Chapter One. *Greenvoe*: In and Out of Time.

This chapter will focus on George Mackay Brown's several writings which were particularly concerned to explore social and moral life in modern Scotland. The three most relevant texts are Greenvoe (1972), An Orkney Tapestry (1969) and the poem cycle, Fishermen With Ploughs (1971). Although very different, all three were published within a few years of each other, and, a dozen or so of these poems or part poems, untitled for the most part, were first published in An Orkney Tapestry before subsequently appearing in Fishermen With Ploughs. The themes of cyclic and mythic history, religion and spirituality, death and decay, materialism, community life and the effects of vast and complex change are common to all three works. Greenvoe, however, is the key text, studied in Scotland as a doomsday book of later twentieth century civilisation.

Greenvoe, it will be argued, is not just a novel about change in Orkney, but is an embarrassingly honest

exploration of the contemporary state of Western Christianity, and a means of understanding, or an accessible and very valid way into Brown's deepest and most profound spirituality. The Greenvoe text will be the focus of this chapter, but discussion of it will be complemented by reference to An Orkney Tapestry, a work best categorised as a collection of essays, and Fishermen With Ploughs, a poem cycle in six parts.

And so this chapter will examine the style, genre and literary structure of Greenvoe, as well as its metaphysical import. It will argue that the text contains an amalgam of tones, that it is surprisingly Hesiodic in spirit, timeless in its setting and that its treatment of the themes of outside threat and change reflect anew the Old Norse warning or eschatological concept of the end of the world, well known as the *Ragnarok.* The epic-like nature of Greenvoe will also be referred to, and its socio-cultural aspects will be examined in relation to its structure. On a metaphysical level the seemingly contemporary themes of Greenvoe reflect both a much deeper spiritual meaning, and also the spiritually stabilising value of timeless ritual, including that of seasonal agricultural labour, which is invested with a truly religious significance.

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Greenvoe is a kind of prose-poem, a muted elegy to many passing and lost ways and attitudes. At plot level it is composed of a patchwork of incidents from everyday Orkney life of the present time, but on a deeper level it is concerned with recreating imaginatively the whole spiritual history of Orkney, exploring how the layered past interacts with the present and how events of major importance or significance seem to occur again and again, although they may never recur in exactly the same way. The novel also probes the relationship between eternal myth and seemingly local history, emphasising the vital importance of tradition, cyclical time, of harmony between people and nature and the endurable value of community.

A crucial theme in Greenvoe, therefore, is that of the manifestations and focus of time. Time, timelessness, the merging of past, present and future, the interaction of past and present time, and the comparison of island time (relating to the seasons and the rhythms of nature) with outside time (industrial time, clock time, mechanical time), are all of significance. Brown, in Greenvoe, managed to rewrite, in selected vignette, the whole political and religious history of Orkney. It is, however, a carefully selective rewriting, a subtle handling and reconception of past events. It is a kind of fictional history, with its mixture of fiction and a few highly significant facts.

The six chapters are each concerned with both past and present events. From the first it is evident that past and present time, to a certain extent, have been fused. The islanders do not have electricity, indicating a somewhat less contemporary time, but they have the dole for the unemployed, a feature of a more modern society. Motorised transport is available, yet farm methods and recreation seem to be those of an ancient traditional society. The effect on the reader is that time on the island, fictionally named Hellya, is unchanging; and that life has continued in much the same way for many centuries. Thus the impact of the swift and terrible events of Chapter Six is greatly heightened. Overall, the text of Greenvoe undoubtedly reflects a largely pre-industrial society.

This feature is also predominant in An Orkney Tapestry, a work which includes poetry, dialogue, select translations from The Orkneyinga Saga, prose stories, and, in the words of the author, 'some of the events and imaginings that have made the Orkney people what they are'(p.3). Its essence is poetry rather than facts. It aims to describe the vision by which the people lived, and to sketch a profile of Orkney, spanning the centuries.

Brown's treatment of man in time may be linked to the novel's tone and style. A predominant style is an unemotional and uncritical recording of bare, if select,

facts. In its purest form it occurs briefly only three times in the text.[1] The change of style, from the generally poetic and descriptive to a terse summary of the action, is most noticeable. It is a kind of interpolation, connected to only two characters, Ivan Westry and Inga Fortin-Bell, illuminating their characters and acting as a device to transcend time[2] .

All three examples occur close together (pp.201, 202 207), in an episode which marks the climax of the Inga and Ivan relationship. Previous episodes have revealed much about their characters and, gradually, a personal picture of each has emerged.

Inga, the school-girl grand-daughter of the Laird and niece of Miss Agatha Fortin-Bell, is of a passionate and sensuous nature, as is evident from her arrival in Hellya carrying a copy of D.H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*(p.13). Her interest in Ivan the boatman, accompanies a, so far, passive awareness of her own sexuality. She is rather silent and enjoys contact with nature, even when the weather is wild, struggling in the wind and the rain while taking 'a score of precarious steps to the summit of Korsfea'(p.37). She is observant of details and appears to be familiar and in tune with Hellya, its shores and the surrounding seascape.

The setting for the main patchwork of narrative concerning Inga is, appropriately, the surrounding sea, which adds depth to the image of Inga the mermaid and the

siren. Inga and Ivan together visit the Skerry lighthouse, a small, rocky place, the kind of place, folklorically, associated with mermaids and sirens. On the return journey Inga and Ivan are surrounded by fog, creating a world which, momentarily, transcends all time, evoking the atmosphere of the sagas. Ivan and Inga are now portrayed as Viking-like, pitted against the elements, Ivan taking by force what Inga chooses not to give freely.

Greenvoe is, in a sense, a family saga of the pagan heart of Orkney, in which Inga is a principal character. She is sensuous and passionate, in tune with nature, silent, mermaid and siren-like, and ruthless in pursuing what she wants.

Ivan's character complements hers. He also has many ancient Viking facets, but in him they are more negative than positive. He is not a hero, and we are told that there is insanity in his family(p.14), but this is less important than the evidence that he is an exploiter, preoccupied with acquiring wealth. He has no qualms about making money from the enigmatic and ruthless Black Star operation, hiring his boat out for special trips and raising the fare for passengers crossing to Kirkwall(p.215). He gives no help, financial or otherwise, to Alice Voar, the mother of his son, Sam, and he makes extra money serving drinks in the pub(p.214). He is also a heavy drinker and has been gaoled for being

'drunk and disorderly'(p.220).

Ivan is, however, most deeply flawed in his treatment of women. Superficially an attractive man, he pursues and discards them and has, all told, three illegitimate children. He rapes Inga, at the same time as he is conducting an affair with the teacher, Miss Margaret Inverary. He also treats Inga brutally, telling her she is 'too thin', 'full of bullshit'(p.206) and that he doesn't fancy her. His rape of her is thus seen as an exercise in power rather than even a burst of passion. On the negative side, he is unkind, insensitive and brutal. However, there exists within him the capacity to embrace traditional values, as once did his ancestors. This potential is directly related to his contact with nature, for he is, in the words of Johnny Singh, 'the silent bright-headed one ... the bringer of warriors and heroes to Valhalla'(p.64). He is, in ancient story manner, symbolically, a ferryman, a boatman, a fog-cleaver, a storm-rider. Every day brings him into direct contact with the elements so that he has not quite lost, like so many other contemporary Orcadians, his appreciation of the beauty and danger inherent in nature.

Most significantly, Ivan carries a copy of The Orkneyinga Saga in his boat(p.206), evidence that he is interested in his splendid, if brutal heritage. It is also a symbol which connects him with the past. The before mentioned tense style of the text(pp.201,202,207)

reinforces this connection and lends weight to the idea that history repeats itself. However, it is clear that Ivan does not understand The Orkneyinga Saga, that he is, in spirit, far removed from its vitalism and folk wisdoms, and that he has, to some extent, succumbed to twentieth century materialism.

History, for Brown here, is necessarily cyclic, a similar pattern of events recurring, but never in exactly the same way. Ivan and Inga may be archetypal (Viking) man and woman, but the setting is modern Hellya. The themes of cyclic history and the value of tradition are strangely enhanced in the Ivan and Inga episodes, by the subtle use of a sparse prose. One such paragraph which illustrates this retells events in saga style, firmly connecting Ivan and Inga with the heroic past:

> The grandaughter of the chief man in Hellya asked a certain boatman to take her to the sea tower. There was much fog on the way back. The boatman whose name was Ivan forced Inga to lie with him in the cabin of the boat called *Skua*. Inga said he had done her a great wrong that day and that he would suffer for it. Ivan laughed. He said they would see about that. (p.207)

That the mode of Greenvoe contains elements which are saga-like is also evident in those sections where the bardic figure, The Scarf, reads aloud his 'history' of Hellya. Like The Orkneyinga Saga itself, his readings are a mixture of accepted historical fact and culturally

appropriate fiction. However, the language is quite different. In Chapter One it is especially poetic and imaginative. Here the earliest history of Orkney is being dealt with, the so-called pre-history of the islands, the time that we know the least about and which, therefore, offers the greatest scope for imaginative re-creation.

The beginning of Hellya's history is described thus:

> Darkness and silence, darkness and silence. The light of the intellect had not yet touched the island.(p.24)

This is the first obvious echo in Greenvoe of the ancient poem, the *Völuspá*, as quoted by Snorri Sturluson in his Prose Edda. Brown's 'darkness and silence' evokes the *Ginnungagap*[3] or the 'void charged with mighty, magic force'[4] which is part of the Norse creation myth when primeval time was evoked. So at the beginning of Hellya's history 'all was a ritual of darkness.'(p.24) Then the first of the island's early people arrived in frail boats, the 'children of darkness'(p.24), who worshipped death. Archaeologists have discovered these people's surviving bones in a chamber shaped 'like days of a dark sun.'(p.25) In Chapter Six the Black Star operation, in an Armageddon fashion, conquers the island. History has repeated itself, since once again the focus of true human existence on Hellya is underground and in darkness, as it was in the beginning.

The more vital spirit of Orkney, by implication, is born with the arrival of a 'merry race'(p.25) from the Mediterranean, presumably the Celts, bringing with them 'life and the promise of life, the jar of seed corn.'(p.25) This is significant, as it links with the quietly secret yet surviving modern day ritual at The Bu, found at the conclusion of each chapter. Farmers and farming and being in touch with the soil have always been of crucial importance, we are told, on Hellya. It is the essential link between past and present and it is the core of the continuum that fuses the two. It is a way of life now in decay and it will soon be obliterated, and as it fades it represents the declining spirituality of the island people.

This 'merry race' comprised the first farmers, 'the light-worshippers'(p.26), the broch builders, and the first Orkney people to be invested with true organic (and island-centred) spirituality. For them:

> The cow, the butterkirn, the cheese-press, the beef-board, made one circle of life. The sheep, the spinning wheel, the harmonious loom, the mutton trencher, made a circle of life for these gay people. ... The ox, the plough, the seedjar, the harrow, the sickle, the flail, the quern, the oven, made a great circle of fruition, as if the round life-giving sun had smitten the earth with its own burgeoning image.(p.26)

This 'circle of life' or ancient agricultural cycle, feeds into the theme of cyclic history in Greenvoe and is also linked to the Germanic eschatological notion of time, as recorded in the *Völuspá*. The passing of every mortal and social time was perceived as a cycle of decay, destruction and re-birth. The Celts, coming first to Hellya, are depicted as a race belonging to the new age of agriculture. It is an age similar to the New Age in *Gylfaginning*, a time of re-birth after the *Ragnarök* and one when 'earth will rise out of the sea and be green and fair, and fields of corn will grow that were never sown.'[5]

The first farmers were themselves under threat from the people they displaced, 'the dark death-people ... who kill the new lambs and put torches into the haystack.'(p.26) This theme of outside yet recurring threat is, like that concerning time, a deeply significant one in Greenvoe. It returns in history as one invading people conquer another. It is also seen in the islanders' battles with the elements, especially in their relationship with the sea. This leads the reader to understand that the modern day threat to Hellya from the outside is not unique, but part of a recurring pattern for human existence. Perhaps it is the most serious threat that the islanders have ever encountered, but there is, as there always has been, a quiet and not yet

desperate hope for the future of human life after the Armageddon experience of the oil.

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The early history of Hellya, as it is read by The Scarf in the first chapter, concludes with the arrival from Norway of the Vikings and with a fictitious but helpful quotation from 'the saga'

> It is recorded in the saga: "Sigurd the first earl of the Orkneys gave the island of Hellya to Thorvald Gormson ... He was a good farmer and he was given the name Thorvald Harvest-Happy out west in Orkney"(p.27)

This is the most direct reference to the islands own saga in Greenvoe. It connects The Scarf's readings with the heroic past, and makes it plain that they are to be deemed an imaginative recension or modern version of The Orkneyinga Saga itself, Thorvald Harvest-Happy being supposed to be a first settler in Orkney. As such, if he were mentioned in The Orkneyinga Saga itself, one would imagine that he probably would be mentioned only briefly. This fits in with The Scarf's assertion that the saga records only a scant few lines about him. The Scarf's account, however, goes far beyond this, being an

imaginative fleshing cut by Brown of the facts of The Orkneyinga Saga.

The story of Thorvald Harvest-Happy is continued in Chapter Two, showing him to be a very contented man with a large family, a man in touch with nature, a successful blend of Christian and pagan. He is a suitable role model for modern-day Orcadians, whose ancestors were also pagan, and as such, he, like them, is connected to modern society in Hellya through having lived and died in the same place.

> 'Thorvald Harvest-Happy: a golden mask of fertility looks at us down the long corridor of history. Somewhere in this island, among cornfields, a skull is buried. Of the flowering wilting flesh between mask and skull nothing is left but a pinch of fragrant dust.'(p.56)

Mechanical time is irrelevant. Past and present are fused by reference to the 'fertility' of Thorvald, both as man and farmer. He had fifteen children and so, by implication, numerous descendants, some of whom probably still live on Hellya, and the reader is to understand that 'his' cornfields still exist. Agriculture has been the economic base of Hellya from Thorvald's time down to the present. There is also present a distinct tone of regret, a perception that Thorvald's was a more 'golden' age than our own, and the expression of a poignant longing both for it and for more knowledge about the

personalities and events of that golden dawn, the early Viking settlement in Orkney[6] .

In this section it is also extremely difficult not to recognise The Scarf's voice and that of the author to be synonymous. The Scarf occasionally even uses the first person.

> 'But I do not think a ghost (sic) when I think of Thorvald Gormson, whom men called Harvest-Happy. I see in the dawning of our history an immense jovial man.'(p.52)

> 'I delight to imagine the death of this fat merry man in that hungry time of the year.'(p.56)

Brown himself admitted that he had read A.B. Taylor's classic translation of The Orkneyinga Saga 'with delight many times'[7] and that it is was a highly significant influence on his writing. [8] In An Orkney Tapestry he has 'translated' pieces of it using 'poet's licence' and 'very free paraphrase'[9] . This knowledge of and pre-occupation with The Orkneyinga Saga is evident in Greenvoe, a connection especially apparent in those episodes concerned with The Scarf's echoic and seminal narrative.

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The same tone is found in Fishermen With Ploughs, a poem cycle which fleshes out the various events described in both The Orkneyinga Saga, and in The Scarf's history of Hellya in Greenvoe. In Greenvoe a single paragraph is given concerning the arrival of the Vikings:

> 'Came from east-over-sea, from Norway,
> a tall blond people, in beautiful curving
> ships with dragon prows. ...'(p.27)

The Orkneyinga Saga itself, too, is less specific about the first arrivals, concentrating on events after that time. However, Brown uses his imagination, in the first section of Fishermen With Ploughs, to tell the story of a shipload of Norwegians, and how they sailed to Orkney to begin a new life. There are nine poems in 'Dragon and Dove'. The 'Dove' is their ship, and the 'Dragon' the 'starvation, pestilence, turbulent neighbours'[10] from which they are fleeing. They are, basically, the 'little' and unnamed Viking folk about whom we know nothing, their doings recorded by Brown in his poetry.

Thorkeld, ship-builder, warrior, protector, leader and hero, is called a man who 'mingled his bronze with dragon flame.'[11] There were many like him whose stories were unrecorded[12] . Thorvald Harvest-Happy is the kind of man this Thorkeld may have become if he had reached Orkney. Thorkeld had a vision of a journey, safety and the establishment of an agricultural community and Thorvald Harvest-Happy, a first settler, lived that kind of life.

