surrounding the winter solstice, the returning of the light, in late December of each year.

Another, related focus of Brown's short stories is, clearly, winter's season. As Brown said:

> Winters in the north are long and cold and dark. It is round hearth flames that the first stories were told: an old wise remembering mouth, a circle of entranced listeners. What they hear are tales of their great-grandfathers ... Further back the stories go, long beyond the remembrance of the storyteller at the fire; then the

> unnecessary details are left out ... and out of the starkness looms a hero larger than life. Then the tale is more a legend than a story.[34]

and its stories:

> Most islands - the Hebrides for example - are full of the 'sweet airs' that Shakespeare writes of; they have a rich tradition of song and music. This is not so in Orkney; music has never been the predominant art here, though each generation of Orkneymen had its good fiddlers. Art in Orkney has devoted itself mainly to the production of stories: the noises and sounds come from the grave mouth of the storyteller.[35]

Brown sees the tradition of storytelling as especially important in Orkney, as contributing to its history, culture and its sense of community, and himself as a storyteller. Arguably, in a few stories, such as 'The Eye of the Hurricane in A Time To Keep, the narrator is Brown himself. In this story the narrator is a devout Catholic and is writing a novel about Earl Rognvald Kolson.

> I had come to live, then, among simple uncomplicated people. I worked to the easy rhythm of fishermen and crofters. My imagination nourished itself at primitive wholesome sources, the sea and the land. It seemed to me my writing had a depth and clarity I had never achieved before. And of course I was working in the place where my novel was rooted.[36]

> Love is too deep a subject for prose - only music and poetry can build bridges between the rage of seed in the furrow, the coupling of beasts, the passion of man and woman, the saint's prayer.[37]

The first quotation lends weight to the generally accepted idea that Brown himself finds his birthplace and its history, literature and culture to be an

unending source of inspiration. He writes about Divine love and grace, poetically and upliftlingly, but romance and passion are basically absent in his prose, overt expressions of emotion being alien to Scottish character, and Brown obviously feeling that prose is not a fit medium in which to record such emotions.

Another short story, 'The Tarn and the Rosary'38 appears also partly autobiographical. Colm, a happy farmer's child, is observant, intelligent and at ease with the sensuousness of nature. He struggles to come to terms with both the loss of his grandfather and the meaning of death. Although not particularly literary he discovers an appreciation for words and poetry, and is able to relate his own experience to that which inspired Wordsworth to write the poem 'Fidelity'; discovering, quite young, that he has a talent for prose composition. He absorbs the talk around him, and learns that many in the community are biased against Catholics and see the Virgin Mary as 'The Scarlet Woman'.[39]

Grown up, an asthmatic, a convert to Catholicism, and living and writing in Edinburgh, he is lonely, sick and 'had done no work on his novel since the start of the golden weather'.[40] He writes a letter to his friend Jock expressing his deepest feelings and convictions, explaining to his friend why he converted to Catholicism. He begins by referring to an Orkney farmer:

> Tom Sanderson is a simple self-effacing man. In this evil time, indeed, he is ashamed of his coarseness and earthiness when he compared

> himself with such folk as grocers and clerks and insurance-men. He is, after all, bound upon the same monotonous wheel year after year. There is nothing alluring about the work he does. He wrestles with mud and dung to win a few crusts and flagons from the earth.
>
> Yet see this peasant for what he is. He stands at the very heart of our civilization ... we cannot do without the humble earth-worker who breaks the clods each spring. He is the red son of Adam. He represents us all. He it was who left the caves and, lured on by a new vision, made a first clearing in the forest. There he began the ceremony of bread He ploughed. He sowed seed. ... He exists in a marvellous ordering of sun and dust and flesh. . .[41]

In this extremely revealing section of the story, which expresses precisely Brown's deepest convictions, the narrator continues, explaining that it is 'not good enough'[42] to see the dawning of the age of agriculture and a more settled existence as leading naturally to a more peaceful era, that 'it doesn't take account of the terror and the exhaltation that came upon the first farmer who put wounds on the great dark mother.'[43] The farmer kept a tenth of his bread back because he sensed the presence of God and he gave the bread as a gift in exchange for life, imagination and food. But each spring the farmer still felt guilty and afraid as he had to wound the earth with the plough.

In the end, the 'Wisdom', or Jesus Christ, took on this burden in order to 'reconcile the divine and the brutish in men.[44] The narrator states that he believes Jesus existed, that he was born a man and was God. His imagination tells him this was so, and so does the

Bible, especially in the many references which Jesus made to farmers and farming. He also believes in the Crucifixion:

> There is nothing in literature so terrible and moving as the Passion of Christ - the imagination of man doesn't reach so far - it *must* be so. The most awesome and marvellous proof for me is the way he chose to go on nourishing his people after his ascension, in the form of bread. So the brutish life of man is continually possessed, broken, transfigured by the majesty of God.
> What is old Tom of Wardings that his labour should be seen at last to be so precious? Gold and jeweller work with shadows by comparison.
> It is ceremony that makes bearable for us the terrors and ecstasies that lie deep in the earth and in our earth-nourished human nature. Only the saints can encounter those 'realities'. What saves us is ceremony. ... Ceremony makes everything bearable and beautiful for us ... the truths we could not otherwise endure come to us. ... It is this saving ceremony that you call 'idolatory' and mumbo-jumbo'.[45]

This passionate justification is, without argument, the authorial voice, Brown speaking through his narrator character; Brown, 'this cold northern man'[46] who hurriedly packs his bags and sets off joyously for Orkney.

