'Of course, it didn't work—that kind of scheme never does': Scotland, the Nordic Imaginary, and the Mid-Twentieth-Century Thriller

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Abstract

In the course of the last two decades, nationalist politics in Scotland have pivoted away from positing a civic identity founded on traditionally Celtic motifs—clans, tartan, the Gaelic language—in order to instead imagine an independent country closely resembling its Nordic near-neighbours in economic and cultural terms. Eulogising the Nordic welfare model, some secessionists have even suggested that a post-UK Scotland could join the Nordic Council. This article seeks to contextualise conceptualisations of Scottishness which lean on the 'Nordic' by examining representations of Northern Europe, and Scotland's place within it, in two mid-twentieth-century Scottish thriller novels, John Buchan's *The Island of Sheep* (1936) and Eric Linklater's *The Dark of Summer* (1956). Respectively a unionist and a nationalist, Buchan and Linklater find opportunities in their work to explore both continuities and discontinuities between Scotland and the Nordic countries, and both demonstrate—with varying degrees of criticality—the extent to which a putative 'Nordic Scottishness' slips too easily into an exclusionary cultural logic. Drawing on geocriticism, this article will problematise efforts to re-found Scottish nationalism on the basis of a Nordicised cultural identity.

Keywords: Scotland; Scottish identity; geocriticism; John Buchan; Eric Linklater; Faroe Islands

In November 2013, Scotland's devolved government, led then as now by the pro-independence Scottish National Party, published a document of almost 700 pages in length entitled *Scotland's Future* in anticipation of the following year's referendum on whether the United Kingdom's second-largest constituent nation should vacate the Union. The referendum produced a close result, but not the one desired by nationalists and called for in *Scotland's Future*. Nevertheless, the subsequent political upheaval provoked by Brexit has resulted in the issue remaining a live one, with many Scots convinced that a second—in this line of thought, triumphant—referendum is a matter of 'when,' rather than of 'if.'

Scotland's Future is a bracingly optimistic document in general, but one particular strand of its secessionist positivity demands attention in any attempt to understand why the independence movement of the early twenty-first century differs from its earlier iterations and why its political heft is arguably greater. This frequently prominent aspect is its direct petition to political and economic commonality with the Nordic countries, particularly (though not only) Norway and Denmark, its geographic near-neighbours, Sweden, and Finland. Enmeshed in this primarily economistic appeal is a sense that Scotland does not merely share a Nordic tendency towards social-democratic consensus which separates it from its inveterately *laissez-faire* southern partner in the Union, it also has more in common *culturally* with the Scandinavian nations, Finland and Iceland than it does with England.

This cultural Nordicisation of Scotland is perhaps less immediately striking than the overt nationalist commitment to Scandonomics, not least because it may fade into a broader tendency to fetishise 'the Nordics' recently on display across the richer parts of the Anglosphere. Whether in the form of the maladroit repurposing of ambient social ethics such as Danish *hygge* or Swedish *lagom* as reified lifestyle concepts for the middle classes, or the ongoing popularity of 'Scandi-noir' detective series, cold-country culture has had a hot decade. Yet Scotland's participation in this revival seems charged by an impulse more deep-seated than mere modishness: it speaks of a desire to refigure the nation as geographically and geopolitically 'Nordic,' and in so doing furnish the ideological means for authentic sovereignty. Citing the bestselling Edinburgh-based *noir* novelist Ian Rankin's claim that 'the Scottish sensibility, psychology, psyche is very close to Scandinavia' (2012), Michael Stachura argues that a recent literary interest in Scotland's northern, often insular, peripheries—especially the island groups of the Hebrides, the Orkneys and the Shetlands—is paradoxically representative of a cosmopolitanism which might 'broaden Scotland's imagination northwards into transnational contact with its Scandinavian neighbours and beyond' (2013: 120). Such cosmopolitanism might be regarded as a postmodern form of nationalism by which the integrity of a putative nation state is guaranteed by its shared commitment to outwardness, but it is also important to note the address of this outwardness is in this case extended only to a geocultural region which is perceived as being 'similar' to Scotland in significant ways.