Greenvoe is a haunting evocation of a timeless Orkney. The Orkneyinga Saga is the best and only real source about Viking settlement in Orkney and Brown draws heavily on his knowledge of it, and then, through his imagination, adds to it. The story of Thorvald Harvest-Happy is a good example of this and Brown, in this instance, is creating a form of saga. He bases the vignette episode on a fictionalised quotation from 'the saga'[13] and then, The Scarf narrating, Brown expands on it. There are many tones in Greenvoe but the voice of saga is always singing, even if it is only a sweetness of note in the background.

The Orkneyinga Saga is a celebration of the Viking age in Orkney and its record of events ends with the waning of Norse influence and authority in the islands. The Scarf's history of Hellya, however, does not. His tale continues, depicting medieval Orkney in political decline, exploited by the Scottish Stewart Earls and spiritually repressed by the deadening effects of the Reformation. The tone is now more objective, as if The Scarf (and by implication, George Mackay Brown), is distancing himself from events which he feels that he needs to relate but of which he does not approve.[14]

> 'The glory of the Norse earldom, which boasted such names as Thorfinn the Mighty, Magnus the Martyr ... was shorn away. The new Scottish earls were incomers; they looked on the islands as a mine with thin veins of gold branching through it. The islanders ... were degraded to the status of beasts of burden.'(p.76)

However, even though 'Mansie Hellyaman', the ordinary Orkney person, is 'humiliated and scourged ... a flame has been kindled in him that could never go out', Although sometimes it sank 'to a glim, to the merest bud of light.'(p.141) The Orkney people, in their compounded guilt and apostasy, then found a 'terrible joy' in watching condemned witches burn at the stake(p.141). They were constrained and repressed by the 'gloomy men, the ministers and elders'(p.142), and yet they remained still 'true ... to the light'(p.142). The 'light' is inferred to be a religious one and referred to in a traditionally Catholic imagery, probing the spirit of the people and their increasingly tenuous connection to 'true' Christian belief. Old Testament overtones of guilt and punishment are dominant here.

By late last century there was a new threat to community life, and to people's affinity with nature. This was the temptation posed by materialism and by the desire for wealth. Brown has definite views about the effects of progress on Scotland, viewing technological change and economic materialism as negative, as 'a new religion ... a rootless, utilitarian faith, without beauty or mystery'[15].

> I feel that this religion is in great part a delusion ... A community like Orkney dare not cut itself off from its roots and sources.[16]

Greenvoe is, ultimately then, about the externally contrived destruction of Hellya[17] . The past has still existed, however vestigially, until the coming of Black Star. It is the most serious threat which the islanders have ever faced, and it results, inevitably, in their total defeat. It is like a last cataclysmal battle between good and evil. The penultimate de-population, sealing off and razing of the island is, symbolically, to be a foreshadowing of the end of the (Western) world. Yet re-birth is hinted at in the last few pages, when a small band of islanders return and perform the timeless ritual of 'The Ancient Mystery of the Horsemen.'

This pattern of destruction followed by re-birth reflects the Norse concept of *Ragnarök* or end of the world, one so famously recorded by Snorri Sturluson in the Prose Edda. There will be three years of winter and the sun, moon and stars will disappear from heaven. Then 'the whole surface of the earth and the mountains will tremble so violently that trees will be uprooted from the ground, mountains will crash down [18]. The sky and the sea will be spattered with poison, and fire will consume the earth. Snorri himself quotes from the *Völuspá* to describe the twilight of the gods:

> The sun will go black
> earth sink in the sea,
> heaven be stripped
> of its bright stars;
> smoke rage
> and fire,
> leaping the flame
> lick heaven itself.[19]

The effects of the Black Star operation on Hellya is a kind of modern, and second millenial, *Ragnarök*. Black Star may well be equated with the ancient 'Midgard Serpent who (will) blcw so much poison that the whole sky and sea will be spattered with it'[20] . On Hellya the 'loch of Warston was drained'(p.214) and its bird population scattered. Also and very ominously, as though the precursor of a man-made earth shock:

> The island began to be full of noises - a roar and a clangour from morning to night. A thin shifting veil of dust hung between the island and the sun. The sea birds made wider and wider circuits about the cliffs. Rabbits dug new warrens at the very edge of the crags.(p.215)

The 'trembling' of the earth, as described in the Prose Edda, is equated in Greenvoe with the power of modern machinery to shake and destroy. 'Hellya was probed and tunnelled to the roots.'(p.214) Bulldozers razed the village of Greenvoe. Its houses 'collapsed before clashing jaws and blank battering foreheads.'(p.217) The centuries old farms and farmhouses of the island were, one by one, annililated.

The black sun of the *Ragnarök* is now the Black Star of modern Hellya. Each kills life and lays waste the earth. Destruction is gradual, a matter of months and years. An echo of the *Ragnarök* is also found in Fishermen With

Ploughs. In the last part of the poem cycle, the world is destroyed by The Black Flame, a holocaust or nuclear-like explosion. The world was filled with fire and ash. There were 'black islands - bone and rottenness everywhere'.[21]

In The Prose Edda, Greenvoe and Fishermen With Ploughs then, cataclysmal destruction is followed by rebirth. In Snorri's 'The Deluding of Gylfi' Gangleri asks what will happen after 'heaven and earth and the whole world has been burned'?[22] Gangleri, as narrator, like Brown, is concerned about what will happen in the future. The final events of all three modern works are set in future time. Gangleri's answer was that there 'will be many good dwelling-places then and many bad.'[23] Rackwick, on Hoy, in Fishermen With Ploughs, is one of the 'good dwelling-places', where a boatload of holocaust survivors find refuge. A first impression of it is described by Trudi:

> Crags rose sheer out of the sea, like pillars of fire. ... I saw first a streak of sand, then a quiet tumult of brown and green fields. A burn flashed here and there ... The boarsmen and the women ... turned their faces to this sweet green gap.[24]

Hellya is not, after fifteen months of Black Star, a 'good dwelling-place' being 'seedless'(p.245) and covered with dust, uninhabited and fenced off. However, Greenvoe, like 'The Deluding of Gylfi', ends on a more positive note. The High One had told Gangleri that after

the *Ragnarök* the 'earth will rise out of the sea and be green and fair, and fields of corn will grow that were never sown.'[25] The sons of the gods 'will all sit down together and converse, calling to mind their hidden lore and talking about things that happened in the past'.[26]

This divine prophecy is echoed in Greenvoe and the rites of 'The Ancient Mystery of the Horsemen' correspond very closely to the ancient 'hidden lore' of the children of the gods. It is a pagan ceremony which once existed in northern mainland Scotland, but has been reconstructed by Brown to make it seem both pagan and Christian. It is about the need to preserve the ancient elemental rhythms of nature in the (Orkney) community, ones so necessary for continued physical and spiritual survival[27] . One midsummer's dawn, ten years after Black Star, a small group of seven men land secretly on the island to perform their ritual. It is a kind of pledge and sacrament, a ceremony which suggests the possibility of meaningful return, which gives hope that Hellya will once again 'be green and fair', and that 'fields of corn will grow.'

In 'The Return of the Women', the final section of Fishermen With Ploughs, the future prospects of those living on the island are much bleaker. All the seeds are contaminated as a result of The Black Flame and the harvest fails. The survivors must revert to a hunter-gatherer lifestyle, to sheep-raising and to fishing. For them, fields of corn will not grow. This

view of the world, post-*Ragnarok*, is dauntingly pessimistic.

The links, in Greenvoe, to the Norse concept of the Ragnarok, invest the text with some of the same ideas found in the Gylfaginning section of Snorri's Prose Edda. Hellya may now be seen to represent the Orkney Islands or even, possibly, all of northern Europe. The setting is out of time and yet awesomely prophetic for us, in that the past existes on Hellya until the coming of the terrible Black Star. The ending is both prophecy and warning and is clearly set in future time.

The Scarf's history of Orkney underlies, mingles with, and to a large extent, determines the present mental climate. Greenvoe is, in socio-ecological terms, in decline, largely as a result of past events. This withering, culminating in a (new) *Ragnarok*, is also a feature of the *Voluspa*. The Scarf's narrative is confined to the first four Chapters. In Chapter Five, when asked to read to the drinkers in the bar, The Scarf refuses.

> 'I'm not going to read,' said The Scarf. Not tonight. Never again. I've written all I know. What's coming to this island is beyond prose. It will be poetry and music. The Song of the Children of the Sun. We'll all be dead I expect. But the folk of Hellya will know it when they experience it. (p.209)

His words are cryptic and visionary, but they contain a sense of eschatology and doom and a new beginning. His fellow drinkers appear to ignore him, but the reader is alerted to the fact that great changes are coming to Hellya. There is almost a sense of the end of history, that there will be nothing left to record after the terrible events to come.

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The ancient spirit of Greenvoe, it can be argued, is also Hesiodic. Both Hesiod, the ancient Greek poet and moralist, in The Works and Days and Theogony, and Brown in Greenvoe, are concerned with beginnings: the beginning of historical time, of farming, and, most importantly, the dawning of modern (social) consciousness. Their writing reflects a time when the pagan world was changing and an older society was moving toward the adoption of more (Christian) moral principles and ideals. Both writers invest the ritualistic, seasonal agricultural pattern with deeply religious meaning. In their primitive state the people are innocent and in harmony with nature, the landscape is unravaged and society is on the verge of a significant religious awakening. Greenvoe and The Works and Days are deeply moral texts. Brown is aware of Hesiod

who represents the dawn of time, and of his disciple, Virgil, who did the same in his Georgics. .

Hesiod ranks with Homer as one of the earliest Greek 'great poet masters: Homer the singer of war and adventure, Hesiod the inspired teacher of practical wisdom.'[28] Hesiod lived in Boeotia in central Greece about eight hundred years before the birth of Christ, himself a deeply religious man, inspired by the ancient gods:

> And it was they (the immortal gods) who
> once taught Hesiod
> his splendid singing
> as he was shepherding his lambs
> on holy Helikor[29]
>
> they breathed a voice into me,
> and power to sing the story of things
> of the future, and things past.[30]

The Theogony, therefore, is meant to be a writing down of what is already known, a cosmogonical record of Greek beginnings of religious awarenes.

This sense of recording the known fragments of (Orkney) proto-history is also present in Greenvoe. Hellya is a fictional name but it is representative of a real place, an island in Orkney. The first five chapters of Greenvoe describe an Orkney out of time, a setting in which the past is as important as the present. The text is enriched by a pervasive sense of the (pre-)history of the islands. Hellya is a place where life has continued in much the same way for centuries. The Scarf, like Hesiod so long before, is a recorder-moralist, his

history beginning with the mythic past, the dawn of time.

In the writings of the ancient Greek Hesiod and in Brown's Greenvoe, the dawn of time has links with the very beginning of human morality and with the age of agriculture. Theogony is a genealogical catalogue of the gods of heroic time. These gods, 'the immortals / who have their homes on Olympos'[31] existed at the beginning of time, and also lived in the age of agriculture. One of the gods was Gaia, the earth, who is connected with the 'turning of the seasons'[32]. Hesperides kept 'fruit-bearing orchards'[33] . Pegasus was the 'mother of sheep-flocks'[34] . Geryon has 'shambling cattle'[35] . Also:

> Iasion in the sweetness of love,
> brought forth Ploutos
> in a three-times-plowed field
> there in the fertile countryside
> of Crete[36]

The Works and Days also places the beginning of human society firmly within the age of agriculture. The first generation of mortal people ,'the golden generation'[37], were extremely fortunate.

> The fruitful grainland
> yielded its harvest to them
> of its own accord; this was great and
> abundant[38]

The existence of human consciousness, the dawn of time, and idyllic farming, are all, in Hesiod's writing, a part

of the beginning of history.

Brown's writing, however skeletally, reflects a like cosmological view. Brown's concept of history is cyclic, and the beginning of the cycle which Greenvoe describes is, arguably, similar to the Greek cosmogony as recorded by Hesiod. Meaningful history on Hellya begins with the arrival and settlement of the Celts, 'the broch-builders'(p.27), bringers to Orkney of 'life and the promise of life, the jar of seed corn.'(p.25) They possess a kind of true spirituality, being the 'light-worshippers'(p.27), in contrast to the 'people of the dark kingdom'(p.26), whom they conquer.

These 'dark death-people'(p.26) are fishermen and pasturalists. It can be surmised that they are, in terms of their position in Brown's imaginative chronicling, to be equated with the survivors of The Black Flame. And 'The Return of the Women', the last part of Fishermen With Ploughs, sees society returning to a time before agriculture, a dark time, a pagan time, an age of brutality, fear and want.

The beginning of more modern time, in Greenvoe and in Hesiod's writing, is the dawn of the era of agriculture. It is the best time, the happiest and the most fulfilling. It is a quiet looking back to a golden age, a better time than the present. The pagan idea that the evolution of humankind was accompanied by a gradual yet inevitable moral decay is found in both Hesiod's writing

and in Greenvoe.

In The Works and Days, the poet describes six ages or generations. The first people were the golden generation who 'lived as if they were gods'.[39] The second generation was 'of silver, far worse than the other.'[40] The third was 'the age of bronze.'[41] They were terrible, strong, violent and possessed of an indomitable spirit. The fourth generation was destroyed by war, although some of them, after death, were saved by Zeus and allowed to live 'in the islands of the blessed'.[42] The fifth generation is that of Hesiod's own time.

> And I wish that I were not any part
> of the fifth generation
> of men, but had died before it came,
> or been born afterward.
> For here now is the age of iron. Never by
> daytime
> will there be an end to hard work and
> pain,
> nor in the night
> to weariness[43]

The happiest age in human history is the first. It is golden. Each successive age is worse than that which preceded it. This concept is reinforced by the names given to each generation. The most precious metal, gold, is associated with the happiest age. Hesiod, of the age of iron, bemoans the baseness of human existence, and looks back wistfully to the heroic age, a time not far removed from his own.

The span of chronological time in Greenvoe is much

greater, about fifteen hundred years, yet the same concept of progressive decay over time is very evident. The 'golden generation', the happiest time in Orkney history, seems to stretch from the arrival of the 'merry race'(p.25) from 'the Mediterranean coasts'(p.25) to the end of the medieval period and the coming of the Reformation. The timeless setting in Greenvoe functions to validate this idea of a remembered golden age which once existed, reached its peak in the dynamic Viking era, and thereafter slowly died over the centuries.

Brown was as unhappy with his time as Hesiod was with his nearly three thousand years ago. He was deeply sceptical about the value of progress,[44] deplored the uniformity in modern society,[45] and the erosion of the once distinctive and identity-enforcing Orkney language.[46] The inhabitants of the village of Greenvoe are losing, or have already lost, their meaningful contact with the soil. In an industrialised society they now depend on central government handouts to survive. More significantly, in Greenvoe and Fishermen With Ploughs, the future is, at best, extremely bleak.

Time is paralleled, in Hesiod's and Brown's writing, both being concerned with primeval, heroic, and present time. The content of their writing spans centuries of measured time yet its mythic content gives an important element of timelessness. Between twelve hundred and fifteen hundred years of chronological time separate the

ancient Greek and Teutonic heroic ages, but The Works and Days, Theogony and Greenvoe are all primarily concerned with the same sort of ancient experience of time. Their principal emphasis is on that age when the heroic was ending, when oral tradition was being replaced by written records, and selfish paganism with a deeper (Christian) spirituality.

Both Hesiod and Brown, as sombre moralists, value old literature, traditional stories, folklore and poetry. Their native traditions developed separately but followed the same pathways. The concept of the movement of time in Greenvoe echoes that in ancient Greek thought. Both writers, ordinary people themselves, are interested in the daily work and simple spirituality of ordinary people. Hesiod was a shepherd, farmer and small landowner, not of the lowest class perhaps, but definitely a worker and in touch with the earth. Brown was a native of Orkney, a professional writer, but from a working-class background, who lived for many years very humbly.[47] Both writers viewed agriculture and farming as a pursuit of religious, as well as economic and social significance.