The Mass, then, is the ultimate ceremony. But farmers have a special place in God's scheme of things because they till the earth to give bread, in the same way that the Priest gives the Bread of Christ. The seasons, and the cycle of life, and the rituals, both religious and secular of any year, are also ceremony; revolving around and tied to the Mass, as the earth is to the sun. So winter, and Brown stories based on this theme, even

those which are light-hearted, are given religious connotation, because winter is infused with ritual and ceremony.

The Masked Fisherman contains winter stories and death, drink, poetry and history are significant themes. 'The Eve of St Thomas' moves from the past and the traditional fisherman's lifestyle, into the present, when an author travels to Orkney to find both the inspiration to write and to discover his roots. It is set in mid-winter and is linked to The Orkneyinga Saga and the 'magnificent winter stories in it'.[47]

The great-great-grandson of Aaron Rolfson is seeking Taing, the family home, and in doing so, Mr Rolfson is profoundly moved by the stark cold beauty of the island, feeling that his ancestors' lives had worth in them, and that the product of his life, his writing, is meaningless 'trash'.[48] He makes a friend, reads The Orkneyinga Saga, writes his first poem, gathers the inspiration to write an historical novel set in Viking Orkney, and plans his return south, contented. Unlike his wife, who returns home at the first opportunity, he is able to look beyond the cold, dark and discomfort, and gain spiritual strength from where his ancestors dwelt, in a harsher, yet truer life.

'The White Horse Inn' is the centre to which all the off-shoots of this story connect. It holds many diverse characters who all look forward to a drink at the end of

the day. Time shifts occur as the story moves from immediate past time, when a fisherman, a harvester and a spinster make their way to the Inn, to a medieval time, when a monk, writing a letter, notes that a new inn, The White Horse, is under construction. The lamplighter's chore of lighting the lamps ends, conveniently, at the Inn. It is worth noting that these gas lamps, although considered a wonder in the community, acted to extinguish the stars evidence of Brown's concern that the effects of 'progress' lead to a more unnatural life and, ultimately, dislocation and unhappiness.

The Schoolmaster, Mr Hodgkiss, like Dr Clifford in 'A Winter Tale',[49] is a type found here and there in Brown's prose, the educated professional or 'outsider' who is spiritually aware, preferring the company of the ordinary islanders, and misunderstood and regarded with suspicion by those of his own class. The Headmaster warns Mr Hodgekiss that public drinking cannot be sanctioned, underlining the hypocritical attitudes amongst the 'leaders' toward the consumption of alcohol.

'The Scholar' also criticises Presbyterian values, depicting the academic achievement of an ordinary islander as worthless in practical terms to both his family and the community.

'The Tree and the Harp' is a ghost story and the winter it contains, is metaphorical, being the thirty years lived by the rich and tyrannical Mrs Maida after

the death of her young daughter, Sunniva. The tree is where Sunniva fell to her death and the harp, not played since the accident, a symbol of contentment and happiness. The sound of it, on the day of her death, transforms Mrs Maida into a gentle and loving woman, who is finally redeemed when she leaves her worldly goods to her housekeeper's daughter, thus alleviating their poverty. The harp may be a Celtic element, but the intent of this story reflects Brown's basic philosophy. Mrs Maida becomes embittered and irascible because she, unlike fishermen's wives, could not accept death as a part of the cycle of life.

'Dialogue at the Year's End' catalogues the productive gains of crofters' working lives. These include goods produced by knitting, harvesting and fishing, gathering wild flowers, making ale and honey, collecting kindling, attending a wedding and a funeral, and providing a gift of a bannock, a 'sun-cake'[50] for the swan princess to take to a poor household. It is a vital catalogue of the products and ceremonies of a community whose lives are cyclic, and who are therefore spiritually rich, shown symbolically in the figure of the swan princess. The bannock she carries, 'yellow with barley and honey'[51] is holy food, like that received in Communion.

'A Croft in January explores the effect of economics-driven emigration on one traditional household

in Orkney. A fisherman has died and his adult son is not there to provide for his widowed mother and younger brother and to carry on working the croft which has been in the same family for seven generations. Refusing to accept charity and facing eviction, the two are given a reprieve upon receiving some money from Australia. There is hope and a pattern for the future when the youngster decides he wants to be a fisherman.