This article seeks to trouble the assumptions which operate within visions of a 'Nordic' Scotland by turning to slightly historically remoter literary efforts to think Scottishness via Scandinavia and its adjacent territories. Looking at two (broadly defined) thrillers by mid-twentieth-century Scottish authors, *The Island of Sheep* (1936) by John Buchan and *The Dark of Summer* (1956) by Eric Linklater, it will consider how both texts seem simultaneously to nominate Scotland as a member of an expanded definition of the Nordic while also problematizing such a move. These works' imaginative delineation of the tensions involved in any Nordic re-compassing of Scotland are here read as pre-emptive warnings against nationalism's Scandinavian turn.

Going "into the north": Scotland Beyond the Antisyzygy?
The Nordic turn must be seen in light of how the question of Scottish national identity has been framed historically, a matter which requires some exposition. Scottish literary and cultural studies will very likely be forever dogged by the matter of the so-called Caledonian Antisyzygy, an idea which has gone on to simultaneously inform and frustrate many attempts to critically consider what 'Scottish identity' is, was, will, or can be. The concept was first named by G. Gregory Smith in his 1919 work *Scottish Literature, Character and Influence*, as part of a speculative solution to allegations of a spoiling incoherence in Scottish writing. Smith notes that there is a pull in Scottish poetry and fiction between a commitment to the cumulative, often sober, social detailing of realism and "another mood […] the airier pleasure to be found in the confusion of the senses, in the fun of things thrown topsyturvy, in the horns of elfland and the voices of the mountains" (1919: 19). This telescoping between the notational and the fanciful, Smith asserts, is expressive of entrenched, unresolved contradictions within Scottishness which "the Scot shows at every turn, in his political and ecclesiastical history, in his polemical restlessness, in his adaptability" (1919: 4).

Though the work it is drawn from is a paradigm of isolationist scholarly charm, Smith's coinage was requisitioned and charged with political meaning by the nationalist, modernist, Marxist poet Hugh MacDiarmid in his essay of 1931-32 'The Caledonian Antisyzgy and the Gaelic Idea.' In it, MacDiarmid concludes that Scottish nationhood can only be the result of a long revolution of national consciousness, a consciousness that will emerge as the consequence of the rousing of a

"distinctive and dynamic spirit" (1970: 73) through a widespread identification with the Scottish Gaelic language. Even in 2020, Scottish nationalism fails to be decisive about whether to make its polemical assertions of linguistic autonomy through the use of Scots, widely spoken in the populous Central Belt and Germanic in origin,[1] or through the revivalist celebration of Scottish Gaelic, the Celtic language on life-support spoken by fewer than 60,000 people, predominantly in the Western Highlands and the Hebridean islands. By the 1930s, MacDiarmid, formerly a proponent of a synthetic literary Scots, had come to believe that Gaelic was a more useful nationalist instrument because it emphasised difference, firmly locating Scotland within the UK's Celtic periphery, a feat Scots, mutually intelligible with English, could hardly hope to achieve.

The Gaelic-Celtic/ Scots-Germanic split is but one of a series of enchained oppositions whose intractability, rather than any particular pole within them, has come to be seen as constitutive of Scottish identity: Scotland, proponents of the Antisyzygy suggest, is also cloven between Highland and Lowland, Calvinist-Protestant and (indigenous or immigrant Irish) Catholic, the spheres of influence of its two main cities, the photogenic east-coast capital Edinburgh and the roughshod west-coast sprawl of industrial Glasgow, nationalism and unionism and so on. The near-ubiquity of *doppelgänger* tropes in Scottish fiction[2] is frequently taken to be a poetic response to this constant attrition, as Randall Stevenson notes in a reference to "the Scottish imagination's Jekyll-and-Hyde, antisyzygical splits" (1991: 61).

One might think that there is something radical in proposing a national identity founded not on essential qualities but on their evaporation in a force-field of contradiction, but antisyzygical sceptics have suggested that the theory constitutes its own, inverted version of essentialism. Writing on the intellectually hyperactive polemic of 'The

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[1] The pro-independence daily newspaper *The National* frequently carries opinion columns in Scots.

[2] An inexhaustive list of Scottish fiction which has deployed the trope would include James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinne*r (1824), Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886)—but the utterly contradictory Long John Silver of 1883's *Treasure Island* may also be regarded as a 'naturalised' example—and Irvine Welsh's *Filth* (1998) and *The Bedroom Secrets of the Masterchefs* (2006).