The Works and Days is, in one sense, a kind of farming manual, giving practical advice and demonstrating the author's close knowledge of rural life and work[48] and the cycle of the seasons,[49] reflecting the very early stages of permanent settlement, a time when Greek people had not

long stopped wandering. It is the beginning of Europe, a kind of dawn of time, the beginning of history, the dawn of spiritual perception.

Timeless Orkney, as presented in Greenvoe, captures something of the same mood. The ancient migration age of the Celts, and hence the beginnings of agriculture, is never felt to be far away. This is because many of the characters live out their days fishing and farming as their ancient forebears did. Also, The Scarf's narratives serve to remind us of the past, to appreciate that history repeats itself, and, in bemused trance, to merge past and present. It is made very clear that the islanders' lives, ever in present time, have links, still, with their earliest beginnings. This concept of time strongly connects events in Greenvoe to the time when the heroic, mythic past was ending and being gradually replaced by a new age of perception, a new dawn of human awareness of others.

The Works and Days is also a moral text, in which advice about planting and ploughing is interspersed with little homilies on the value of work:

> Work is no disgrace; the disgrace is in not working[50]
> It is best to work, at whatever you have a talent for doing,
> without turning your greedy thought toward what some other man possesses[51]

Work is necessary to survive and prosper but it is also of value to the spirit. It is invested with religious significance and linked to the gods.

> Make your prayers to Zeus of the ground
> and holy Demeter
> that the sacred yield of Demeter may grow
> complete
> and be heavy.[52]
>
> throw down the holy grain of Demeter
> on a well-rounded
> floor[53]

Greenvoe, too, invests agricultural work with a religious significance, the farmers being presented as timeless ritual figures, linked to their pre-Christian past through (pagan-like) ceremony, 'The Ancient Mystery of the Horsemen'. Brown has reconstructed this ceremony as being both pagan and Christian. For him the corn is holy and equated symbolically with both the Bread of Christ and Christ Himself. The work of producing the corn is therefore the most worthwhile kind of work, keeping the worker in touch with the elemental rhythms of nature, and in tune with the cycle of the seasons.

Many of Greenvoe's inhabitants do not engage in meaningful work as modern society provides them with an alternative, the dole Brown equates such dependence with every sort of societal decay and decline. The Scarf is

'the fisherman who does not fish.'(p.74) Not forced to provide his own food he is losing contact with nature and meaningful spirituality. He tells Johnny Singh:

> -No petrol, he said. So I couldn't go. The old yawl ccughed twice and then she died on me. Thank God for National Assistance. The sun of socialism warms me, however feebly. I'm not complaining. I can smoke. I can eat potatoes and margarine. I have leisure to write.(p.75)

Self-reliance is a virtue applauded by both Hesiod and Brown. The Scarf's decadent attitude contrasts markedly with that of Bella and Ben Budge, who, even in old age, do not need the pensicn to survive, living comfortably on the money Bella makes from selling eggs(p.17).

The Works and Days is also a highly moral text, which, as a sort of analogue to Brown's, expresses definite opinions on what justice is and how it functions in society. Hesiod had accused his brother, Perses, of obtaining more than his fair share of their father's estate by engaging in bribery and corruption.[54] He wanted to settle the quarrel 'with straight decisions, which are from Zeus,/and are the fairest.'[55] Hesiod's concept of justice and wrong-doing seem almost Christian. The spirit of The Works and Days, in its moral tone and sense of righteousness, is akin to a religion of compassion. In a like sense, many of the islanders in Greenvoe are also on the verge of a new morality. Various Biblical echoes of warning are too found in the sections relating to the

Whanesses, and in the climax of the relationship between Ivan and Inga.

So Greenvoe also has social justice as one of its central concerns. The enemy is 'bureaucracy', the same enemy, although on a very much larger scale, that Hesiod is fighting, for the people of Hellya are being defeated by the forces of modern bureaucracy. The final mood expresses something of the bitterness and helplessness expressed by Hesiod ir The Works and Days. Both writers are trying to raise the perception of ordinary people to justice issues.

Hesiod represents the dawn of time, and in Greenvoe there is an echo of the early philosopher's attempt to 'describe the true way of existence.'[56] There is a similar pessimistic view of the future when the gods in

> ... pale mantles, shall go
> from the wide-wayed
> earth back on their way to Olympos,
> forsaking the whole race
> of mortal men, and all that will be left
> by them
> to mankind
> will be wretched pain. And there shall be
> no defense
> against evil.[57]

Both texts are like as pastoral pieces of writing. Brown sees the setting of the latter as timeless, unravaged landscape, much as Orkney once had, until it was destroyed by modern society, and feels the same awareness as Hesiod of the cyclic human existence, tied to the rhythms of the seasons:

> Then after
> the Pleiades and the Hydes and the
> strength of Orion
> have set, then remember again to begin
> your seasonal plowing,
> and the full year will go underground,
> completing the cycle.58

He too invests agricultural work, as Hesiod does, with spiritual significance, for the very corn is holy. Greenvoe, like The Works and Days, is a compassionate text, concerned with humanity, husbandry, justice and toil, reflecting a society approaching a Christian like moralism.

* * * * *

Greenvoe is also like a prose epic in its shape. Its basic structure is a text divided into six, largely contained chapters. This parallels the traditional structure of epic, written in six, twelve or twenty four books, and it is interesting to note that Fishermen With Ploughs is a poem cycle in six parts, and An Orkney Tapestry is, loosely, a collection of six large essays. The first five chapters of Greenvoe are identical in that each describes one day, from early morning until after dark. The last chapter spans over a decade of chronological time, ending with the dawn of a new

summer's day, a beginning which promises hope for the future.

Greenvoe is at once about twentieth century Orkney and past centuries, including primeval time, and is a Christian text about modern day spirituality as much as it is a record of the pagan past. Each chapter is concerned with both past and present Orkney and so is, at one and the same moment, contemporary, and seen to be spanning centuries of chronological time. Its six chapters may too be seen to echo the first six days of the Biblical creation[59], from the beginning of the world to its peopling, as Adam and Eve were tempted and fell, and so doomed humankind to a constant battle against evil and sin.

In Greenvoe, the strong sense of the past impacting on the present, flows structurally from The Scarf's 'history' of Hellya, its primeval origins reflecting the Biblical story of creation:

> In the beginning, when God created the universe, the earth was formless and desolate. The raging ocean that covered everything was engulfed in total darkness, and the power of God was moving over the water. Then God commanded, "Let there be light"- and light appeared.[60]

> 'Darkness and silence, darkness and silence. The light of the intellect had not yet touched the island. ... For a million years there was no man to observe, there was darkness, the islands lay on the water like black lumps, the wind was darkness, the blind sun rose and set in a blank sky.'(p.24)

The 'light' in Greenvoe is consistently equated with its author's concept of true (Catholic) spirituality in human society, chronicled in its beginning, decline and the ending of spirituality in Orkney. Adam and Eve's eviction from Eden is paralleled, in the final chapter of Greenvoe, with the depopulation and destruction of Hellya. That island, for the Celts and more importantly for the Vikings, had once been an Eden. Greenvoe in a way recreates that Biblical time when 'the Lord God took some soil from the ground and formed a man out of it; he breathed life-giving breath into his nostrils and the man began to live.'[61] The Scarf's narrative, embedded into the plot structure of each of the first five chapters, mirrors all the events in *Genesis*, and so charts a wondrous beginning, a decline and then a fall.

This sense of doom in the Bible led Christians to believe in the Millenrium Theory, that a thousand year period of holiness would either follow or precede the Second Coming of Christ, itself a time of re-birth.

> Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key of the abyss and a heavy chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent - that is, the Devil, or Satan - and chained him up for a thousand years. ... After that he must be let loose for a little while.[62]

Greenvoe is set both 'in time', historical time, for it spans about a thousand years, from The Orkneyinga Saga to the late twentieth century. It charts this millenium of, mostly, gradual spiritual decay, ending with the apparent triumph of evil, but promising eventual rebirth for Orcadians, and, by implication, for all men.

* * * * *

Greenvoe has qualities belonging to both the manner of primary and secondary epic. It is primitive or primary epic as it has many levels, tells many separate stories, refers to a history which is already known, has a large time frame and is itself timeless, the layers of stories ultimately deriving from heroic oral tradition. The fact that the past is in the present is especially seen as a quality which invests Greenvoe with the spirit of primary epic.

The Scarf's vatic voice is also like the saga-teller. His narrative is an imaginative reconception of The Orkneyinga Saga, which is a central thread in the modern tapestry of Greenvoe. Many characters function to inform the reader about the past but undoubtedly it is The Scarf who has the most crucial role, as an eclectic combination

of fisherman, historian and Communist. He is not very interested in fishing, an indication that he has lost touch with his roots; but he is, paradoxically, very passionate about the history of the Orkneys, being absorbed by the past but, again paradoxically, indifferent about the future and seemingly unconcerned about the destruction of the island's culture, history and landscape, and the dispersal of its inhabitants. He accepts the advent of Black Star as necessary to human progress and development(p.228), an attitude which does, to a large extent, fit in with his Marxist beliefs, but which also makes a mockery of his seeming commitment to the past values of personal fulfillment.

The Scarf, therefore, is a flawed character, and so it follows that it is more productive to examine him in terms of his function, as the vehicle used by Brown to convey Orkney history to the reader[63] . He is a writer and historian and it is this aspect of his character which most closely reflects parts of George Mackay Brown himself. Most evenings he reads his work in the pub, telling a story to a listening audience, as Orcadians have done for centuries. His reflective chronicles bring the more heroic past alive in present time.

Overall, he is an ambivalent figure - appreciative of the past but not displaying any meaningful warmth or kindness: a recorder of the mythic-historic past and, therefore, crucial to the plot, but not a significant

member of the Greenvoe community until the last chapter, when he becomes a martyr to the 'progress' which he had endorsed as necessary to the logical development of humankind, and so he commits suicide after losing his job at Black Star. He becomes a kind of flawed St Magnus, a modern day victim, helpless against his enemies.

Another narrator figure of some importance[64] is Johnny Singh, the Sikh (or possibly Hindu) hawker of goods, a character, we are told, who belongs to the 'light'(p.141). Events in Chapter Three are told from his point of view, partly in a series of detailed letters to his Uncle Pandanus in Edinburgh. Johnny is intelligent, perceptive and a student of English literature(p.69) and he tells his own story in poetic style. He is capable of intense emotion, as shown by his feelings for Alice Voar. Johnny, in fact, appears to express the compassion of George Mackay Brown, and much more meaningfully so than The Scarf. But he is very much an outsider, although he values the island, its way of life and its people. Johnny's function is to provide valuable, objective and much more truthful information about present life on Hellya.

Greenvoe is now in moral decline; seen in the need for social security payments; the lack of interest in fishing; the alienation of the villagers from the soil; people's neglect of each other; their lack of compassion and dependence on alcohol; and lack of personal hygiene.

The villagers are not romantic figures. Their individual stories are told, focusing mostly on present time, but also, in many cases, including dubious details about their early life, or even the lives of their ancestors.

Their stories, thoughts and concerns are presented episodically, as a kind of social patchwork, which, when finished, gives a complete picture of a community. In fact the structure transcends the episodic in two ways - convincing the reader that events are happening simultaneously, as when Alice Voar, Ellen Kerston and Rachel Whaness think their own thoughts, while waiting for Olive Evie to serve them at the shop(pp.134-5). Sometimes a multiple viewpoint of an event is given, so that the reader has two perspectives on it, as with Inga Fortin-Bell sun-baking on the shore and splashing in the water, and sensuously enjoying this contact with the sun and the sea(pp.108-9), while from Samuel Whaness's stern perspective, she is a 'shameless hussy'(p.113) who is nearly naked.

Greenvoe also reflects qualities which are normally associated with secondary epic. It is literary, and contains a widening out of Orkney legendary history, expressing a moral concern for the fate of Orkney, and by implication, Scotland and the rest of Europe. It treats the known past in epic fashion, evoking a self-contained Orkney as existing in the pre-Reformation medieval world. It examines European (and Protestant) civilisation and

its several social processes, and sees past time as more desirable than either the present or future. It has characters with whom the reader can identify and it is a serious work, very like a Christian sermon.

The main characters in Greenvoe also illuminate important themes in the novel, concerned, as it is thematically, with spirituality and Christian values. Some characters are warm, compassionate and appreciative of nature. A few are cold, exploitative and materialistic, while many characters are a mixture of both ranges. The central themes connect with those of religion and Christian humility and to its desirable expression of Christian charity and tolerance.

* * * * *

At the furthest extreme and connecting with the warning theme of outside threat is the anonymous hotel guest, who is a symbol of faceless bureaucracy, a figure of doom, even an image of death. He is a kind of Horseman of the Apocalypse, the effect of his coming being akin to that of the breaking of The Seventh Seal, which resulted in 'rumblings and peals of thunder, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.'[65] He is, in Johnny Singh's words, 'Western Man arrived at a forseen inevitable end ... He

rules the world with a card index file.'(p.86) His role is that of recorder and reporter to those who are powerful, and he displays no human emotion, is devoid of spirituality and epitomises ruthlessness of bureaucracy, operating in the name of 'progress', scientific advancement and government policy.

The Black Star operation, put in train by the hotel guest, is akin to the Biblical star of 'Bitterness'[66] which poisons the water and reduces the light of the sun, moon and stars. Black Star evokes for us the 'star which had fallen down to the earth ... opened the abyss, and smoke poured out of it ... the sunlight and the air were darkened by the smoke from the abyss.'[67]

Mr and Mrs Evie, Colonel Fortin-Bell, Miss Agatha Fortin-Bell and Bill Scorradale, all lacking true spirituality, are mainly motivated by the desire for wealth and position. They all lack real compassion, seeking somehow to exploit the community they live in, rather than contribute to it. They are portrayed only in the present time and do not value tradition, or understand its importance, and they will not oppose the destruction and depopulation of Hellya as long as they benefit from it.

Mr Evie is 'postmaster, merchant, county councillor, justice of the peace'(p.8) and a 'kirk elder'(p.17), and so a powerful figure in the community. He appears to know everyone's business, but unlike his wife, never gossips.

By Chapter Four (p.140) the reader realises that Mr Evie has prior knowledge of the identity of the hotel guest and has been working secretly to facilitate the take-over of Hellya by Black Star(p.215). Like Judas, Mr Evie is a traitor, and his actions encourage the triumph of evil. Working from the inside, like a member of a fifth column, he plots to destroy the community to which he himself belongs. The Evies reap huge profits from the influx of workers(p.214) and are cold, selfish and actively involved in the (spiritual) annihilation of the island people. Mrs Evie, spiteful and even vicious, sows dissent and intolerance through rumour and gossip, and the pair retire rich to the safe haven of Kirkwall.

The Laird, Colonel Fortin-Bell, and his niece, Miss Agatha Fortin-Bell, also are lacking in warmth, real kindness and any appreciation of nature. They are linked in the text with noise and disturbance(p.13), and speak differently to the islanders(p.13), especially Miss Fortin-Bell who 'spoke as if she were shouting into a gale.'(p.13) and the expressed emotions of 'the grand folk' are 'watched with sardonic awe'(p.13) by the villagers.

The Fortin-Bells are not regarded, nor do they regard themselves as belonging in any way to the island community. They live at the hall and are gentry, perceived by Orcadians as being interlopers. History has frequently portrayed their class as exploiters, as does

Brown in Greenvoe. The Laird, in a gruff English style, describes a rainy day (typical weather in Orkney) as 'Not weather for a dog.'(p.36) His niece gives out clothes to the needy(pp.186-90) but is motivated by a sense of the duty of her position, rather than by any feeling of compassion. She is tactless, pushy and curious, forcing her way into the Budges' house, but leaving abruptly when she discovers Ben is laid out inside. She listens eagerly as Alice Voar chatters innocently about her children, discovering, to her dismay, that the father of the oldest is her own uncle, the Laird. This gentry mocking provides rare ironic humour for the reader to enjoy.

The Fortin-Bells are not dismayed by the brutal invasion of the island or the impending exile of its people, happily swapping their Hellya hall for one in the Western Highlands of mainland Scotland, where they can hunt deer. They do not have any spiritual attachment to Orkney, are not in touch with its landscape, having no deep roots, being concerned only to maintain their position socially and economically. Having little regard for place, they are not true Orcadians and so are mocked for their misplaced sense of superiority, for their ignorance and for their material values.