In Andrina, 'A Winter Legend' is a kind of Grimms' fairy story about a princess, imprisoned in a tower for half a century but who did not grow older. She has nothing to do except to remember the stories her nurse used to tell her and is thus nourished spiritually and kept sane. For fifty-one years it is perpetual summer, and then winter, and her freedom finally comes. She turns into a swan, views the rose bush which has grown from her dead brother's body, and sees the waves which are her parents. This story contains traditional motifs and is visually beautiful, haunting and evocative. The princess is symbolic of all the princesses and young women who have been locked up, yet are no threat to anyone. She is an innocent victim of war and has characteristics similar to those of the girl in Time in a Red Coat. The ultimate meaning of 'A Winter Legend' is unclear. It might be a reminder that life is short and uncertain, or a fable about the spirit in its bodily incarnation. The swan may be the princess's soul winging

aloft after death.

In A Calendar of Love, 'Stone Poems' sketches creatively the circumstances surrounding real events which took place in Maeshowe in the winter of 1150. Seven Viking poets take refuge from a storm in the tomb and write 'graffiti' on its walls. These words written in runes were found in Maeshowe: 'Ingibiorg is the most beautiful of women' and 'Many a lovely lady has entered here low stooping'. The final rune: 'In the north-west is a great treasure hidden' has been re-interpreted by Brown to refer to 'the bones of the blessed Magnus that lie in Birsay kirk ten miles north-west from this place.'[52] Thus he is here suffusing pagan Maeshowe with Christian grace.

* * * * *

Quite a few of Brown's stories centre around traditional drinking or alcohol. Brown's attitude toward 'drink', as charted in his stories, is ambivalent. Strict Presbyterian taboos are too rigid, but alcoholism is depicted as a problem, especially as it affects the drunkard's dependent family. The inn is a numinous place where news and stories are exchanged and fishermen and crofters congregate for companionship, but where men of

professional status do not linger. For quite a long time Brown himself brewed his own ale[53] and it would seem that he, for a Scot born into the Presbyterian Church, held a rather liberal 'Catholic' view of pubs and drinking bouts.

'The Troubling of the Waters'[54] is a humorous reminiscence, seemingly based on local folklore, of illegal whisky stills on the island of Quoylay. Its style contrasts with most of Brown's other stories, not just because of its humour, but also as it is laconic, mocking and factual.

> Tom of Scatter's whisky was like a blowlamp flame in your throat ... You had to drink the well dry to take the scald out of your throat the next morning.[55]

And compare:

> The most famous whisky in Quoylay was made by a henwife called Beena Bews. It was made to an ancient fixed recipe, a traditional thing like a ballad which had salted the life of generations. It wet the lips of new-born babes and old dying men in every corner of the island. ... I tasted it once; it wasn't very good.[56]

Sweyn Johnstone destroyed his still, the finest on the island, after his wife warned him that excisemen were coming. After having hammered his still flat and poured all his whisky in the burn, his visitors turned out to be the new Minister - 'They say the ducks in his burn were drunk for a week.'[57]

Another story which illustrates Brown's light-hearted

story-telling, showing his enjoyment of popular folklore, is 'Tam', also, interestingly, from the earliest of his short story collections, A Calendar of Love (1967). 'Tam' is an irreligious, enchantingly wicked story of three sisters with little chance of marriage as it suits their father to have them serve him. Their second cousin Tam, tired of poverty and hunger, spends a night in their house before leaving as crew on a whaling ship. Returning from the toilet in the middle of the night, he blunders into the sisters' room, and sleeps in turn with each of his three willing cousins. Tam sails away and is never heard from again but he leaves behind 'three bonny bairns, born within a week of each other.'[58]

This earthy side, although it undoubtedly existed[59], is seldom seen, 'The Troubling of the Waters', 'Tam', and 'Icarus' in A Time to Keep, being notable exceptions. Such stories may also be seen to reflect, in Brown's view, an Orkney bawdiness uncrushed by Presbyterian repression, or a reaction by islanders to post-Reformation moralistic dogma.

'A Calendar of Love',[60] although serious in intent, is also concerned with the ultimate rejection of a moral code which is intolerant and unforgiving. Constructed in the form of a monthly diary, it revolves around a love triangle between Jean and her two suitors: Peter, a Presbyterian evangelist of unimpeachable but fanatical

morality; and Thorfinn, who drinks and womanises as did the Vikings of old. Jean loves Thorfinn, even though she realises he will never be responsible or faithful, and she becomes pregnant with his child, hiding herself away until, with the first snowflake, there comes the realisation that 'everything was in its place'[61] and her pregnancy, natural and a result of love, was nothing to be ashamed of. In December, a boy-child is born.

'Five Green Waves'[62] is similar, preferring a more 'natural' view of the world than Brown believed Presbyterian values allow for. It is evocative of Edwin Muir's writing in that it is a looking back to a happy childhood when 'Time was skulls and butterflies and guitars'.[63] John, the child narrator, is in tune with nature and simple things and wants to be a sailor, but his choices are likely to be limited, and his life compares unfavourably to the tinkers who have a wild and free kind of existence. John's father is a merchant and Kirk Elder and wants his son to have a profession, an ambition implicitly criticised in the story. Reminiscent of Hamlet is the gravedigger, who holds up Billy Anderson's skull and addresses it, remembering Billy as 'a thieving, drunken, fighting character'.[64] Vivid recollections such as this one are precious in the boy's memory.