Caledonian Antisyzygy and the Gaelic Idea,' in which Gaelic is offered not as an intrinsic element of being "Scottish" but as a stop-gap solution precisely to a dearth of the intrinsic, Matthew Hart casts doubt on the possibility that "'a national genius' that is endlessly provisional" (2007: 33) can be proposed in anything other than bad faith, especially given MacDiarmid's tendency to "reify the ethno-national identities he doesn't like" (2007: 33), most notably and unsurprisingly Englishness. In Hart's sardonic paraphrase of MacDiarmid, the Scottish genius is "nowhere more essential than in its rejection of all essentialization" (2007: 33), and it may well be claimed that all this calculated provisionality has proven strategically unwise anyway, given its apparent waning into a form of depressed nationalist fatalism which has come to believe that no severance from the Union can ever be viable because of Scotland's allegedly innate dividedness. Jonathan Hearn notes how at times the Scottish National Party have collapsed into pessimism by offering a pair of arguments about the antisyzygical obstacle to independence which *are themselves mutually contradictory*:

> Some within the party maintain that the SNP's argument for independence is too often couched in terms of cold, rational economic arguments, failing to inspire support on a more emotional level. On the other hand, it is often argued that there is broad support for nationalism at the level of sentiment, but that skeptical rationalism constantly raises doubts about the viability of independence, doubts that must be countered with reasoned arguments. It matters little that these two assessments of what stands in the way of winning the argument for independence seem to contradict each other. (2002: 763)

In Hearn's analysis, the Antisyzygy has been taken for granted as an impediment to the realisation of a nation state: for many nationalists there is no obvious way to suture the "rational economic" (by implication, realist, Lowland, Scots) case and the "emotional" or sentimental (by implication, Romantic, Highland, Gaelic) one. It is at this point that the "Nordic" seems to offer itself to some nationalists as, if not a long-thought-impossible synthesis, at least an alternative to the over-trodden antisyzygical path, its virtue being that its economistic and sentimental components appear to come pre-assembled.

Scotland's Future repeatedly uses phrases such as "nations similar to Scotland" and "comparable nations," always mentioning at least one of the Nordic countries, but usually more, and sometimes a full suite. The following extract is typical:

> Nations that are similar to Scotland—such as Norway, Finland, Denmark and Sweden—sit at the top of world wealth and well-being league tables. Unlike Scotland, they are independent and are able to take decisions in the best interests of their own economies. They do not leave the important decisions about their economy to parliaments whose interests necessarily lie elsewhere. That is their independence advantage and they have used it to build societies that deliver a higher quality of life for their citizens. (2013: 63)

While it is perhaps possible to read this passage and others like it as restraining itself to purely pragmatic, socio-economic justifications for making an association between Scotland and the Nordics, there is also a not very well-hidden invitation to regard the comparison as involving something over and above policy. If Norway, Finland, Denmark and Sweden are indeed "(n)ations that are similar to Scotland," but operate in an economically distinct way because of their independence—and one might ask who these four nations are independent from if not one another, given their chequered historical relationships—then *in what way can they be said to be similar*? Obviously, population might be one defensible cause for comparison, but Scotland's 5.4 million inhabitants would give it the likeness not only of Norway (5.3 million), Finland (5.5 million) and Denmark (5.8 million), but also of the Republic of Congo (5.5 million), Slovakia (5.4 million) and Singapore (5.7 million). Such a linkage also ignores Sweden (10.3 million) laying claim to almost twice the population of Scotland. Other similarities might be based on certain forms of resource wealth such as North Sea oil (which Norway divides with the UK, and which an independent Scotland would claim successor-state rights to) or forestry, but neither of these are notably abundant for Denmark. The list of precisely material reasons that the Nordics are "nations that are similar to Scotland" at this point begins to elide with the fuzzy abstractions of notional cultural commonalities.

Historically, the nation which has offered itself most obviously as a mirror to the hypothesis of an independent Scotland has been the Republic of Ireland. Scottish and Irish Gaelic share a modest intelligibility, and there is an extensive history of cultural exchange between 'Celtic' Scotland and Ireland, stretching at least from the archipelagic proto-Scottish kingdom of Dál Riata—incorporating not only much of the coastline of Argyll and the Hebridean isles but also the Ulster littoral across the sea—to substantial Catholic Irish immigration in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to which both Glasgow and Edinburgh owe aspects of their contemporary demographics. James

Connolly, one of the foremost figures in the Irish Easter Rising of 1916 and executed subsequently by the British, was Edinburgh-born; reciprocally, Glasgow's Celtic Football Club and its supporters are a highly visible part of Irish nationalism's contemporary global brand. In his broadside on the Antisyzygy, MacDiarmid saw a 'Celtic' identity and the establishment of common interests with Ireland as a pivotal aspect of his scheme to raise national consciousness.