Bill Scorradale, the publican, shares many like attitudes, his aim being to accumulate wealth. He makes money by illegally keeping the pub 'open every weekend till four in the morning.'(p.9) He is out of touch with

the island's history, as shown by his reaction to a reading by The Scarf: 'I had no idea all them things happened here in Hellya.'(p.26) He is the father of Sander, Alice Voar's son, but only provides 'two bottles of guinness every weekend ... and a half-bottle of gin at New Year'(p.189) toward the boy's upkeep and cheats his customers by selling falsely labelled home-brewed whisky(p.87). He was paid 'extravagant compensation'(p.217) for his hotel and he 'looked at the ruin with dazed joy'(p.217). The reader sees that Bill is so completely immersed in the world of business and money that he is devoid of any kind of warmth or intuition regarding the needs of others.

* * * * *

The 'middle' group of characters have both positive and negative traits. They are modern-day islanders who are flawed but who have retained some of the ancient spirit of their forebears. In their hearts they do not belong, or wish to belong, to an officious, greedy, industrialised society. Inga Fortin-Bell, Ivan Westray, the Kerstons and the Whanesses fit into this group.

Rachel and Samuel Whaness, deep down, possess true islander thoughtfulness. They are kind, giving fish to

Alice Voar(p.23) and treating Johnny Singh with hospitable politeness(p.73). They are fisher-folk and, like Ivan Westray, the sea is dominant in their lives, Samuel being in almost daily contact with it, his work a cyclic pattern of setting and checking his lobster creels.

Rachel is more actively aware of the constant physical danger which her husband faces and this deeply worries her. She tries to persuade him to stop fishing, arguing that they no longer need the money(p.135). Her dread of losing Samuel is well-founded. Twice in three days he is nearly killed while fishing(p.46, 155). For a time, after 'retiring' to live with Rachel's brother on Hoy, Samuel decides he 'will never bait another line'(p.236). But he is unhappy and feels useless, and, much to his wife's dismay, he buys another boat and resumes fishing, needing that contact with nature to be fulfilled and still having the capacity to realise this need and to act on it.

Rachel is also fulfilled in her role of home-maker, being especially seen to be 'busy and contented' in the tidying up of her widowed brother's house and garden(p.236). However, it greatly grieves her that she and Samuel are childless. Samuel has fathered one of Alice Voar's children a little girl, and Rachel was 'good to Shirley'(p.189) and 'wanted Shirley to stay in her house all the time.'(p.189) Rachel sometimes feels bitter that she has no children(p.104) but she does not

let this bitterness affect her personal relationships.

For all their good qualities, and they have many, Rachel and Samuel Whaness are fundamentally flawed. They are post-Reformation Presbyterian fanatic figures, obsessed with religion, narrow-minded and often intolerant.[68] Essentially they are cold, their childlessness perhaps symbolic of the lack of joy in their lives, Alice shrewdly describing Samuel as 'the religious fisherman'(p.189). Johnny, while appreciating the degree of formal kindness which Mrs Whaness shows him, realises that she will never buy from him, and that her rigid principles will never soften(p.73). The account of Johnny's visit to Rachel contains much ironic humour, particularly in her refusal to even look at what he has for sale, deeming his bag to be 'stuffed with all harlotry and vanity and incensed hell-bait'(p.73). Accordingly, she gives this Sikh pedlar two pamphlets, *How a Child led me from the Hell of Drink* and *The Scarlet Woman-The Menace of Popery.*

This mocking of Presbyterian intolerances is also to be seen in the final chapter, when the Whanesses flee Hellya because a Catholic Mass is to be celebrated in a hall which Samuel has the responsibilty of cleaning. George Mackay Brown converted to Catholicism in 1961. For him it was ' "the rock" '.[69] Protestantism, in its early Scottish stages was 'a creed now of terror and hellfire.'[70] In Greenvoe it is evident that Brown deemed

Calvinist intolerance and righteousness to be deplored, and the flight of the Whanesses from a place of Catholic worship, is one illustration of this.

The personal effect of Calvinism, is, to a lesser extent, seen in the portrait of Margaret Inverary. She is an outsider, and, at the end of Greenvoe, elects to remain one. Her dilemma is moral. She is an ageing single woman. Should she be persuaded into having an affair with Ivan Westray? Such a decision would be contrary to her religious principles and, for a time, she refuses him. However, she succumbs eventually to the island's warmth and natural beauty(p.138), and briefly finds love with Ivan. Sincere love and the free expression of it appear to be applauded in Greenvoe. It is a little difficult to endorse her decision wholeheartedly, especially as the object of her affections is the exploitative Ivan Westray. But he treats Margaret differently from Inga, taking her a gift(p.209) and forgoing a visit to the pub for her sake. She gives and therefore she receives and the effect is that she is richer for her contact with Hellya and Ivan.

Another two people who are shown to be much more deeply flawed through inherited religious belief are Mrs McKee and her son Simon. Their story, in terms of its length, might be said to dominate the novel. Arguably, it is a story within a story, a kind of novella, representative of what Brown perceives has happened in

the wider outside world of mainland Scotland.

The McKees' story is a pathetic one, describing the illness of both mother and son; the mother consumed by guilt about the sins, mostly trivial, which she believes she has committed; and the son driven by the fear of professional and personal failure into chronic alcoholism. It is implicit in the text that it is the strict tenets of Calvinism which are the main cause of the sickness of Mrs McKee and Simon[71] . At the end of her life and mentally ill, she believes that she is responsible for all the evil around her, while Simon is weak and has never really tried to face his drinking problem. However, the fact that he is a Church of Scotland Minister makes it almost impossible for him to do so, as any admission would mean dismissal and would harm the local standing of his Church. His mother has been unable to help him for the same reason.

The characters of the McKees are basically sound, Johnny describing Mrs McKee as a 'gentleness'(p.79), and every word said about her confirms this. She is and was a loving wife, sister, aunt and mother. She has always done everything in her power to help and support Simon, including accompanying him to his exile on Hellya. Simon had tried to live up to his mother's, aunt's and society's expectations by embracing an honoured profession but he was not able to cope with the stress of doing so. He would be judged to have failed if he took a

different or lower kind of job. The only way he could cope with the panic he felt while actually preaching was to drink.

The long sections concerning the McKees are, arguably, too extended[72] , and so constitute a structural flaw in Greenvoe[72] , the detailed material not fitting in with the novel's episodic structure. But there is no doubt that the story of the McKees adds memorable depth to the novel and its themes, both in its own right and by way of contrast. The inclusicn of the McKees' story provides an added perspective, a way for the reader to contrast the lives of those on Hellya with that of 'outsiders'. Events on Hellya have a much more archetypal quality than those in Edinburgh. Mrs McKee's long memory stretches from 1916 to the (almost) present and the incidents which she remembers belong to 'real' chronological time, reflecting very nearly the increasing moral dilemmas that European society has from the time of the Somme massacre[73] . On Hellya itself, however, time is continuous, past merging with present[73] .

Even on Hellya, potentially a place of healing, Simon is unable to stop drirking. He is kind and sensitive(p.154) and seems to be liked by most of his parishioners, although many do not respect him because of his secret drinking. But he is always an outsider, both spiritually and culturally. He lacks any real joy in life and one wonders if he ever really experienced it. His

essential moral situation is made clearer when his life is contrasted to that of his cousin Winnie's.

Winnie was raised in rural, northern mainland Scotland and so, with the opportunity to absorb local folklore, nurtured a sense of wonder and joy in nature. Later in life, at about the same age as Simon was when he became an alcoholic, Winnie rejected the prescribed, narrow path she was expected to follow, fell in love, had a baby without marrying, became an author (not a highly respectable profession), and converted to Catholicism. The last is highly significant. It indicates that Winnie was able to build on the knowledge of folklore and tradition which she already possessed, and find meaningful spirituality. Unfortunately for Mrs McKee and Simon, the 'flame'(p.141) or spirituality which once burned in their pre-Reformatiom ancestors, has, in them, been extinguished. The poignancy of their history is not what they are, but what they could have been.

Bert and Ellen Kerston are Greenvoe villagers who live in a decaying community. They are island born, with, in Ellen's case at least, a proud heritage(p.187), which makes her aware of what is missing in her life since her marriage. Bert is a fisherman and so lives in tune with the forces of nature. It is Bert Kerston, after all, who saves Samuel Whaness's life(p.199). But he is lazy, a thief, a drunkard, abusive and irresponsible in caring for his family. There is, however, hope for the Kerstons.

They must leave Hellya because pollution is seriously affecting Bert's livelihood, but they are able to remain in Orkney, Bert accepting a job as a ghillie at the Sutbreck Hotel on a neighbouring island.

* * * * *

The remainder of the characters belong to a group which is comprised of those who, however obliquely, have a more 'true' spirituality. This means that they are in touch with nature; that customary ritual, the past and its values, is still important in their everyday lives; and that their Christianity is kind, tolerant, warm and earthy, as Brown imagines the Catholicism of the islanders to have been in the time before the Reformation.

The farmers are, generally speaking, members of this group. Life on the farms is 'out of time', being described in traditional terms, before the mechanisation of the twentieth century. The farm people are tolerant and kind as shown in their attitude to the Minister(p.185), and in Johnny's report of them as happy and content(p.92); they fight against eviction from their farms, and against the destruction of their island(pp.240-4), the only ones to do so; and they practice a ritual which sustains them.

Timmy Folster, Bella and Ben Budge, and Alice Voar, too, are villagers who, like the farmers, lead lives of spiritual significance. They are all simple people, innocent, especially vulnerable to the effects of change, bewildered and helpless in the collision of old and new. They evoke a timeless Orkney, and their stories and way of life celebrate community life and reveal to the reader the simplicity, quiet happiness and harmony of traditional village life.

Voar, in the Orkney language, may mean a lover or wooer, and spring[74] and thus Alice Voar is, by her very name, representative of both springtime and fertility.[75] She is sensuous, kind, warm and not worried by trivia. Johnny describes her as an 'enchantress'(p.90), 'the much-loved one'(p.97), and 'the passionate dove'(p.74) who lives 'in the house of the roses'(p.74). Alice, unashamedly, has sever children, each with a different father, whom she loves very much. She may be viewed as a kind of combined Madonna figure of ancient Catholicism and Norse fertility goddess, evoking an ambiguous early Christian Orkney.

Timmy Folster is what the twentieth century defines as intellectually disabled. About fifty years old(p.218), unkept and sometimes sick in body, he is symbolically representative of the decay of modern Orkney life. Yet, mainly through his innocence and his contact with nature, the reader is aware of his essential spirituality. He is

a casual harvester and beachcomber(p.132), an activity which he indulges in even after the coming of Black Star(p.218). He lives 'an open-air life'(p.219) and eats lots of greens, fish and seaweed, living in total harmony with nature and with the people in his community. His innocence and trust, however, make him very vulnerable to exploitation. He ends up in a Home where there is no doubt he will be clean and comfortable(p.221), but the reader wonders whether he can possibly be happy in an environment so clinical and unnatural.

Bella and Ben Budge are characters who evoke, more than any others, the idea of continuous, timeless, traditional Orkney. For two or three centuries many men of Orkney have made a living from the sea, as whalers, fishermen and sailors. Ben Budge belongs to this group, having left home at seventeen, 'a shy boy'(p.150) and sailed to 'every waterfront in the world'(p.150), finally returning to Hellya with tattoos on his arms and speaking in a new way, bluntly and offensively, peppering his speech with oaths, which demonstrates how he has been contaminated by the outside world. However, Ben is intelligent and values family and community life. He tries to stop Timmy from drinking meths(p.44), writes almost daily to his nephew in Canada, giving him news and offering any assistance within his power to give(p.17), and he respects his father's authority and values, submitting to them while his father is alive(p.151). He

is devastated when he returns home on leave to find his father dead and his home occupied by strangers. 'His eyes glittered and his cheeks were wet.'(p.152)

Greenvoe sketches Een's last days, his death and his funeral. His demise is all too symbolic of the approaching 'death' of Hellya, the ending of the islander way of life. Ben did not attend church or consider himself to be at all religious, but it is made clear that he is going to heaven, that, despite his 'profane and blasphemous'(p.196) way of speaking, he 'had a berth booked there'(p.196).

Bella Budge, Ben's sister, is, like Timmy Folster, in total harmony with her environment, being inoffensive, kind(p.44), loving, laconic and hard-working. No-one has a bad word to say about her. She values community life, home life, family history and simple ritual or ceremony. She is much attached to her chickens(p.8) and she and Ben can live off the money she makes from their eggs(p.17). Like their forebears the Budges live free from the debilitating welfare state. The past is important to Bella and Ben's death evokes memories of their childhood, as well as important events in their family life. This section of the narrative is an elegy for Ben(pp.148-154) and for a past time. She remembers the advice of the Norn-like old women or how to cope with death(p.148) and she knows how to prepare a corpse for burial.

> The voice of the first elegaic woman in the island, a dweller in a stone place, murmured to her mildly.'(p.149)

Like her brother, Bella is full of 'ancient wisdom'(p.148). Like all the others, she is eventually forced to flee her home. She is old, 'light as a hare'(p.235), and most poignantly, had never before left the island(p.235). Her departure best exemplifies the helplessness of the islanders in the collision between the old ways and the rew.

* * * * *

The essence of Greenvoe is a Christian fable of dangerous and destructive change. It is a tapestry of stories with timeless overlays, belonging to both past and present. Greenvoe is like The Orkneyinga Saga in that it appears to be deeply rooted in oral literature, possessing narrator and chorus figures, its threads reaching out and extending into modern time. Its text is sometimes Biblical, the journey of Samuel from near death back to the real world being evocative of the spirit of The Pilgrim's Progress. Greenvoe is an unusual novel of great beauty, its many layers and interwoven threads presenting a comprehensive Orkney tapestry.

George Mackay Brown s Greenvoe is, at the metaphysical level, an exploration of humankind's deepest spirituality. Its text reveals two planes of existence, one inhabited by the selfish and aggressive, and the other by the timeless, ritualistic, seemingly acquiescent characters who represent, to Brown, traditional Christian Orkney. It is really exploring the effects of greed and pride, materialism, intolerance of outlook and of the destruction of tradition. It is, at the heart, about fate, time, re-birth and innocence.

The theme of community is an important one in the text's moral survey. Unselfishness, being in tune with nature and its forces, the celebration of daily, human, community, such as is revealed in Bella Budge's recollections, daily, human cooperation in terms of agricultural work and fishing, and more meaningful identity gained through a numinous association with the locality - are all explored.

The theme of outside threat also exists at the metaphysical level. Hellya may be seen as representative not only of Orkney but of all of Scotland. There is a connection here to Scottish nationalism. The centuries of domination from outside are portrayed in Greenvoe as an implicit cause in the decay of socio-cultural values since the time of the Reformation. The Black Star operation is most representative of the modern threat that oil exploration and mining has posed to Orkney.

Shetland has been changed, socially and economically, by oil. On Orkney the effects are mainly confined to Flotta, but other national projects, such as the Rocket Range in South Uist, have threatened the existence of the local community culture and way of life. Thus Greenvoe looks at the implications of bureaucratic and managerial takeover of the islands and concludes it will inevitably mean the death of the traditional community and all of its members.

Greenvoe is concerned, too, with religion, the collision of old and new, and the deeply human need for pattern and ritual. Each chapter ends by referring to the deepest level of community function, the need for ritual symbolism, seen in a secret ceremony at The Bu, the main farm in the middle of Hellya and itself the geographical and spiritual centre of the island. Mansie Anderson is Lord of the Harvest. A young farmer is being taken through the six initiation rites of 'The Ancient Mystery of the Horseman', rites to be seen as crucifixion and resurrection of the corn, but it is not specifically Christian, let alone Roman Catholic. It is about the need to preserve the ancient elemental rhythms of nature in the community. It is a kind of sacrament, necessary for continued moral survival.

In Greenvoe the fragmentary but sustaining past had still existed until the coming of Black Star. It is the greatest threat which the islanders have ever faced, and

it will result, inevitably, in their total defeat, in what must seem a last battle between good and evil. Greenvoe is not and has never been the perfect community but it has always survived until now, when it seems that it is being destroyed in the name of material progress and scientific advancement. Yet the novel ends with the possibility of renewal, in that, in a final ceremony, a kind of Catholic litany, the power of The Word is invoked. The Word is *'resurrection'*(p.249).