The writer's treatment of time is important in 'The Three Islands',[65] where time shifts occur between the

present and past, and place is also significant. Orkney's rich heritage, both historical and religious, is made manifest by linking the activities of three ordinary fishermen in modern time, as happening near where a Viking chief once sat in his Gairsay Hall, near where monks once prayed in Eynhallow monastery, and most significantly, they lift their lobster pots up off Egilsay, where St Magnus was martyred. Brown is reminding the reader that underlying all daily life lies, available, this priceless spiritual heritage.

Brown's treatment of time in many of his short stories, as in his novels, is, like his overall style, outside the literary norm.[66] Settings are often 'timeless' in that the reader is unable to pinpoint an exact or even an approximate year in which events are set. Except for fairy stories such as 'A Winter Legend',[67] tales generally fit, albeit vaguely, into an historical era, such as the Viking age in Scotland, or mediaeval,pre-Reformation time, or post-Reformation time, which can extend right up to the early twentieth century and encompass so-called modern time. Modern time in Orkney may still be pre-industrial/pre-technology, as the old ways, though disappearing finally in Brown's lifetime, survived in remnants until recently. As Brown himself explained:

> I am inclined to think that a really great story- like Tolstoy's 'What Men Live By', or Daudet's 'La Mule du Pape, or Forster's 'The Road to Colonus'- have a mingling of myth and legend in them.
> ... I rarely write a story about the 1970's ... Passing events are difficult to grasp, form, pattern. I feel more at home writing about the 1920's or the 1930's when I was a small boy listening with wonderment, in the tailor's shop where my father worked, to the old seamen and farmers weaving their magic spells.[68]

Brown's deep consciousness of the literature, folktale, myth, legend and history which for him permeates the Orkney landscape and makes it numinous, is expressed through timelessness, time shifts, and a construct of universal time in his prose. He does not need to be specific about time in order to satisfy his readers. The timeless settings are outside time and a crucial element in the reader accepting them as myth or legend or folktale, at once, as the author intended.

Brown sees the Orkney mind, 'as an intermeshing of the practical and the imaginative', adding, 'and this has been a constant (narrative) pattern.'[69] In so many stories, such as 'The Three Islands', the use of structural time shifts function to express this.

'The Masked Fisherman'[70] is a re-working of one 'of the loveliest and most moving passages in The Orkneyinga Saga.'[71] In his weekly column in *The Orcadian* in June 1984, Brown tells the story of how Rognvald Kolson, Lord of Orkney and Shetland, went fishing with an elderly

islander, and in the dangerous waters of Sumburgh 'Roost', Shetland, they caught a huge catch of 'flashing treasure',[72] the stranger's share of which was distributed among the needy shore-folk. Brown goes on to say that he is 'trying to adapt this piece of saga for narrative ends'[73] and it is tempting to speculate that this adaption is his short story 'The Masked Fisherman'.

Brown is fascinated by the character of Rognvald Kolson, as it is 'many-faceted'[74] and this one exploit of his demonstates his many skills. This is one of the few events to which Brown gives his attention which did not take place in Orkney, and it is notable in that it shows Rognvald possessed the Christian quality of humility, accepting the laughter of the women after he falls on slippery rocks.[75] In his version Brown uses his imagination to give details about the names and characters of local folk and to compose a poem to complement that attributed to Rognvald in The Orkneyinga Saga.

The imaginative rewriting of Orkney history and legend is very much a part of Brown's style and is widespread in his short story writing. 'Perilous Seas' and 'The Pirate's Ghost'[76] retell the Walter Scott treated story of Captain John Gow, the Orkney mutineer and murderer. 'The Burning Harp',[77] 'The Feast at Paplay',[78] 'The Story of Jorkel Hayforks'[79] and 'Tartan'[80] were inspired by the Icelandic Sagas.

'A Saint Andrew's Day Legend'[81] aims to promote contemporary awareness that November 30th is St Andrew's Day. Brown is sad that this day is no longer celebrated or even mentioned in the Scottish media, as he remembers that not so long ago it was 'celebrated over the air with Scottish music and poetry ... rich, dark, winter fare.'[82]

In Brown's story the St Andrew who fished with Jesus, and who appears in the Old English epic, Andreas, appears in Fife during a hard winter in pre-Reformation time, when the fishermen are in debt and hungry, and unable to put to sea in their boats because of huge waves and stormy weather. A Cathedral is being built, but progress is slow although the stranger does his best to help. The locals blame him for their bad fortune and he is only saved from attack when the stones he has collected are transformed into fish. On the day of dedication of the new Cathedral the bell cannot be rung as the iron clapper is missing, but St Andrew provides a fish as a substitute and the music is very sweet. By common consent the Cathedral is named St Andrews.

Although the factual foundations of the 'Legend' are flimsy, Brown has here, as in many of his Christmas stories, relocated a biblical character, across time and space, to a Scottish, although not a specifically Orkney, setting. In doing so he is investing St Andrew with local significance and so promoting both his modern

recognition and popularity, despite his loss as patron saint of Scotland.