Yet Irish identifications are hardly straightforward in contemporary Scotland, where the vast majority of nationalists speak Scottish English and Scots rather than Gaelic and where sectarian tensions overspilling from Northern Ireland have been a source of angst and inter-community tension for over a hundred years. In this, one might find an explanation for the SNP, and the nationalist project more broadly, choosing to identify Scotland as partly an insular Celtic nation of Europe's far west, but to sublimate this into a more compellingly "northern" self-image. As an editorial in the *Edinburgh Review* put it in 1997, the year Scotland voted in favour for devolution from the UK:

> It seems, at this point in its history, as if Scottish culture must 'go into the north,' to fulfil the creative potential of its future as a northern European country in post-imperial Britain. For when the centre of government shifts, its relationship with the 'peripheries' changes—an Edinburgh parliament will obviously alter the political map by shifting power northwards. (2013)

What might be observed in a scan of Scottish nationalism's post-devolution relationship with its Nordic neighbours is an interaction or even elision between what is specified in the editorial as "culture" and economics and social policy. For example, Leslie Riddoch, the pro-independence journalist and author of the queasily titled *McSmorgasbord: What Post-Brexit Scotland Can Learn From the Nordics* (2017), has since 2010 helmed a think-tank called Nordic Horizons, described on its website as "an informal group of Scottish professionals who want to raise the standard of knowledge and debate about life and policy in the Nordic nations" (2019). This operation is not quite as casual as it may seem, given its funding by the Scottish government and likely role as a policy driver. Nordic Horizons puts out—or put out, as it is currently on a year's hiatus—communiqués about, for example, the impressiveness of Scandinavian approaches to childcare or Finland's success in tackling homelessness, but it also

celebrates cultural exchanges across the North Sea which implicitly seek to identify, establish and further common ground in lifestyle and aesthetics. In worldviews such as this, the socio-economic policy successes of the Nordics appear to be positioned as lying very squarely in a communitarian, egalitarian culture which makes them possible: unlike in antisyzygical Scotland, there is no rupture between economism and sentimental self-conception, because such a set of sentiments permits the kinds of economic calculations which have been the public face of the Scandinavian countries, Finland and Iceland for a number of decades. Scotland, such a line of reasoning holds, needs to "go into the north" because "the north" is where its sentiments and its politics might finally be harmonised.

Michael Stachura analyses how the tactical culturalism of formations such as Nordic Horizons is echoed at the level of individual literary creation, finding in the work of a handful of modern Scottish poets (including Robert Alan Jamieson, a co-author of the northernist *Edinburgh Review* editorial of 1997) the cultivation of "a transnational discursive space between Shetland, the Scottish (and British) mainland and the fringes of northern Europe" (2007: 121). Here, Scotland's northern peripheral islands, once home to their own Scandinavian language, the now-extinct Norn, and still deeply marked by their medieval history as Norwegian possessions, are cast as loci in which Scotland blurs into the Nordic world, opening political horizons distinct from the UK's unsparing neoliberalism. In the poetry of Jamieson and Christine De Luca, Stachura shows, one might find a furthering of the analyses made by the Scottish experimental novelist Alasdair Gray, whose writing often suggests "that Scotland has fallen from its place as a northern European or Nordic country" (2007: 124). An aesthetics of the north, in Stachura's interpretation, instantiate a cognitive mapping which permits Scotland to be read as Nordic, with all that that implies politically.