* * * * *

Footnotes for Chapter One: 'Greenvoe'.

1. G. M. Brown, Greenvoe, Ringwood, 197?, pp.201, 202, 207. Subsequent page references to this work will be given in the text in brackets after the quotation.

2. J. D'Arcy in Scottish Skalds and Sagamen, East Linton, Scotland, 1996, p.245, has concluded somewhat differently that 'Brown sometimes imitated the saga style to achieve ironic effects' and he cites this episode as an example. After reading D.H. Lawrence's Women in Love, Inga wants a sexual experience with a local peasant, but Westray cynically rapes her.

3. J. Young (translator), The Prose Edda of Snorri Sturluson, Cambridge, Bowes and Bowes, 1954, p.32.

4. E.O.G. Turville-Petre, Myth and Religion of the North, London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1964, p.275.

5. J. Young, op. cit., p.91.

6. A. MacGillivray, Greenvoe, (Scotnotes) Aberdeen, 1989, p. 10, explains 'that many local writers, including perhaps George Mackay Brown', view the Norse age in Orkney as the golden one and see everything that has happened since then as a decline and deterioration. This is because the Norse age was, historically, a time when Orkney achieved (near) independence from Norway, when Orkney rulers were significant political pawns in Northern Europe and a time of (relative) peace and properity, the economy based on farming.

7. G. M. Brown, An Orkney Tapestry, London, 1969, p.2.

8. From a letter dated 23.4.94, which I have received from Mr Brown.

9. G. M. Brown, An Orkney Tapestry, London, 1969, p.3.

10. G. M. Brown, Fishermen With Ploughs, London, 1979, see the introduction.

11. ibid., in the poem 'The Blind Helmsman (2)', p.7.

12. J. D'Arcy, Scottish Skalds and Sagamen, East Linton, 1996, p. 16, disagrees. He explains that Brown 'did occasionally use historical comparisons for overtly didactic purposes'(p.254) and that a good example of this can be found in Fishermen With Ploughs. The Norse folk in this poem cycle 'are not vivid recreations of historical people, but are verbal metaphors in highly stylised pieces'(p.255).

13. See pp. 51-2 of Greenvoe for an example in italics.

14. A. MacGillivray, op. cit., pp.11-12, explains that, historically, the event which dramatically changed Orkney life was not Norway's handing over of Orkney to Scotland, but rather the Reformation, which brought the Protestant church to Orkney, and especially the rule of Robert Stuart and his son, Patrick. These two events marked the beginning of a long period when Orcadians felt they were being imposed on, and being cruelly and unjustly treated by outsiders.

15. G. M. Brown, An Orkney Tapestry, London, 1969, p.20.

16. ibid., p.21.

17. A. MacGillivray, op. cit., p. 17, states that Brown sees the true villain of the modern age as an attitude of mind, one which sees people as less important than government plans and policies, that views the traditional way of life as not worth preserving, and fears that materialism has become our religion.

18. J. Young, op. cit., p.86.

19. ibid., p.90.

20. ibid., p.87.

21. G. M. Brown, Fishermen With Ploughs, London, 1979, p.82.

22. J. Young, op. cit., p.90.

23. ibid.

24. G. M. Brown, Fishermen With Ploughs, London, 1979, pp.85-6.

25. J. Young, op. cit., p.91.

26. ibid., pp.91-2.

27. A. Bold, George Mackay Brown, Edinburgh, 1978, p. 94, explains that the ritual of the 'Ancient Mystery of the Horsemen' may be inspired by Edwin Muir's poem, 'The Horses', in which the world survives a nuclear holocaust when it is reborn in an Orkney agricultural community. A. MacGillivray, op. cit., p. 50, also notes Brown's probable debt to Muir regarding this. Also see A. MacGillivray, op. cit., p.14, for background information on the traditions and history of the Society of the Horsemen's Word, centred in the North-East of Scotland.

28. J. Hastings(ed.), Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Vol. 6, Edinburgh, 1908, p.668.

29. R. Lattimore (trans.), Hesiod, (Theogony) University of Michigan, 1959, p.124, Lines 22-3. The Hesiod text translates 'The Works and Days', 'Theogony' and 'The Shield of Herakles'. To distinguish between quotations from 'The Works and Days' and 'Theogony' the appropriate work will be included in the footnote, as above, in brackets ( ).

30. ibid., (Theogony) Lines 32-3.

31. ibid., (The Works and Days) p.31, Line 109.

32. ibid., (Theogony) p.134, Line 184.

33. ibid., (Theogony) p.136, Line 216.

34. ibid., (Theogony) p.140, Line 284.

35. ibid., (Theogony) p.140, Line 290.

36. ibid., (Theogony) p.183, Lines 970-2.

37. ibid., (The Works and Days) p. 31, Line 110.

38. ibid., (The Works and Days) p. 31, Line 117-8.

39. ibid., (The Works and Days) p.31, line 112.

34. ibid., (The Works and Days) p. 33, Line 127-8.

41. ibid., (The Works and Days) p. 35, Line 144.

42. ibid., (The Works and Days) p. 37, Line 170.

43. ibid., (The Works and Days) p. 39, Lines 174-8.

44. G. Brown, An Orkney Tapestry, London, 1969, pp. 20-1.

45. ibid., p.21.

46. ibid., pp.22-3.

47. Brown mentions his working class background in Under Brinkie's Brae, Edinburgh, 1979, p.85, and the fact that he lives in Council housing (p.120). In Rockpools and Daffodils (pp.228-9) he mentions that he bought his Council flat in November 1989. My letter from Brown, dated April 1994, shows that his address is unchanged. Another published source concerning Brown's family background is Alan MacGillivray's 'Greenvoe' in Scotnotes, Number 6, published by the Association for Scottish Literary Studies, University of Aberdeen, 1989.

48. This is especially evident in Lines 405-600.

49. Hesiod's awareness of the seasonal cycle permeates 'The Works and Days'. Examples may be found in Lattimore's translation on pages 63, 71, 87, and 90-1.

50. Lattimore, op. cit., (The Works and Days) p.55, Line 311.

51. ibid., (The Works and Days) p.55, Lines 315-7.

52. ibid., p.73, Lines 465-6.

53. ibid., p.115, Lines 806-7.

54. ibid., p.23, Lines 35-9.

55. ibid., p.23, Line 36.

56. ibid., p. 19, Line 10.

57. ibid., pp.41-3, Lines 198-201.

58. ibid., p.91, Lines 614-7.

59. A. Bold, op. cit., p.92, interprets the significance of the six chapters rather differently, seeing them as corresponding to the six stations of the initiation rites in the Ancient Mystery of the Horsemen.

60. Good News Bible, Australian Bicentennial Edition, The Bible Society in Australia, Canberra, 1988, Genesis 1.

The Scarf's words concern the notion of the creation of the world, whether specifically Old Testament, or more akin to the Voluspa and the prose of the Gylfaginning. The Voluspa may not be Biblical, but its setting, towards the end of the Gylfaginning, marries the two.

61. ibid., Genesis 2:7.

62. ibid., Revelation 20: 1-3.

63. A. MacGillivray, op. cit., pp.16-17, sees The Scarf's Marxism as important in that it makes him 'more of a religious believer than anything else'(p.16). J. D'Arcy, in Scottish Skalds and Sagamen, (1996), p.252, sees The Scarf's importance as one of function. I. Murray and B. Tait, Ten Modern Scottish Novels, Aberdeen, 1984, p. 159, see The Scarf as the least successful character in Greenvoe and as one who has too many functions.

64. A. Bold, op. cit., p. 97, is of the opinion that 'Whoever the narrator, the dominant sound through the book is the supple, suggestive, persuasive voice of George Mackay Brown.' This is debatable. The two principal narrative voices are The Scarf and Johnny Singh, both vehicles used by Brown, certainly, but characters in their own right as well, Johnny being especially interesting as the perceptive outsider who has such empathy with and passionate feelings for Alice Voar.

65. ibid., Revelation 8:5.

66. ibid., 8:10.

67. ibid., 9:1-2.

68. A. MacGillivray, op. cit., p.16, explains that Samuel and Rachel Whaness belong to a Protestant Evangelical group, with the result that their outlook is coloured by a sense of being more righteous and worthy than their neighbours. This helps to explain their intolerance. I. Murray and B. Tait, op. cit., p.158, see Samuel Whaness as essentially a good man, to be treated with respect.

> 'Only two real jokes are made at his expense - one is the repeated assertion that the Whanessess keep money between the leaves of *The Pilgrim's Progress* ... and the other is the extremity of the pair's anti-Catholic prejudice (p.158).

If, indeed, it is a joke, it is very black humour. It is difficult to imagine Brown viewing anti-Catholic prejudice, common in Northern Scotland until recent times, as a matter for levity.

69. From a letter I received from George Mackay Brown, dated 23.4.94.

70. G. Brown, An Orkney Tapestry, London, 1969, p.38.

71. A. MacGillivray, (op. cit., p.16), describes Simon McKee as a 'despised alcoholic' and blames him for the fact that 'religion has become ineffectual in the (Greenvoe) community.' It may be argued, that in Brown's view, (and his anti-Protestant attitude permeates the text), religion in Greenvoe and indeed in all of Scotland, became 'ineffectual' from the time of the Reformation.

72. N. Roberts, Contemporary Literary Criticism, Volume 48, 1988, p. 54, condemns those sections which explore the inner consciousness of Mrs McKee as 'tedious' and as 'over-writing' or as too long. I. Murray and B. Tait, op. cit., p.153, tacitly agree that the extreme character development of Simon and Mrs McKee overbalances the novel in its concentration of detail. A. Bold, (op. cit.), p.96, merely notes that the episodic technique is suspended for twenty six pages when Mrs McKee's imaginary prosecutor presents his evidence to the court.

73. A. Bold, op. cit., pp.96-7, notes that at the end of Greenvoe, as the village collapses around her, Mrs McKee is used as a vehicle to convey, symbolically, the image of time collapsing, going into reverse, back to the birth of her son. I. Murray and B. Tait, (op. cit.), p.5, view Mrs McKee as an important character in that, in his treatment of her, Brown shows the consequences of being brought up in a religious tradition which stresses guilt, and believes in the unworthiness and degradation of humanity. Brown is thus criticising Calvinist attitudes.

74. H. Marwick, The Orkney Norn, London, 1929. p.204. *vooer* is a wooer or lover. *vore* means springtime. This is a work Brown has long been familiar with. See Letters From Hamnavoe, Edinburgh, 1975, pp. 2 and 15.

75. A. MacGillivray, op. cit., p.8, concurs with this, stating that 'Voar' is the Orkney and Shetland word for the season of spring, and pointing out that Alice Voar has associations with fertilty and the sowing of seed. See also J. Wright(ed.), The English Dialect Dictionary, Vol. vi, 1961, p.350.

Chapter Two: *Magnus.*

Magnus is a novel deeply rooted in the rich earth of The Orkneyinga Saga, Brown's most continuous, important and valued source. For him it is a text of significance, for Orcadians it is the source of the identity of the Orkney people.

> Some wise man once said that every house in England should have copies of Shakespeare and the Bible. In the same way, I suppose most Orkney homes would like to be graced with a copy of 'The Orkneyinga Saga."[1]

The Orkneyinga Saga is described by him as one of 'The Crown Jewels of Island Literature'[2] and it contains many interweaving stories which Brown never tires of reading.[3] The Norse were 'masterly story-tellers'[4], he has said, and the '*Orkneyinga Saga* a matchless record of the way their earls and great men and women lived and thought.'[5] It is 'the backcloth against which those larger-than-life Orcadians enacted their roles.'[6] Everyday life in Orkney evokes, in Brown's conscious thoughts, the people and events of the saga.

> When we saw the peat-cutters on the high desolate hills above Evie the other evening, I thought of Torf-Einar, the earl who (it was said) got that nickname because he first showed his people how to burn peats.[7]

The Orkneyinga Saga is, according to Brown, 'arguably the most important book in Orkney literature'.[8] For Brown the writer, it is 'the greatest influence'.[9] The Orkneyinga Saga is, in fact, Brown's *vade mecum*,[10] a companion and spiritual guide. Brown reflects on it, loves it, understands it, and, on opening it, never fails to find a reference from the past which he is able to relate to the present.

Brown is so strongly associated with the saga in the academic world that the latest translation of it is dedicated to him.[11] It was a work he thought to be needed and wanted in Orkney.

> There's such a hunger for "The Orkneyinga Saga" nowadays (1973) that the 500 numbered copies of the Anderson edition (1873) - recently published in Edinburgh - must be almost exhausted. Certainly Orkney's quota vanished like snow on a June day ... What is even more urgently needed is a translation in the modern idiom. Such swift exciting narrative, such masterly characterisation, all accomplished in a few strokes - it puts the vast majority of modern novels to shame.[12]

He is acutely aware that Orcadians, for many centuries, were only vaguely if at all aware of their Norse heritage. The Orkneyinga Saga was first translated into

English in 1873,[13] and only then did modern Orcadians become gradually interested in their own history. The Dasent translation [14] was used in The Orkney Book (1909), and, Brown was sure, 'gave many a young Orcadian his first taste of the great story, and whetted his appetite for more.'[15]

The third translation, by A.B. Taylor in 1938, is the text which Brown depended upon, at least up until 1977,[16] describing it as a 'very scholarly work ... a worthy translation, much more supple and colloquial than earlier ones ..'[17] and one which he has 'read with delight many times'.[18] Its introduction and explanatory notes are extensive (in fact longer than the actual text) and deeply illuminating. Palsson and Edwards, in the most recent translation of The Orkneyinga Saga are also 'glad to acknowledge our debt to Dr Taylor's work.'[19]

Brown, as a poetic writer, works intensely with words. He is conscious that any translation of The Orkneyinga Saga cannot hope to reproduce exactly the original Old Norse form.[20] He wants his presentation of the saga material to appeal to, and be understood by modern readers, even if this means his using 'very free paraphrase'[21] to do so. His Magnus, then, is an adaptation, in (modern) prose form, of the story of St Magnus as recorded in The Orkneyinga Saga, but not changed in its essentials. However, it is not the same

story. Brown has used his imagination, his knowledge, his great sympathy and his writer's craft to flesh out the originally spare story of St Magnus and present it in the form of a modern novel. He has included, in his rendering of the story, the 'little person's view', one that appeals to modern readers, but which is almost omitted from The Orkneyinga Saga. Magnus is a successful attempt to revitalise an event of historical and religious significance and to give it a new meaning in the late twentieth century.

* * * * *

Magnus is not an assessment of historical facts,[22] but is explicitly Christian and such overtones permeate the whole. Brown's faith, rather than his scholarship, underpins the novel. As in The Orkneyinga Saga itself, Magnus's right to sainthood is undisputed. Yet it is apparent that Brown has thought deeply about the Magnus story[23] and has, to some extent, re-assessed the evidence.[24] He accepts as valid the scientific evidence that Magnus was 'a rather small man'[25] and that other recorded 'facts' about him were undoubtedly exaggerated.[26] Yet he also describes Magnus as 'a strange disconcerting figure'[27] and says that the

'events that gather about him are so extraordinary, and were witnessed by so many people, and were enacted in such a hard light, that there is *no faking of the record.*'[28] Brown proceeds, in the next few pages of An Orkney Tapestry, to record the Magnus story in modern prose. It is a foretaste, in its style and content, of the novel to be - thoughtful, dispassionate and yet uplifting. It includes a view of events from the perspective of the ordinary people of Orkney; and is valuable because of its authorial comment on the Magnus story, allowing the reader direct access to Brown's reflections on the main character of the novel (a text that he described as being his 'best work.'[29])

> The saga-man is still obsessed with foreshadowings of fate, and the revising monk has been assiduous in putting haloes about the head of the hero. But the story remains solid and impressive; no one could have invented the psalter in the Welsh battle, or the tears of Lifolf the cook-executioner, or the conversation between Hakon and Magnus's mother.[31]

It is also evident that Brown perceived the martydom of St Magnus as being of enormous significance in the history of the north.