In 'The Sea-King's Daughter',[83] a prose-poem-dialogue, Brown tells the story of 'The Maid of Norway', little Margaret, her stormy voyage and tragic death off the coast of Orkney. Brown is here uninterested in the historical implications of her journey and subsequent death,[84] dwelling instead on the personal thoughts and feelings of Margaret and her servants, Olga, Sunniva, Maria, Ingiobiorg and Ragna. Included are stories told to the little Queen, and images of forests and greenery linked to life and beauty. Forty pages in length, this 'story' is unusual not for its content, which is vintage Brown, but for its form, which has become lyric poetry. Although he uses the same kind of material over and over again, Brown's skill is such that the end product is never mundane.

*   *   *   *   *

Many of Brown's more serious stories reflect an interest in Scotland's past, a deeply religious view of history, are eschatological, and eschew modernity. Like Dumezil,[85] the history Brown practices is the history of religious ideas. In his depiction of past events, even

in those tales which are 'fictional' rather than 'historical',[86] the interplay of religion and history is crucial. Only a very few stories lack moral import, the majority commenting on aspects of universal human experience: death, war, good and evil and justice being a few.

In 'Soldier From the Wars Returning',[87] volunteer soldiers from Orkney were 'Cut to pieces ... Every man of them killed',[88] young men who had been 'well told to bide at home'.[89] . Brown presents war from the 'little' person's perspective, as an evil exploitation of the innocent by the powerful, resulting in needless death, disability and economic hardship.

'The Bright Spade'[90] associates death with winter and depicts its causes: old age, accident, famine, exposure and drowning. Death is sad but natural, part of the cycle of life, as emphasised by the story's ending, the spade of the gravedigger replaced by the plough, accompanied by the hope of no more deaths 'till after the shearing and the lobster fishing and the harvest.'[91]

'Tithonus'[92] is concerned with death, decay, friendship and the strong bonds of kinship, even when a close relationship is unacknowledged and unspoken. In his diary the Laird of Torsay (Tithonus) records forty years of island history. It is a charting of gradual decay and disillusionment, in his life and in the general community. There are few births but many deaths,

including that of Thora Garth, the Laird's illegitimate daughter, who nursed him through a life-threatening illness but with whom he 'never exchanged one word.'[93] The history of Orkney is one of division between gentry and islanders, seen here as responsible for breaking the natural cycle of existence and ultimately leading to the death of a community.

'Tartan'[94] and 'A Carrier of Stones'[95] are historical fiction concerned with presenting examples of how exposure to Christian values changed Norse attitudes and behaviour. In 'Tartan', Viking thieves desist from seeking to revenge the murder of one of their own, intent instead on giving a gift of cloth to a lovely young girl. In 'A Carrier of Stones', a Viking renowned for his strength chooses to enter a monastery and serve God. <u>The Orkneyinga Saga</u> records much concerning the acceptance of Christian faith by the Vikings in Scotland, history which fascinated Brown and provided him with an unending source of inspiration. He presents the history of the Vikings in Orkney as inevitably leading to their acceptance of true (Catholic) Christianity.

'The Seven Poets'[96] expresses Brown's eschatology,[97] that the modern age will end in nuclear catastrophe, subsequent human survival being possible only in small rural self-supporting communites. This view of the future reflects the pessimism felt by many who

experienced the terrible wars and the Depression in the first half of this century, and, later, the real fear in the world that the Cold War would result in a another holocaust. It sees progress as destructive, and, as such, contrasts with the more optimistic outlook of philosophers such as Francis Fukuyama[98] who see liberal democracy as the furthest development in human society, thus constituting the end of history.

In 'The Seven Poets' 'the earth fled from cities and machines'[99] and intelligent people set their faces 'against science and the ruthless exploitation of the earth and its resources',[100] progess being 'a word they uttered like a curse '[101] The narrator is a wanderer, moving from village to village, staying usually at the poet's house, gaining with age and experience an appreciation of the value of poetry in the world, presenting the poet as the Priest in charge of the mid-winter masque, and reiterating how essential it is that humankind maintain 'the sacred bond'[102] with 'cattle, sheep, horse, swine, poultry, fish'.[103] This story warns about the effects of 'progress' and links poetry with the spiritual survival of the human race, ending with the wanderer finding himself, 'for the first time among the mountains of Scotland',[104] reminding the reader that Orkney is the focal point of Brown's world, providing, if disaster does strike, a place of refuge, and hope for the future.

Brown's short stories, although restricted in their physical setting, yet not by time, are wide-ranging in style and universal in theme. Character development and structure are secondary considerations, religious ideas and the history of Orkney from the perspective of the 'little' people being of paramount importance, and many stories explicitly warn of the danger in the blind acceptance of 'progress' as fundamental to human advancement. Like the sagas, Brown's stories which reflect traditional life and historical events and figures are easy to accept as truth; myth, legend, fiction and fact blending together poetically and convincingly.