Mapping is vital in thinking about the ideological role literature might play in sending Scotland north. A geographical turn in recent literary thinking embodied in the "geocriticism" of Bertrand Westphal and Robert Tally, amongst others, encourages a consideration of literary narrative which positions it as simultaneously complementary to and in a state of antagonism with cartography 'proper.' Tally notes that "the creative writer engages in an activity quite similar to mapmaking" (2013:

46), but that insouciant "quite" is telling. While fiction (and poetry and drama, and so on) make similar inclusionary and exclusionary selections in their depiction of setting to the cartographer, they are also empowered to undermine and destabilise what Derek Schilling (2014) calls "cartographic reason." Fiction can, and very often does, open pockets of geographic unreality within the real map (where is, say, Gotham City?) or it can rewrite that map as a defiant expression of its poetic licence, as in the case of Thomas Hardy's Wessex. At the extremes, it can force ontological disarray upon cartography, by, for example, doing what Brian McHale calls juxtaposing "[s]paces which real-world atlases […] show as non-contiguous and unrelated" (1987: 45). Geocriticism, Schilling shows us, tries to think the tension between acts of geographical anchoring in literature and "the formative capacity of literary representations to augment, correct, or supplant" what is "variously known as 'the zero-world,' 'geospace,' or 'actuality'" (2014: 215).

Considered as a doubly cartographic and anti-cartographic act, Scottish 'Nordic' writing selects its geographical referents as a way of postulating a political map alternative to the extant one while inscribing the latter with folkways between nominally distinct geopolitical regions. Yet the practices this entails are not exclusive to post-devolutionary poetry: in a footnote, Stachura calls attention to Linklater's *The Dark of Summer* alongside his earlier *The Men of Ness* (1932), a pastiche saga largely set around the Orkney Islands, and Buchan's *The Island of Sheep* need also be considered in any burgeoning canon of Nordicised writing from Scotland. Both make substantial use of the Faroe Islands as settings, and share vague generic similarities. *The Island of Sheep* is a thriller in which the main character is a retired spy; *The Dark of Summer* borrows elements of the spy thriller without ever really committing itself to the production of tension or, indeed, thrills. That the latter novel draws on the thriller while having little interest in the dominant affects of the genre suggests that it found it useful for some communicative purpose other than readerly excitement, and one might note the unique capacity of the mode for generating cartographic meaning.

Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope—particular forms of spatiotemporal relationship in narrative—is useful in thinking genre: in fact, Bakhtin insists that "it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic definitions" (1981: 85). In other words, given genres always

disclose particular attitudes to space and time and instantiate distinctive forms of spatiotemporal consciousness. The chronotope, James Lawson notes, sees "space become charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (2011:389), and this is perhaps especially palpable in the thriller. Thrillers tend to involve rapid movement between disparate geopolitical spaces—count, say, the countries James Bond visits in a typical episode of the franchise—which has the effect of compressing them into a matrix by which their occulted connections are made visible. In so doing, they disclose to us that spaces we might think of as remote from one another are only quantitatively so: again, the earlier Bond films often turned on the relationships between Britain, its recently independent colonies, and communist powers looking to fill the sudden void of influence. The genre's telescoped settings, in other words, both enable and encourage readers to conceive of geography in ways which can sometimes be counterintuitive when held to the standards of "zero-world" maps. Both Buchan and Linklater provide examples of thriller-adjacent fiction which gently warps geospace to prompt considerations of cultural identity, though these considerations are by no means decisive.

The Island of Sheep *at the End of the Nordic Zero-World*
The Island of Sheep constitutes the final, belated portion of Buchan's pentalogy of novels narrated by Richard Hannay, a Scottish-born mining engineer raised in South Africa only to return to Britain in the gathering gloom preceding World War One. In the sequence's first three instalments, the justly renowned and often-adapted *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915), *Greenmantle* (1916) and *Mr Standfast* (1919), Hannay's chance entanglement in a spy conspiracy and his subsequent rise to the status of a patriotic war hero are detailed, while *The Three Hostages* (1924) sees him foil a somewhat impracticable kidnapping plot. Hannay narrates the introduction to *The Courts of the Morning* (1929), which focuses on the adventures of several of his most significant associates introduced in the preceding novels and introduces Jacques d'Ingraville, who returns as the principle antagonist of *The Island of Sheep*. As *The Courts of the Morning* cannot properly be considered a canonical "Hannay novel"—he is its curator rather than its protagonist—thus producing a more-than-decade-long gap between instalments, and because the stories tend more or less to be set close to their date of publication, *The Island of Sheep* has

the ambience of an afterthought, and its once-almost-youthful hero is virtually pensionable. Indeed, the set-up for the plot is a largely nostalgic flashback to a strange episode in Hannay's former life in "Rhodesia," in which he and several friends rescue an eccentric Danish treasure-hunter, Marius Haraldsen, from a gang who intend to rob him in the wilderness in the aftermath of a business disagreement. In a burning *kraal*, Haraldsen, evoking Saga mythology, insists on a pact by which Hannay and his friend Lombard will come to his or his family's aid if they are ever again threatened by the gang.