> What remained after the fall of the axe in Egilsay was a sense of boundless release, an entire people raised from the grave of its history, a cornstalk bursting from a choked furrow.[31]

That is to say, the martydom of St Magnus resulted in the people of Orkney becoming saved by their proto-Christ, and truly Christian, as they had not been before.

The idea of history as patterned, and, more importantly, the perception that Magnus and Bonhoeffer (and, by implication, other martyrs), are Christ figures, is also foreshadowed in An Orkney Tapestry.

> 'I have no quarrel with any man here' - it was the first time in the history of the north that that remark had been made. It has been made, sporadically, ever since, nowadays with increasing urgency. Some day soon all men everywhere will have to speak it, if the nations are not to be involved in a final holocaust;[32]
>
> But the truest sign of the martydom appeared in the abundant horn of peace that tilted over the islands.[33]

* * * * *

Magnus then, is like the garment which is its central symbol, a weft of many threads. The most traditional and recognisable of these is that belonging to The Orkneyinga Saga, for Magnus is, except for one brief section, set wholly in saga time, events focusing on the life and, especially, on the death of Magnus.

Structurally, Magnus is divided into seven, considerable sections of varying lengths. The style of writing varies greatly, the basic story-telling prose being interspersed with poetry and dialogue. The use of such widely diverse styles as saga, journalese, hagiographic writing and philosophical discourse, serve to link past and present ages and to provide multiple perspectives of the same event.

A strongly coloured thread, and the one which Brown chooses for three sections of the Magnus text, including the structurally crucial first and last sections, is a picture of events, both great and small, from the perspective of the 'little' people of Orkney.

'The Plough', in the opening section of Magnus, is a symbol of the drudgery, exploitation and unremitting harshness of the lives of agricultural labourers in 'Christian' Orkney. Mild, because their ox is lame and the factor unmerciful, becomes the plough, and Mans, her husband, drives her. A picture of their lives is sketched, including: Mans's frustration and helplessness over their inability to improve their situation in life; the physical hardships they must endure; and the wide gulf, social, economic and political, which separates them from the nobility.

Mans is portrayed as a thinker, shrewd, cynical and yet honest. He functions to make the reader aware that in twelfth century notionally Christian Orkney, the

labouring class were without power of any kind, their sufferings unheeded and unrecorded, their safety and their property often at risk.[34] Mans is also present as an oarsman, when the Norwegians and the Welsh do battle in the Menai Strait. He is not portrayed as a hero, being an ordinary, common man and 'very frightened indeed.'[35] He does not in any way distinguish himself. Rather, he is a comic figure, a fighter who decides to join the battle only when it is nearly over, and who knocks himself out accidentally after slipping in a pool of blood. His inclusion in the battle sequence adds a blunt modernist reality that is not to be found in The Orkneyinga Saga. It also has the effect of mitigating the contrast between the unthinkingly aggressive Viking warriors and Magnus, who refuses to fight.

Mans and Hild, whilst ploughing, accidentally uncover 'the uncanny hollow darkness of a troll's house'(p.14). Carefully, they recover the hole and continue working. They possess a reverence for the pagan past and an understanding of the numinous that contrasts with the aristocratic desire to loot and burgle. Their sense of awe underscores the integrity of the folk beliefs of the ordinary people. The inclusion of the incident in the text also links the folk past to the present, adding a further dimension to the Orkney setting.

'Scarecrow', or the time of virtual civil war, is wholly concerned with the plight of the ordinary people during a period of unrest and domestic violence in Orkney. Brown himself is acutely aware of the effect of such terrible political upheaval on the lives of peasants such as Mans and Hild.

> The only golden age for the peasant and his family was a year when the corn came up thick and burnished for the sickles of peace. The peasant knew, more vividly than those in power, how precarious life is: the armed horseman rides through his green corn, he is likely to be dragged from his hearth if the island chief is short of an oarsman for his spring pirate-voyage.[36]

'Scarecrow' itself is blunt about the effects of a civil war, Glum being murdered when he fails to provide the horsemen with bacon. Women are forcibly rounded up to 'socialise' with the soldiers. Food is stolen and crops ruined. Starvation looms. It is fitting that Brown invests Earl Magnus with a similar concern for the common people, his men having orders that 'the cornfields are not to be trampled'(p.98). But it is inevitable that disorder prevails.

Mans is not a character in his own right. He is the voice of the common people, a voice which is missing from the surviving recorded history.[37] His doings complement those of the famous and powerful, described

in The Orkneyinga Saga. Hild, his wife, is endowed with the characteristics, which, in Brown's view, epitomise Viking woman. She is strong, loving, patient, honest and always protective. She and her kind will endure, whatever the odds.

'Harvest', the seventh and final section of Magnus, focuses on the characters Jock and Blind Mary, first introduced to the reader in An Orkney Tapestry, and already familiar Brown figures by the time of Magnus. They are vagrants, criminals, outcasts, and bringers of various intelligences, surviving somehow on the fringe of society. Mary, the 'dark foot', has no redeeming qualities. She is just 'an old blind sack of sins.'(p.198) She is ungrateful:

> -One small crab. The mean buggers. I got a hook in my hand.(p.184);

She lacks faith:

> Kirk! What are we going to a kirk for? There's nothing to eat in a kirk. O no, I'm going to no kirk. I can assure you of that. Kirk, indeed.(p.183);

She thieves:

> She bent toward the chicken noises. She spoke kindly. She coaxed. ... She struck. A twist of hands.(p.186);

and, abrasively, is unimpressed when she regains her sight:

> I'm supposed to be grateful, am I? Well, I'm not. Can I get the dark years back again? There's one place I do want to see though, more than any other place, and that's the Birsay ale-house.(p.206)

Jock's attitude, in contrast, is touching:

> -Beeswax. I'm trying to mind on a prayer. Light for light Magnus. Ask the Lord God to put a glimmer back in her skull.(p.197)

The Orkneyinga Saga tells us that Bergfinn Skati's son, after vigil at Magnus's tomb, was cured of his blindness, [38] and that this was only one of many miracles. There is no reference in the saga, however, to anyone remotely resembling Blind Mary. And in Magnus, hers is the only miracle cited.[39] She is a pitiful figure, a weak woman who has been stripped of all redeeming features. In choosing to tell her story, Brown has presented a Magnus of Christ-like stature, a true Christian martyr, whose love for humanity is all-embracing, and includes that for an embittered and ungrateful peasant.

* * * * *

There are strong parallels in many sections of Magnus to the action of The Orkneyinga Saga itself, but expanding on events recorded in the saga. Brown is aware that '*The Orkneyinga Saga* is a mine of understatement'[40] and that 'The sagaman can never be accused of sentimentality.'[41] Magnus describes various plausible events for the life of St Magnus which are not to be found in the saga, but which may well be true.[42]

'A Boy and a Seal'(pp.31-48) is the first of these. The setting is the Brough of Birsay. Brown has said more recently that he likes 'to think that Bishop William had his cathedral on the Brough'[43] and he has chosen this place to introduce the reader to Magnus. Significant character traits begin, tentatively, to emerge. Hakon's pride, and his belief that he is by birth superior to Magnus, is made manifest(p.47), echoing information given in The Orkneyinga Saga.[44] He is described as a 'rather small boy with a sensuous mouth and restless eyes'(p.32), presented, even in childhood, as being different. He will not go into the monastery with the others, as he is concerned about a wounded seal. His perceptions are, in some ways, very adult:

> I do not like my name. It means "great, powerful." I don't want to be great and

> powerful. The world is sick because of people wanting to be great and powerful(p.46).

Brown puts words of poetry in his mouth(p.48), emphasising his early gentleness and his concern for the weak.

Magnus's destiny as a Christian martyr has, in Magnus, been almost preordained by Brown.[45] Magnus, conceived on his parents' wedding night, is 'a particular chosen seed, a summoned one'(p.26). It is thus implicit in the text that Magnus has been chosen by God to demonstrate true Christianity in a nominally Christian world, but one still dominated by pagan values. The incident which, more than any others, invests Magnus with loving and pacifist qualities which fundamentally challenge the old ways, is retold by Brown in the section 'Song of Battle'.

'Song of Battle' tells the story, given in The Orkneyinga Saga, of Magnus at the Battle of Menai. Its essence is that Magnus will not fight as 'he had no quarrel with any man there'.[46] In this section, Brown's text understates events, as does the saga. Magnus's behaviour, in terms of Viking standard ethic, was shocking,[47] especially so, given his rank. It may be assumed that those around him would have felt great anger, contempt and even revulsion at it. Given that Magnus felt it necessary to escape his ship, this would seem to be the case.

Yet nothing of this is apparent in 'Song of Battle.' The saga itself downplays the idea of Magnus being either disloyal or a coward. Brown ignores it also, only going so far as to describe Magnus as a 'lonely figure'(p.60). Like the recorder of the saga, the novel's narrator is overtly Christian. Magnus is a saint and any hint of scepticism about him is not possible. 'Song of Battle' is a unique type of hagiographic writing - lyrical, poetic and uplifting, yet tempered by Mans s perspective on events, and so the more convincing. The battle is described in heroic terms, the 'ritualistic dialogue'(p.51) between the foes emphasising their (stock) feelings of joy and exhilaration. Magnus the reader feels, is also a part of this almost ritualistic heroic setting, but his actions in reading the psalter and refusing to fight, are, by association, 'heroic' of a different sort. The reported dialogue between the Welsh and Norse heralds supports this:

> *Who is the young man who has fought this battle for you with a psalter?*
>
> *He is Magnus, the son of Erlend, the son of Thorfinn ... great and mighty earls. Death is proud to have such heroes in his keeping.*(p.59)

'Song of Battle', then, is about 'the singing of Magnus Erlendson'(p.56) the Christian hero, contrasted with the brave words and deeds of those fighting men who

seek to be remembered in a song. Magnus is a symbol of personal calm and of a new spirituality in a society in transition between the old way and the new.

* * * * *

The next section, 'The Temptations', portrays this Magnus as a Christ-like figure, resisting the lures of evil.[48] It expands on the virtues of Magnus of the saga, especially on the fact of his celibacy.

> He (Magnus) consorted with her ten years in such wise that he fulfilled the lusts of neither of them and was pure and clean from all carnal sins And if he felt temptation coming over him he bathed in cold water and prayed for the intercession of God.[49]

The first two pages of 'The Temptations' echo the laudatory style of the Christian recorder of the original saga, Magnus being destined for greatness and for suffering. Brown gives him a guardian angel, who will help Magnus to 'weave well upon the loom of the spirit.'(p.67) He will also be tempted by its 'dark opposite', which will come to him in 'many subtle disguises.'(p.67) His path is predetermined, yet, as

Brown emphasises, he is caught on the horns of a terrible dilemma, between two worlds and two conflicting sets of values.[50] As the king's cup-bearer, he is expected 'to be a hero and a great warrior'(p.68). Magnus views the coming expedition as destructive, unjustifiable and sinful. Yet, caught on the horns of dilemma he must obey his king and, somehow, 'go in peace to the war.'(p.68)

The saga has very little to say about Magnus's wife[51], preferring to dwell on his priest-like celibacy. Brown names her as Ingerth from Shetland, which both acknowledges and underlines, subtly and aptly, the long and close historical association of St Magnus with the Shetland people.[52] Magnus's 'rage of fire', which burns 'fiercer than ever', is now 'diffused in a new feeling, a special regard for everyone who walks the earth'(p.72). His justification for celibacy is the same as a priest's, and in his condition he is pure, and so perceived as being closer to God. Brown does not leave it there, extending Magnus's transmuted passion 'beyond human beings to the animals, ...(and) even water and stone.'(p.72) Magnus is appreciative of and concerned about the environment, yet he is also pragmatic about the getting of food, understanding that 'cruelty is needful in the

world'(p.73). Brown has here invested Magnus with what are, arguably, twentieth century perceptions and concerns. The effect is to make the reader feel that the Magnus story is relevant, even today.

The saga is vague on the specific circumstances surrounding the death of Erlend, Magnus's father. Brown, however, depicts the event as one which causes Magnus great sorrow and which thrusts upon him responsibilities which will be a crushing burden. His assumption of power is joyless, he refuses to try on the coat-of-state, or to wait in Norway to see the king, since he wishes only to return home. It is clear that he will not misuse his new power.

'The Temptations' section ends with a three way dialogue, containing his greatest temptation. The 'Tempter' tries to persuade Magnus to relinquish his power and remove to Wynhallow monastery, and Magnus knows that there will be peace in Orkney if there is just one earl. Yet he does not hesitate or walk away from his destiny:

> 'God has made me an earl in this place. The harp is bleeding, I know it. My work is a work of peace . .'(p.79).

The Viking in him also thinks 'it is not right for a coward to wear the long bright holy coat.'(p.79) His guardian angel, the 'Keeper-of-the-Loom', chastises Magnus for leaving with his sword but he knows 'there

is no other way'(p.8)). New Testament overtones in this section are most noticeable in the concluding sentence:

> Far on, Magnus came to a place of burnt and broken stone, in the darkness of night, alone.(p.80)

Like Jesus in the desert, Magnus is a lonely figure, suffering the pain of mental torment, preparing for what inevitably will follow.

Brown's voice, it may be surmised, is synonymous with that expected from Bishop William. It is an educated, culturally reflective, dispassionate and yet Christian one. The Bishop's own (fictional) philosophical musings (pp.35-42 and 110-113) closely approximate to Brown's own in An Orkney Tapestry.[53] It is William who most constantly uses the 'coat' image, a recurring symbol in all Brown's writing. As he expounds in An Orkney Tapestry it has three kinds: the community coat which represents society; the coat-of-state of the earl (or earls); and the monks' 'long white weave of innocence'.[54] All are found in Magnus and they are there of symbolic significance.

The coat-of-state is symbolic of 'the unity and peace of the people'(p.112). When two men lay claim to the earldom, it is 'riven'(p.112) and war results. War, regrettably, is something that some enjoy, 'a black joy

abroad, a dance of the deadly sins, a withershin rout.'(p.112) It is evil, 'a consequence of Adam's fall; men who turn from the patterns originated by God always desire to return to nakedness and savagery.'(p.113) Here is Brown at his most moralistic and this voice is far removed from the laconic brevity of The Orkneyinga Saga. Magnus, like Christ and other Christian saints and martyrs, weaves, by his actions, a coat of holiness, 'the white fold of blessedness'(p.67), 'the immaculate garment'(p.68). The coat, however, also symbolises Christian society, and Mans's words best describe the devastating effect of civil war on the (Orkney) people.

> "Prem," I said, "we're one folk. We all hang together, we're all of a piece. Priest, ploughman, laird, tinker, earl, we're all woven together in a kind of coat. Now the coat's in tatters and Orkney's naked," I said. "That's what war means in the end - everyone trying to cover himself from the east wind with his own bit of rag."(pp.96-7)

But it is Bishop William, with his wisdom, foresight and intelligence, who uses the coat symbol most profoundly.

> 'Peace-making, said the bishop, 'is at best the patching of an old coat. To make true peace, the *pax Christi*, is to weave the seamless garment.'(p.119)

The 'seamless garment' is the robe of sainthood, which Magnus gains, ultimately, through martyrdom. It is also a Biblical image (John 19:22), a reference to the 'seamless' garment which Christ wore at the Crucifixion.

The Bishop's words contain the Christian justification for Magnus's death, William knowing that what 'is needed in Orkney is something more in the nature of a sacrifice, the true immaculate death of the dove.'(p.119) Thematically, this is the heart of Brown's Magnus. His sacrifice, like Christ's, changes the coat of the community, bringing peace from both war and pagan darkness. The text here is far removed from that of the sagaman, being more sophisticated, more deeply Christian and, even if unintentionally, being a twentieth century retelling and meaningful reassessment of events which happened long ago.

* * * * *

'The Killing'(pp.123-79), more than any other section of the text, helps to convince the reader that Magnus was, arguably, Brown's most impressive novel to that time.[55] In it occurs the climax of the Magnus

story, his murder. The reader expects it, so that the necessary suspense is built up in other ways: events are recorded from many different points of view and by using a wide variety of writing styles; the section is composed of many 'patchworks' of varying lengths; time shifts frequently occur; authorial intrusion is present; the pace of action varies; and the same event may be retold two or three times from different perspectives.