The force of the stories, whether published individally or in collections, is to make clear that Brown was a compulsive teller of tales: witty, elegaic, 'historical', moral, recensionist, or fixed in the timeless Orkney landscape and/or seascape. While numbers of them are similar to, and might well have been worked into larger novels, the truth is that all the prose, like the more obviously lyric poems and dramas, is concerned with a great epic tapestry of North Western Europe, Germanic largely, in spite of his own part Celtic stock. They illuminate a proud past, a deeply fulfilling faith, and a home with heroes aplenty and redolent of history or the ebb and flow of time's tide in the seas of millenia past.

Contemporary critics' view of Brown's short stories seems, generally, to be amused by the folkloric, magic and peasant beliefs of single stories, they apparently being unaware of the rich traditions upon which these stories are based, and they, perhaps, having little knowledge of the writings and tales of earlier periods. It is significant that many of Brown's works could be adapted into opera/drama, not least because of their dramatic and lyrical qualities. Brown collaborated with his close friend, the composer, Peter Maxwell Davies, to adapt various of his texts for presentation in dramatic/musical form. It is also evident that the moral core of Brown's writing is easily turned into verse/drama, as in the Cantebury Cathedral tradition of most of this century. But this is not, today, a popular form of expression, so Brown mostly wrote his seeming short stories, but really impressionistc and moral fables.

The various collections of his stories have tended to be reviewed singly, and therefore their qualities have not been considered in the overall context. It is noteworthy too that the observations of J. D'Arcy, a respected scholar who has immersed himself deeply into Brown's writing, have generally been very positive. A reader/reviewer who possesses some knowledge and appreciation of Orkney or Northern Scotland history, culture and literary heritage, can more meaningfully

understand them. Brown's style, also, is much more accessible to those who are familiar with medieval genres, hagiographic and (modern) verse drama.

Of course, most readers do not have such specialised knowledge, nor did Brown expect that they should. So the question of the appeal and, therefore, of the success of these stories remains unresolved. Brown aimed to entertain, inform and instruct his readers. For many of them, no doubt, his occasional didacticism, introspection, seeming present pessimism, localised setting and old-fashioned style, proved too great a barrier. Yet any fair assessment of his short story writing must be an overview which takes into account: his detailed knowledge of Orkney's heritage of history, literature and culture; his unique style; and his genuine conviction that an awareness of the past is crucial to our understanding of the present and that western man's heritage of faith, experience and earlier suffering will carry him through his country's and Europe's malaises and despair.

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Footnotes for Chapter Five: Stories and Tales.

1. The Masked Fisherman is a good example. See 'Acknowledgements' just prior to the 'Introduction', for details of where each story was originally published or read aloud.

2. A Calendar of Love, London, The Hogarth Press, 1967.

A Time To Keep, The Hogarth Press, London, 1969.

Hawkfall, London, The Hogarth Press, 1974.

The Sun's Net, London, The Hogarth Press, 1976.

Witch and Other Stories, London, Longman, 1977. This collection does include some stories already published in the collections cited above.

Andrina and Other Stories, London, Chatto and Windus, 1982.

The Masked Fisherman, London, John Murray Ltd, 1989.

Winter Tales, London, John Murray, 1995.

This list of short story collections is, in all cases, the first publication of each, and may not be the edition referred to subsequently in this thesis.

3. See G.M. Brown, Letters From Hamnavoe, Edinburgh, 1975. This volume is a reproduction of columns Brown wrote weekly for the *Orcadian* newspaper in Kirkwall. It is helpful to the reader if the date he wrote the original column is included and this will be given when citing a reference to either the above mentioned source, and Under Brinkie's Brae and Rockpools and Daffodils, also collections of his newspaper columns pieces.

4. G.M. Brown, Letters From Hamnavoe, op. cit., p.97 (20/12/73)

5. G.M. Brown, Under Brinkie's Brae, Edinburgh, 1979, p.87. (22/12/77)

6. G.M. Brown, Letters From Hamnavoe, op. cit., p.30. (23/12/71)

7. G.M. Brown, Hawkfall, London, 1974. The first story is 'Hawkfall', pp. 9-51.

8. ibid., p. 13.
An anonymous reviewer, (originally published in the Times Literary Supplement, 27/9/74), in Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol.48, 1988, describes the characters in Hawkfall as 'strangled in pattern'(p.55), ones who 'never break loose'(p.55), that in Hawkfall the spare directness of the writing is, in fact, at odds with the characters.

9. The first part of the story deals with the struggle for power in Orkney between Rognvald Bruisson and his uncle, Thorfinn, in 1046. Each tried to burn each other to death. Rognvald, escaping death by fire, was finally stabbed to death. The second part of the story took place in 1135 and concerned Earl Paul and the jealousy felt by his captain, Sweyn Breastrope, which eventually lead to his death.

10. G.M. Brown, Hawkfall, op. cit., p.17.
J. D'Arcy, Scottish Skalds and Sagamen, East Linton, 1996, pp.256-7, thinks that this story fails because of Brown's didactic use of Old Norse material,

and that he is clearly trying to twist historical facts to fit in with his sometimes dogmatic Christian beliefs.