The text itself is dense, both examining and imaginatively recreating the events of the last day of Magnus's life. The section begins in Old Testament style. Its language is archaic, its tone one of foreboding, yet saga-like in its brevity. In less than a page it sketches events up to the cousins' arrival in Egilsay, and prophesises what is to come. This opening invests the Magnus story with Scriptural echoes, re-emphasises that the account has a Christian perspective, and it reinforces our concept of Magnus as Christ-like.

The next patchwork is multi-layered, retelling, in poetic detail, Magnus's journey to Egilsay, the main events of which are identical to those recorded in The Orkneyinga Saga.[56] The journey is peaceful, rythmic, gentle. The names which Brown has given to the two ships, *Flame* and *Rockspring*, evoke tranquillity, safety and spiritual power. Magnus dreams that he must go to a

wedding feast, but first he needs a new coat, and to get it he must pass through 'a terrible street ... a place of fires and burning.'(p.127)

This imagery refers to suffering, indeed the martyrdom which Magnus must endure before he reaches heaven and sainthood The ending of the dream coincides with *Flame* being almost swamped by a freak wave, an incident also recorded in the saga. It is an omen, a foretelling, like Magnus's dream, of what is to come, and Magnus recognises it as such, but knows, too, that he cannot avoid his fate, but must go to the 'wedding feast.'(p.129) In the words attributed to him in the saga:

> "Our voyage shall still go on, and may God's will be done therein."

The freak wave, as omen, corresponds to the pagan concept of fate. It is the central event of the journey as recorded in the saga. In Magnus, however, the dream, which explores the idea of fate in specifically Christian (Catholic) terms, predominates. Brown, using the The Orkneyinga Saga as his source, has rewritten the Magnus story in language much more moral and much more Christian.

The next 'patchwork'(pp.130-6) reports on events as if they were happening in modern time. There are interviews, and references to 'binoculars'(p.133) and 'guns'(p.134). The reader is able to view events from

the impact that they had on nine of the islanders and their families, a perspective that is lacking in The Orkneyinga Saga.

The next 'patch' of narrative(pp.136-147) is an amalgam of philosophy, theology, narrative and poetry with Magnus in a church on Egilsay on the last night of his life where an old priest is saying Mass. The gospel read is 'that parable in which Christ compares the celestial kingdom to a marriage feast'(p.137)[57] A man bidden to the feast, but without a wedding robe, is bound and thrown into outer darkness, because 'many are called, but few are chosen.'[58] The biblical significance of Magnus's dream is now fully revealed in that he has been bidden to the feast, but has little time now to prepare himself, or to obtain his robe.

Brown meditates on the Mass and it becomes apparent that he is speaking directly to the reader as he sets down his basic beliefs about religion, history and human society. 'The Mass was not an event that takes place in ordinary time'(p.139). It is in time and out of time and 'time's purest essence'(p.139). History repeats itself but never in exactly the same way(p.139). There are 'constants in human nature, and constants in the human situation'(p.140) and men in similar circumstances will behave in a similar fashion. The tone is philosophical, and timeless agricultural man is lauded, Brown here unequivocally recording the

ideas and beliefs which are, thematically, the quintessence of his writing.[59]

The text briefly returns to the narrative(p.141), reminding the reader of Magnus's (perpetual?) presence, and linking him to the holy ritual of the Mass. Magnus is dreaming, his tortuous nightmare of being excluded from the wedding feast, being told with images(p.142-3) horrible and horrifying: 'sickening slaughter-house stench', snouts of swine'; lascivious sighs', kissings and slobberings and lewd whispers ... sniggers, pleadings, bitings.' They are images of evil, of hell, evocative of the demonology of medieval pre-Reformation Christianity, a re-affirmation of the power and ontological existence of evil, and the atmosphere which they create sets the scene for the coming murder: 'He would not leave this island alive.'(pp.144-5)

The scene then moves from the church and the slow beauty of the Mass to the dark night outside, where negotiations are taking place. Finn Thorkelson and Hold Ragnarson, Magnus's men, are bargaining for his life, and the narrative describes events from their point of view(pp.147-63). In The Orkneyinga Saga Magnus and Hakon negotiate face to face,[60] but Brown avoids this, preferring to portray Magnus as silent, fully aware, and resigned to his fate. However, the text does reflect the main events as recorded in the saga - Magnus, with two boatloads of men compared to Hakon's

eight, being completely in his cousin's power. Hakon was motivated by political considerations, and, in general, his action was publicly supported. Neither the Magnus text nor the saga condemn Hakon, both giving a balanced view of his character, motives and strengths.

Another patchwork follows(pp.164-70): a serene, scholarly, anthropological journey through time; a musing on sacrifice and religion. Its central premise seems to be that sacrifice is necessary to human existence. Authorial intrusion is present, and reference to twelfth century time and Magnus, Hakon and Lifolf, links these pages to the climax which immediately follows.

> I have spoken of sacrifice as it might have been celebrated at Brodgar in Orkney, ... four thousand years before the time of Magnus and Hakon and Lifolf.(p.166)

Slowly and gently, Brown journeys through both Orkney and Biblical time, examining and describing the evolution and development of sacrifice and religious beliefs. Animals and humans were sacrificed to primitive gods, but then a wonderful thing happened, such as was recorded in the Old Testament:[61]

> We know the name of the first priest who offered bread and wine on the altar instead of a slain beast: Melchisedec the Israelite. This was a thrilling moment in the spiritual history of mankind.(p.168)

This was eventually followed by Christ's sacrifice.

> That was the one only central sacrifice of history. *I am the bread of life.* All previous rituals had been a fore-shadowing of this; all subsequent rituals a re-enactment.(p.169)

So, at last, Brown reveals the essence of Magnus - that Magnus's death is a re-enactment of Christ's, as are the deaths of all martyrs since the Crucifixion. Christ-like, Magnus's life and death were pre-ordained. His sacrifice is meaningful, was then and is now. Its impact is timeless, for it, like Christ's death, transcends time.[62]

The last two paragraphs(p.170) move to present time.

> At certain times and in certain circumstances men still crave spectacular sacrifice. ... They root about everywhere for a victim and a scapegoat to stand between the tribe and the anger of inexorable Fate.
> So Magnus Erlendson, when he came up from the shore that Easter Monday, toward noon, to the stone in the centre of the island, saw against the sun eleven men and a boy and a man with an axe in his hand who was weeping.(p.170)

These paragraphs are set in saga-time. A single asterisk follows and the reader is transported to the twentieth century, the events describing the death of another martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in such a way that they parallel and reinforce the meaning of the twelfth century martyrdom of St Magnus.

* * * * *

The 'Bonhoeffer' story(pp.170-9), although only brief, forms one of three main sections of the Magnus text.[63] It concludes 'The Killing' and in it is the climax of the novel. It is, therefore, structurally crucial. It must work or Magnus will be flawed beyond redemption.[64] It does succeed, brilliantly, making the point that Christianity has to be practised in the real world, and that this may involve great sacrifice.

The story is in a plain narrative prose, in the first person, by a chef who is also a butcher, who is working in a concentration camp somewhere in German occupied Europe. It is April, 1943. It is evident that he is an ordinary person, unassuming, trying to do his best as a cook despite difficult circumstances, and content to ignore 'things that were no concern of mine'(p.172). He appreciated the fact that he lived in a hut outside the compound, where he could forget the camp's horrors and pretend that life was normal. He is representative of the 'little' person caught up in time of war, powerless, intent on surviving, accepting authority, self-effacing.

Unexpectedly, he is called to the commandant's office. He is addressed as Herr Lifolf. Lifolf, Hakon's

cook, 'the best cook in Orkney, maybe in all Scandinavia'(p.157), has already been introduced to the reader in 'The Killing'. He, too(p.160), fed two paupers (Jock and Mary) much as the German Lifolf did the gipsies at his hut(p.173). He, too, was a butcher and was unexpectedly summoned by his master(p.164). The parallels are obvious. The two men and the situation they face is the same, only the time and place are different.

The Orkneyinga Saga names Lifolf as Magnus's executioner.

> Hakon bade Ofeig his standard-bearer kill the Earl, but he refused very indignantly. Then he compelled Lifolf his cook to kill Magnus, but he began to sob aloud.[65]

The modern Herr Lifolf is also extremely reluctant to kill, describing himself as 'a man of peace'(p.177), but, like Lifolf in the saga, he obeys orders, feeling he has no choice: 'One does not dispute with one's superiors inside the barbed wire.'(p.175)

The prisoner Herr Lifolf is ordered to execute is not named. The reader knows that he is a political prisoner, a traitor, and according to the major, 'an animal'(p.176). Lifolf recognises him as 'the Lutheran pastor whose books were burned at the start of the war'(p.178). It is evident to us that he is Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor, philosopher and writer, and active anti-Nazi, who was arrested by the Gestapo,

imprisoned, and later executed at Flossenburg concentration camp early on the Easter morning of 9th April 1943.

Why did Brown decide to substitute Bonhoeffer's death for Magnus's? And why did he choose Bonhoeffer? One can only speculate of course, but some reasonable deduction may be made. Brown sees Christ's death as the 'one only central sacrifice of history'(p.169), and all subsequent martrydoms, such as Magnus's and Bonhoeffer's, as a re-enactment of Christ's. He also believes that 'history both repeats itself and does not repeat itself'(p.139), 'and that men in similar circumstances (like Magnus and Bonhoeffer) will behave roughly in the same fashion'(p.140). Bonhoeffer, really, is Magnus. His death, in our time, gives meaning to that which occured in Orkney centuries ago, and it enables the reader to view Magnus's death from a perspective which is interesting, relevant and deeply thought-provoking.[66]

Brown recognises that Magnus and Bonhoeffer have so much in common, despite the fact that one lived in the twelfth century and one in the twentieth - both being Christians living in non-Christian societies, caught in a dilemma, having to choose between faith and patriotism. Bonhoeffer, in America, one month into a two year contract, knew it was his Christian duty to return to Germany, even if it meant death. He wrote:

> Christians in Germany will face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilisation may survive, or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying our civilisation. I know which of these alternatives I must choose.[67]

Magnus, too, put faith before patriotism when he refused to fight at the bloody Battle of Menai. Like Bonhoeffer, he was torn between his duty as a ruler and his love for Orkney and its people, and his own safety. Exiled from Orkney while King Magnus was alive, he was compelled later to return, despite the terrible dangers.

Both martyrs were killed in April, in the season of Easter and both faced death calmly.

> He closed the prayer book. He kissed it. He smiled.(p.178)

or the saga's

> After that he (Magnus) crossed himself, and bowed himself to the stroke[68]

Bonhoeffer's theory of conformation[69] in essence means:

> Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within'[70]

The Orkneyinga Saga contains much solid evidence that Magnus was a social non-conformist, but Brown develops the Christian nature of his character much further, depicting him as one who had a 'mind formed after the mind of Christ'.[71] Bonhoeffer, of course, was a

Lutheran, but also religious figure.[72] Brown lessens the impact of his actual Protestanism by presenting him as a kind of medieval (Catholic) Christian of great saintliness, accepting his fate placidly.

Bonhoeffer wrote:

> I have long had a special affection for the season between Easter and Ascension Day.[73]

Christ, Magnus and Bonhoeffer were all martyred at Easter time, and it may be supposed that Brown, also, had a special feeling for Easter time.

The 'Bonhoeffer story' in Magnus informs the reader of the Christian meaning of Bonhoeffer's life. It examines hauntingly what it means to be a Christian in our time. It is also an analogue to the life of Magnus and sheds light on him in modern terms. People like Magnus and Bonhoeffer help us to understand somewhat, through inadequate comparison, what Christ did for us. Both saw the true meaning of being Christian, were conscientious objectors to war, and thinking Christians who acted in accordance with their faith. Magnus lived and died a pacifist Christian, the long-term effect of whose witness was to promote the acceptance of true Christianity in Northern Scotland, and especially in the Orkneys and in Shetland. Bonhoeffer believed that in Nazi Germany the 'great dying of Christianity was at hand'[74] and his fight against this resulted in his own ultimate sacrifice.

The ethos of Nazism strongly reflected that of the pre-Christian Vikings. Both societies were fired by a conquest ethos and the triumph of the strong, pity and mercy having no relevance. The Nazi era proved that brutality and Christianity still co-exist. Magnus, especially in the 'Bonhoeffer' section, may be viewed as a dynamic study of good and evil. The twentieth century setting is intended to impact powerfully on the reader, to drive home the idea that evil incarnate is a powerful force in the present world. The inferences in Magnus about evil may go further than this. Perhaps great evil is sometimes necessary as a corrective[75], an unmistakable indication that Christianity is essential to the survival of goodness in our time. Magnus and Bonhoeffer, by their actions, help us to understand what it means to be truly Christian when challenged by authoritarian evil.

* * * * *

Magnus is also about what makes a saint in the eyes of the ordinary people. It is implicit in the text that Magnus is to be regarded as nothing less than a Christian martyr, a saint, an individual who brought

true faith to northern Scotland, a man in full communion with God. Magnus is, therefore, hagiographic in its nature, as are the earliest sources telling the story of his martyrdom. There are three such sources.[76] They all derive from a Latin *Vita*, composed by a Master Robert, a text lost centuries ago. The sources are similar in content, their intention being to record Magnus's value as a saint and to demonstrate the sanctity of his life.

Brown, in his examination of the most famous of Orkney's tragedies, attempts to uncover the qualities which make Magnus a holy man. In medieval time, the saint stood at the apex of Christian society, even higher than King (or Norse Earl). Veneration of saints developed in local communities, being based on visits to the saint's tomb, and it occured because people believed that the saint was in heaven and was able to intercede with God on behalf of those who prayed to him/her. In early times a saint became so because of popular acclaim. By Magnus's time the approval of the local bishop was also needed for such status. The body was then moved to a place of veneration, where it was especially honoured on the anniversary of the saint's death. Miracles were viewed as proof of sanctity and relics of the saint[77] were regarded as instruments of divine power, and, as they spread, so did the cult of the saint. All the sources concerning the story of St

Magnus suggest that his elevation to sainthood followed the pattern here outlined.[78]

Our Magnus retells the story but gives it greater depth, concentrating on the man and his struggle to be truly Christian, rather than on the miracles which followed his death. Magnus's sainthood is made to seem pre-ordained but he has to suffer and fight to maintain his own faith. His Christianity did not come easily. He stands for a believer's necessary death and a Christian's acceptance of it. It is implicit in the text that he is a martyr, although nowhere is this explicitly stated. Theologically, Magnus's status as a martyr is questionable, as he was, by all accounts, murdered for political rather than religious reasons.[79] Yet it is commonly accepted that he died for his faith.[80]

Brown sketches for us a Magnus who is passive and gentle, and who has, from childhood, rejected Viking ways[81] .In Magnus, the writer is not concerned with exploring the character of a saint but in examining why (modern) society needs martyrs. What meaning does the existence of St Magnus have for Orkney, and the West, today? Brown believes that we still need martyrs and saints, and attempts in Magnus, to explain why this should be so. It may be that his view is too obviously Catholic to convince a wide readership,[82] but it can also be argued that Brown is successful in portraying

Magnus as a kind of folk hero, a deeply moral man, revered by the common people.

What makes a saint in the eyes of ordinary people? Brown invests Magnus with this quality, but it is difficult to isolate exactly what it is.[83] Magnus is with associated with things Scottish. According to Scottish myth, Magnus 'is said to have appeared to Robert Bruce on the eve of the battle of Bannockburn (1314) and promised him victory.'[84] Magnus also, by his death, replaced evil with good, furthering the cause of Christianity in northern Scotland.

The life of Magnus, although belonging to the past, is seen to have considerable meaning in the present. Ordinary people feel comfortable about asking him for help, and confident about receiving it. Magnus though, despite all Brown's efforts, remains an aristocratic and ascetic figure. But Brown humanises him, linking him to the concerns and sufferings of ordinary Orcadians. Nowhere is this done more deftly than the description of his first miracle, the story of how Magnus, in communion with God, restores the sight of Blind Mary, thief, vagrant and non-believer.[85]

Magnus is also a kind of folk hero. Brown draws on two traditions for his material, the oral and the written and he uses his imagination to recreate the

first, the popular stories of the people.[86] . Brown has also presented the story of a man caught between two worlds, vacillating between Earl and saint, warrior and pacifist, a man confused and torn, despite the fact - seemingly known to him - that his destiny is pre-determined. Finally, Magnus chooses right over wrong, an action which is invested with deep spiritual meaning. Such a man is an example in any age, but especially so in ours. According to Brown, contemporary European culture, like that of the twelfth century Viking world, is Christian only on the surface. We, like the ordinary people of Magnus' time, can still recognise and value the goodness and selflessness of true Christian saints.