11. Found in Hawkfall, pp.116-8. It is preceded by a dedication: 'A story For the Eightieth Birthday of Neil Gunn.'

12. ibid., p.118.

13. The burning reflects events in both Njal's Saga and The Orkneyinga Saga.

14. G.M. Brown, The Masked Fisherman, London, 1991, pp.133-138.

15. ibid., p.138.

16. ibid., pp.177-186.

17. ibid., pp.205-210.

18. ibid., pp.210-218.

19. ibid., pp.219-224.

20. ibid., pp.225-232.

21. ibid., p.232.

22. loc. cit.

23. ibid., pp.245-254.

24. G.M. Brown, The Sun's Net, Glasgow, 1989, pp.9-44.
J. O'Faolain, (Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol.48, 1988,) sees this story as too dark for one about Christmas: 'By the story's end the doctor has had a vision about a Christmas nativity, but as it is only a vision and happens in a deserted croft called Wanhope, the message is bleak.(p.56) Commenting generally on A Sun's Net, O'Faolain observes that Brown's 'stories make no concession to contemporary tale'(p.55). J. Miller, Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol.48, 1988, has a more positive view of 'A Winter's Tale':

> The first story is set in the present on a 'dying' island, where the individual's isolation is matched by the community's, and the doctor, the schoolmaster and the minister separately and secretly record a sense of failing the people they have chosen to live among. The failure is characteristic of the times and catching.(p.56)

Miller's overall summing up of The Sun's Net is also generous, the stories are 'poet's stories'(p.56), images of contrast 'made real'(p.56).

25. ibid., p.26.

26. G.M. Brown, Under Brinkie's Brae, op. cit., p.49. (6/1/77)

27. In G.M. Brown, Witch and Other Stories, London, 1977, pp. 23-31. Originally published in A Calendar of Love.

The anonymous reviewer of Hawkfall, op. cit., is critical of this story, viewing it as an example of Brown's using 'simplistic divisions between good and evil'(p.55) to manipulate character.

28. ibid., p.23.

29. G.M. Brown, A Time To Keep, London, 1969. The story is 'A Treading of Grapes'.

30. ibid., p.66.

31. G.M. Brown, Andrina and Other Stories, London, 1983.
D. Dunn, Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol.48, 1988, commenting in general about Andrina, but citing 'An Epiphany Tale' as an example, states that 'Only a poet of Brown's imaginative, historical, religious and place-loyal disposition could have written something that on the face of it seems incorrigibly old-fashioned, but which in the reading convinces with its contemporary language.(p.59) He deems 'An Epiphany Tale' 'deeply affecting for the strange beauty of life it conveys'(p.59). Professor A. Nuttall, however, (CLC, Vol.48, 1988), reviewing Andrina, agrees that 'Mr Brown is certainly skillful'(p.61), but sees the stories themselves as being 'better than the style in which they are written'(p.61).

32. G.M. Brown, A Time To Keep, op. cit., pp. 38-62.
It is noteworthy that J. Frakes, Comemporary Literary Criticism, Vol.48, 1988, pp52-3, reviewing A Time To Keep, apologises for an earlier slighting review of A Calendar of Love.

> What a rare privilge to be able to apologise for my glib misreading of his work as an exploitation of local-colour. I should have seen that this regionalist, like Faulker, has discovered his own little postage stamp of native soil and transformed it into a dancing ground.(p.52)
>
> This man works with a compassionate scalpel, rendering the elements once more elemental. And absolutely beautiful.(p.53)

33. G.M. Brown, A Calendar of Love, London, 1974, pp. 92-99. 'The Storm Watchers' is 'A Play For Voices'.

34. G.M. Brown, Witch and Other Stories, op. cit., in the Introduction written by Brown, pp.vii-viii.

35. op. cit., p.xi.

36. ibid., p.159.

37. ibid., p.180.

38. G.M. Brown, Witch and Other Stories, op. cit., pp. 115-150.
The anonymous reviewer, CLC, op. cit., is damming (or hyper-sensitive) in his/her criticism of this story, as Brown's bias against Calvinism, already seen in 'Master Halcrow, Priest', is, in 'The Tarn and the Rosary', 'scarcely less insultingly loaded'(p.55).

39. ibid., p.142.

40. ibid., p.143.

41. ibid., pp.145-6.

42. ibid., p.146.

43. loc. cit.

44. loc. cit.

45. ibid., pp.147-8.

46. ibid., p.144.

47. G.M. Brown, The Masked Fisherman, op. cit., p.19.

48. ibid., p.23.

49. See The Sun's Net, pp.9-44.

50. G.M. Brown, The Masked Fisherman, p.238.

51. loc. cit. It is worth noting that 'Dialogue at the Year's End' is similar in content and style to 'Eureka', the second story in The Sea-King's Daughter and Eureka, Nairn, 1991. 'Eureka', (pp.61-112) comprises a series of quirky, secular, funny and serious prose-poems, which imaginatively examine the origins of staples such as 'Tobacco', 'Coal', 'Beer' and 'Sail', depicted as 'Coats for the sea wind'(p.88).