Magnus makes this impact possible. Without it, St Magnus would probably be unknown outside Scotland. His story, retold by Brown, humanises him, presenting him as deeply concerned about the welfare of his own day's most ordinary people. It is Magnus's humanity, as much as his sacrifice, which makes him a saint, and that message is the core of Brown's finest prose piece.

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Footnotes for Chapter 2: *Magnus*

1. G.M. Brown, Under Brinkie's Brae, Edinburgh, 1979, p.59.

2. G.M. Brown, Letters From Hamnavoe, Edinburgh, 1975, p.19.

3. ibid. Brown says there are lots of stories in the saga which he never gets tired of reading. He mentions 'the confrontation of the two Sweyns, that violent, death-laden Christmas in the Hall of Orphir; the tragic killing of Earl Rognvald the First in the seaweed of Papa Stronsay' and indicates that this list is very incomplete.

4. G.M. Brown, Portrait of Orkney, London, 1981, p.10.

5. ibid.

6. G.M. Brown, Under Brinkie's Brae, Edinburgh, 1979, p.59.

7. ibid., p.107.

8. G.M. Brown, Letters From Hamnavoe, Edinburgh, 1975, p.86.

9. In a personal letter to me from the author dated 23.4.94.

10. The New Imperial Reference Dictionary, London, 1952, p.1220. *Vade mecum* is Latin for 'go with me'.

11. The Palsson and Edwards edition, 1978. 'For George Mackay Brown. (May) he who wrote this record, he who has told it, and all who listen to it enjoy from that holy knight of God, Earl Magnus, blessings and answer to their prayers for theremission of their sins and for everlasting joy.' *Orkneyinga Saga* chapter 57.

12. G.M. Brown, Letters From Hamnavoe Edinburgh, 1975, p.87.

13. The 1873 Edinburgh edition was translated by J.A. Hjaltalin and G. Goudie and edited with an introduction by J. Anderson.

14. W Dasent, The Orkneyingers' Saga, London, 1894.

15. G.M. Brown, Under Brinkie's Brae, Edinburgh, 1979, p.59. Brown was one of the students thus affected. See Rockpools and Daffodils, p.47.

16. Brown, as described in Under Brinkie's Brae, p.59, had, on 28.4.77, just received a proof copy of the Palsson and Edward edition.

17. G.M. Brown, Under Brinkie's Brae, Edinburgh, p.59.

18. G.M. Brown, An Orkney Tapestry, London, 1973, p.2.

19. H. Palsson and P. Edwards, Orkneyinga Saga, London, 1978, p.20.

20. G.M. Brown, An Orkney Tapestry, London, 1973, p.2.

21. ibid., p.3. Brown 'translates' a poem from the saga into modern poetry, lightening it and starkening the images.

22. See J. Storer Clouston, A History of Orkney, Kirkwall, 1932, for an excellent assessment of the historical evidence concerning Earl Magnus.

23. In fact, it could be argued it is one of his obsessions. J. D'Arcy, 'George Mackay Brown and Orkneyinga Saga', in A. Wawn (ed.), Northern Antiquity. The Post-Medieval Reception of Edda and Saga, Middlesex, 1994, p. 309, points out that the Magnus story inspired Brown all his creative life, that references to it can be found throughout his poems, plays and stories, and that in one five year period alone Brown produced three important renderings of it: the 'Martyr' section of An Orkney Tapestry; The Loom of Light; and Magnus.

24. See especially An Orkney Tapestry, pp.71-87.

25. G.M. Brown, An Orkney Tapestry, London, 1973, p.72.

26. ibid.

27. ibid.

28. ibid. The emphasis is mine.

29. In a letter to me dated 23.4.94.

30. G.M. Brown, An Orkney Tapestry, London, 1973, p.84.

31. ibid., p.85.

32. ibid., p.74.

33. ibid., p.86.

34. A. Bold, George Mackay Brown, Edinburgh, 1978, pp. 101-2 and p.109, perceptively views Mans as 'the peasant representative of common humanity in the novel'(p.101). 'Mans is timeless, he is downtrodden man'(p.102) and one of the few characters (along with Jock and Mary) to be given a solid fictional identity(p.109).

35. G.M. Brown, Magnus, London, 1977, p. 51. Subsequent references to the Magnus text will be given by the page number(s) in brackets ( ) after the quotation.

36. G.M. Brown, Portrait of Orkney, London, 1971, p.91.

37. J. D'Arcy, Scottish Skalds and Sagamen, 1996, p. 250, comments on the many stories of Brown's in which the heroes or personas are "the ordinary 'man-in-the-longship', the cannon-fodder, so to speak, of Viking history'. Mans is not a main character in Magnus, of course, but his inclusion provides further evidence of Brown's interest in presenting some events from his point of view.

38. A.B. Taylor, The Orkneyinga Saga, Edinburgh, 1938, p.219.

39. E. Huberman, 'George Mackay Brown's *Magnus*,' in Studies in Scottish Literature, Volume 16, 1981, p.133, sees this miracle as symbolic of the restoration of spiritual sight, and of the 'renewal of all Orkney after Magnus's sacrifice.'

40. G.M. Brown, Rockpools and Daffodils, Edinburgh, 1992, p.41.

41. ibid., p.38.

42. See J. Mooney, St Magnus - Earl of Orkney, Kirkwall, 1935, for discussion on the boyhood of Magnus. The Longer Magnus Saga states that Magnus went to school on Orkney (Mooney, p.36) but does not say where although Birsay is a distinct possibility (Mooney, pp. 37-42). J. D'Arcy, 'George Mackay Brown and Orkneyinga Saga', op. cit., comments on Brown's 'unobtrusive manipulation of Old Norse history'(p.312), and cites three specific incidents in Magnus (pp.313-4) which diverge from those of *Orkneyinga Saga* and which show, in D'Arcy's opinion, that Brown was 'determined to play down the fallible and human aspects of Magnus and to emphasise his saintliness'(p.314). He goes on to say that while Brown was 'justified in presenting his vision of St Magnus in whatever form he feels most effective ... the result may be a (reader's) greater wariness and scepticism toward Mackay Brown's intentions, especially if these seem overly didactic. In this sense Mackay Brown's manipulation of the saga could defeat his own ends'(p.315). This conclusion would appear to conflict with an earlier comment: What makes Mackay Brown's use of this source (Orkneyinga Saga) interesting and worthy of detailed study is the fact that he does not simply ransack it to re-tell various incidents from Orkney history - he attempts to re-interpret and, in some cases, even reformulate the saga'(p.306). In my opinion, the moot point would appear to be not how Brown chose to portray Magnus, but whether he was successful or not in doing so. D'Arcy, while, quite rightly, expressing some reservations on this matter, concludes favourably to Brown, describing Magnus as 'a powerful and intriguing fictional experience. This is particularly notable in that a reader with no particular knowledge of Roman Catholicism or *Orkneyinga Saga* can nonetheless engage deeply with the novel'(p.315).

43. G.M. Brown, Rockpools and Daffodils, Edirburgh, 1992, p.27.

44. Taylor, op. cit., p.199.

45. A. Bold, op. cit., views Brown's portrayal of Magnus as a weakness in the novel, and that depriving Magnus of a free will is 'hard to swallow for the non-Catholic reader'(p.104).

46. ibid., p.199.

47. A. Bold (op. cit., p.103) sees this incident as the 'first real example of Magnus's singularity'(p.103) in Brown's novel.

48. J. D'Arcy, 'George Mackay Brown and Orkneyinga Saga', op. cit., points out that 'The Temptations' 'is a completely new and ambitious addition to the story'(p.311) as the reader is introduced here to Magnus's guardian angel.

49. ibid., p.205.

50. E. Huberman, op. cit., sees Magnus's ambiguity as especially significant in Magnus, as she believes that Brown was able to focus very convincingly on the dilemma of the Earl, and 'emphasized and developed that very trait in the man that gave the Saga-teller most trouble: his ambiguity, his vacillations between his two roles of Saint and Earl'(p.124).

51. See J. Mooney, St Magnus - Earl of Orkney, Ch VII, for discussion about her possible identity.

52. See B.E. Crawford (ed.), 'The Cult of St Magnus in Shetland', in Essays in Shetland History, Lerwick, 1984.

53. G.M. Brown, An Orkney Tapestry, London, 1973, pp. 76-7.

54. ibid., p.77.

55. In a letter to me dated 23.4.94, Brown said 'I think my novel Magnus contains my best work, and my Selected Poems, (1954-83).'

56. Taylor, op. cit., p.207.

57. St. Matthew, XXII, 1-15.

58. St. Matthew, XXII, 14.

59. A. Bold, op. cit., p.101, views the long sections of philosopical/theological discourse, of which this is an example, as a negative in the novel, as it has the effect of removing dramatic tension and because non-Catholic readers may not be able to understand it.

60. Taylor, op. cit., pp.209-10.

61. Genesis, XIV, 18-20.

62. E. Huberman, op. cit., concurs, seeing the Martyrdom as 'an instance of an eternally recurring, eternally necessary, sacrificial rite'(p.123) for the ordinary people. A. Bold, op. cit., sees a danger of too much Catholic dogma in 'The Killing', but recognises that Brown wished to make the reader 'consider it (Magnus's death) analytically, as an event of timeless significance'(p.106), and so therefore Christ-like.

63. As E. Huberman, op. cit., (p.131) points out, the name Dietrich Bonhoeffer is never given in Magnus, yet it is very reasonable to infer that Brown is referring to him, as he is a Lutheron pastor, because Lifolf remembers reading about him in the newspapers, of his books being burned and of his voice being silenced, presumably in prison.

64. Not all critics view the 'Bonhoeffer' section as being justified. A. Bold, op. cit., p.108, feels that the parallel which Brown attempts to draw between Magnus and Bonhoeffer is slight, giving his main reason as Magnus passively accepting his fate, whereas Bonhoeffer was an active opponent of Nazism. The anonymous reviewer, in 'Et in Orcadia', Times Literary Supplement, 1973, views this section as one of two which 'sit uneasily among the rest.' J. D'Arcy, 'George Mackay Brown and Orkneyinga Saga', op. cit., thinks this section, while it 'may disturb the unity of the novel for some readers'(p.312), is, on the whole, 'imaginative and daring, and at the very least displays a measure of stylistic virtuosity'(p.312).

65. Taylor, op. cit., p.210.

66. E. Huberman, op. cit., p.132, concurs that this section transforms Magnus into a novel of contemporary events. J. D'Arcy, 'George Mackay Brown and Orkneyinga Saga', op. cit., p.311, also sees Brown's use of Brechtian Verfremdungseffekte in the 'Bonhoeffer' section as intending to show us that martyrdom is still relevant in the twentieth century.

67. A Dumas, Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologian of Reality, New York, 1968, p.63. This is a quotation from a letter Bonhoeffer sent to Reinhold Niebuhr in 1939, explaining why he had decided, after only one month of a two year contract, to return from America to Germany and its terrible dangers.

68. Taylor, op. cit., p.211.

69. See D. Bonhoeffer, No Rusty Swords, Vol 1, London, 1965. This collection of 'Letters, Lectures and Notes From the Collected Works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer' is edited by E. Robinson.

70. ibid., p. 12. E.H. Robinson edited and introduced the reader to this volume of Bonhoeffer's collected letters, lectures and notes. The quotation is Robinson's.

71. ibid., p.14

72. Brown chose Bonhoeffer to be a modern Magnus as they shared the same Christian spirit. Although staunchly Catholic, Brown is tolerant of those Christians who are not. For example, he was a friend and admirer of Robert Rendall, a Plymouth Brother and strict Calvinist (see An Orkney Tapestry pp.179-88), even though they differed radically in their religious views.

73. A Dumas, op. cit., p.284. This quotation is from a letter written by Bonhoeffer on 11th April and published originally in 'Letters and Papers From Prison', SCM Press, London, and Macmillan, New York, and translated by R. Fuller, revised by Frank Clarke.

74. ibid., p.282.

75. See U. Simon, A Theology of Auschwitz, London, 1967, which puts forward this argument.

76. See H. Palsson and P. Edwards (translators and with introduction by), Magnus' Saga, Oxford, 1987, p.45. Also J. Mooney, St Magnus: Earl of Orkney, Kirkwall, 1935, pp11-15. The three sources are The Orkneyinga Saga, Magnus' Saga I (The Shorter Saga), and Magnus' Saga II (The Longer Saga).

77. Relics were of two kinds. Primary relics were bones of the saint and secondary were objects used, such as clothing, beads etc. See D. Farmer, The Oxford Dictionary of Saints, Third Edition, Melbourne, 1992, for more information on the making of a saint.

78. There were political reasons for Magnus' nephew promoting the cause of his uncle's sainthood: see J. Storer Clouston, A History of Orkney, Kirkwall, 1932, Chapter VII. Bishop William was for a long time reluctant to give in to popular opinion, but in Magnus' case the pattern held.

79. Martyr, according to the New Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume IX, Washington D.C., 1967, p.312, is 'one who voluntarily suffers death for his beliefs'. The Reader's Digest Great Illustrated Dictionary, Volume II, Sydney, 1984, p.1043, gives the term a wider meaning: 'One who suffers death through refusing to renounce religious or political principles.' Thus Magnus may be seen to be a martyr according to its more modern, secular meaning.

80. In D. Farmer, op. cit., p.313, Magnus is described as 'martyr'.

81. This is different to information given in The Longer Magnus Saga (from W. Metcalfe (trans.), Ancient Lives of Scottish Saints, (no place of publication), 1895, p. 332: 'when Magnus had almost reached the fullness of his growth ... he seemed, for some winters, to be like wicked men, and as a viking with robbers or soldiers, he lived by rapine and spoil, and stood by with others at murders ..'

82. See A. Bold, George Mackay Brown, Edinburgh, 1978, pp.99-100.

83. As Brown has drawn attention to the Magnus story, so the media and the Catholic Church are currently engaged in publicising that of Mary McKillop, set to become Australia's first saint. Like Magnus, McKillop functions as a role model for ordinary people. See Sister Mary Cresp, 'A 'Saint' For Australia', in Australian Folklore, No 9, July 1994, p.117. See also A. Loxley, 'The Slow Road To Sainthood', in Good Weekend, The Sydney Morning Herald Magazine, pp.34-44. Cresp explains why Mary McKillop's support has come from ordinary Australians. Mary, she says, 'has become a permanent but living part of Australia's story.'(p.117) The figure of Mary 'goes beyond the historical context to become a living part of that history, touching into our nation's mythology.'(p.118) Mary is a role model who 'models those values that are enshrined in the myth of what it means to be Australian.'(p.118) Mary was a quiet achiever, suspending judgement of others, and replacing evil with good. She was a doer, not a talker, practical and homely. She became associated with outback Australia, the founder of the 'Brown Joeys', connected with the landscape.

84. D. Farmer, op. cit., p.313.

85. Fray Leopoldo is another saint, who, like Magnus and Mary McKillop, was popular with ordinary (Spanish) people. See C. Slater, City Steeple, City Streets, 'Saints' Tales from Granada and a Changing Spain', Berkeley, 1990. Fray Leopoldo was a Capuchin friar (1864-1956) in Granada, who was 'probably the most popular non-consecrated saint today in all Spain'(p.1). Slater gathered stories about him and studied official accounts of his life and work. The stories about him were oral, popular and included the secular point of view, often differing considerably from the official, written and sacred Church version. She found that there were 'major pitfalls inherent in any scholarly attempt'(p.7) to separate the two. Her study also concluded that while most people believed that Leopoldo was a saint, they did not necessarily support his promotion by the Church, or believe all that the Church said about him.

86. It is popular opinion that makes a saint possible and it is the special meaning that Mary McKillop, Fray Leopoldo and Magnus have for the common people of Australia, Spain and Scotland that invests them with sainthliness. Leopoldo and Mary are folk canonisations who have literary parallels with Magnus.