52. G.M. Brown, A Calendar of Love, p.146.
A Calendar of Love, after publication in 1967, had mixed reviews. H. Corke, Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol.48, 1988, described it as looking like 'one of the few really solid achievements of the year'(p.51). J. Frakes, loc.cit., expresses the concern that although the 'sketches' are 'deft, graphic and incisive', they are 'still sketches'. Frakes has failed to recognise that Brown was writing in medieval skeletal style, using symbolism instead of the detailed atmospherics of a more modern style.

53. G.M. Brown, Under Brinkie's Brae, p.90. (12/1/78)

54. G.M. Brown, A Calendar of Love, pp.83-6.
J. O'Faolain, op. cit., reviewing The Sun's Net in 1976, observes that Brown was 'at his best when happily immersed in rural comedy or ghost stories or romancing about a fanciful past'(p.56). This comment belittles Brown as a short story writer and, arguably, treats his tales much too lightly.

55. ibid., p.83.

56. ibid., p.84.

57. ibid., p.85.

58. ibid., p.103.

59. Ian MacInnes, a boyhood friend of Brown's, who described him as 'a very funny man and a wonderful mimic' in a letter to *The Orcadian,* April 18, 1996, p. 3, in memorium.

60. G.M. Brown, A Calendar of Love, pp.9-40.

61. ibid., p.33.

62. ibid., pp.41-60.

63. ibid., p.60.

64. ibid., p.55.

65. ibid., pp.61-72.
It is interesting that J. D'Arcy, op. cit., sees the main thrust of this story somewhat differently: that the 'sheer ignorance of the fishermen of their own history and heritage, deprives them of a whole spectrum of emotions and values'(p.254).

66. See D. L. Higden, Time and English Fiction, New Jersey, 1977.

67. G.M. Brown, Andrina, pp. 17-26.

68. G.M. Brown, Witch and Other Stories, the Introduction, pp. viii-x.

69. G.M. Brown, A Portrait of Orkney, p.41.

70. G.M. Brown, The Masked Fisherman, pp.159-168.

71. G.M. Brown, Rockpools and Daffodils, Edinburgh, 1992, p.111.(14/6/84)

72. loc. cit.

73. ibid., p.112.

74. G.M. Brown, The Masked Fisherman, in the Introduction written by him, p.9.

75. H. Palsson & P. Edwards, The Orkneyinga Saga, London, 1978, p.159.
J. D'Arcy, op. cit., has found evidence in 'The Masked Fisherman' that Rognvald is popular with Brown as Rognvald is a poet and also 'very much a man of the people'(p.258), taking in good part the laughter of the women, and even writing a poem about it.

76. G.M. Brown, The Sun's Net, pp.117-59.

77. G.M. Brown, A Time To Keep, pp.115-8.

78. G.M. Brown, Andrina, pp.105-24.

79. G. M. Brown, Witch and Other Stories, pp.32-40.

80. ibid., pp.79-83.

81. G.M. Brown, published in Harpers & Queen Magazine, London, May, 1995.

82. G.M. Brown, Letters From Hamnavoe p.95. (6/12/73)

83. G.M. Brown, *The Sea-King's Daughter and Eureka*, Nairn, 1991.

84. For historical background see K. Helle, 'Norwegian Foriegn Policy and the Maid of Norway', *The Scottish Historical Review*, LXIX, October 1990, pp.142-156.

85. See G. Dumezil, *Camillus*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1980, and also Dumezil's *From Myth to Fiction*, Chicago,1973.

86. 'Fictional' refers to those tales which imaginatively recreate possible past events. 'Historical' refers to those stories based on the sagas, and which refer to known historical personages.

87. G.M. Brown, *The Sun's Net*, Glasgow, 1976, pp.219-31. The battle referred to is probably Culloden (1746). *Time in a Red Coat* explores the same themes.

88. *ibid.*, pp.223-4.

89. *ibid.*, p.228.

90. G.M. Brown, *A Time To Keep*, London, 1969, pp.131-4.

91. *ibid.*, p.134.

92. G.M. Brown, *Hawkfall*, London, 1974, pp 59-83.
J. Mellors, *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, Vol.48, 1988, commends 'Tithonus' as 'an elegaic account of the decline of a community from the 1920's, when at least the village was still enriched by birth, to the 1970's, when all the young have gone'(p.55).

93. *ibid.*, p.83.

94. G.M. Brown, *A Time To Keep*, pp 135-40.

95. *ibid.*, pp.141-154.

96. G.M. Brown, *The Sun's Net*, pp.257-268.

97. This eschatology is detailed most comprehensively in *Greenvoe*, *Fishermen With Ploughs* and *An Orkney Tapestry*.

98. F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York, 1992.

99. G.M. Brown, *The Sun's Net*, p.267.

100. *loc. cit.*

101. *loc. cit.*

102. *loc. cit.*

103. *loc. cit.*

104. *ibid.*, p.268.