In the interwar present, Hannay coincidentally encounters Lombard, now settled and tedious, on a train in the English stockbroker belt, then, again coincidentally, Haraldsen's more retiring son in an inn in Norfolk. Soon, the younger Haraldsen contacts Hannay to request his protection against Erick Albinus, who had been involved in the Rhodesian episode, and Lancelot Troth, whose father, Aylmer, died in it. Hannay elicits the support of a reluctant Lombard and of Sandy Arbuthnot, his regular sidekick, who reveals the recruitment of the psychopathic D'Ingraville on the gang's behalf. Initially, they sequester Haraldsen and his daughter Anna at Arbuthnot's ancestral seat in the Scottish Borders, but once this redoubt is compromised the decision is taken to fight a concluding battle on their charge's island in the "Norlands," clearly based on the Faroe Islands but never named as such. At the end of the novel, the once-timid younger Haraldsen, imitating the Norlanders who kill three Viking raiders in a folk-tale he tells Hannay shortly after their arrival on the island, hurls D'Ingraville from a cliff. The rest of the miscreants surrender when Anna, Haraldsen's teenage daughter, leads "an army of men […] outside all [Hannay's] notions of humanity [in] troll-like Norland dress" (1992: 1133), recruited from a whale hunt, against them.

Two preliminary points need making about *The Island of Sheep*'s cartography. The first is that the novel is longitudinally inexorable, plotting a northwards course pretty much relentlessly. Excluding a few brief episodes such as Hannay and his son Peter John's encounter with Haraldsen in Norfolk, there are four main settings in which the action takes place: the veldt of late-Victorian "Rhodesia," Hannay's family's home Fosse in the Cotswolds, Arbuthnot's Laverlaw in the Scottish Borders and the titular island, and they are laid out for us in that order. The transition from Fosse to Laverlaw is encapsulated in the novel's memorable set-piece, in which Lombard rediscovers his youthful

bravado to rescue Anna from the gang at her boarding school in the English Midlands and spirit her to Scotland in a tense, drawn-out escapade along the Great North Road. Hannay and Lombard's boat journey from Scotland to the Norlands is also represented scenically for the most part: these are movements readers are supposed to pay attention to. On one hand, the northwards drift might seem to be anticipatorily tracing imperial withdrawal: we are told that the younger Lombard had "dedicated himself to one end, the building up of a British Equatoria […] a new kingdom of Prester John" (1992: 933) but by the time Hannay reencounters him he is the picture of over-comfortable bourgeois sedentariness. Here, one might recall Jed Esty's (2003) thesis that the development of British interwar modernism saw a shift towards the homebound and inwardly focused as an aesthetic corollary of the slow withering of the British Empire during the Great Depression,[3] and it is tempting to see Buchan—hostilely abreast of modernism[4]—as aping these centripetal trajectories. Yet, crucially, *The Island of Sheep* overshoots not only the Scot Hannay's adopted England in favour of Laverlaw, but goes on to pull its narrator and Lombard further into the north: if this is imperial withdrawal and homecoming, it is so as a sort of crash-landing beyond the apparent purview of Britishness or Scottishness.

The second piece of immediately significant cartography in *The Island of Sheep* is that the place that the writing eventually lands upon is not what, following Schilling, we might call a properly "geo-actual" space but a dwindling echo of one. Buchan had travelled in the Faroes shortly before writing the novel and there is no doubt that his Norlands are based on them, especially in the adaptation of the real islands' capital Tórshavn as "Hjalmarshavn," a winking nod to a hero of the Faroese Sagas. Yet the choice to forsake geoactuality is pointed, not least in the

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[3] A typical example for Esty would be something like T.S. Eliot's shift from the polyglot internationalism of *The Waste Land* to the extremely situated Anglocentrism of *Four Quartets*.

[4] At one point in the novel, Sandy Arbuthnot, a master of disguise, infiltrates the gang under the assumed identity of "a French artist in a black sweater, [who] hadn't washed for a day or two […] A *surréaliste*, who had little English but all the latest studio argot." (1992: 1017)

decision to trade the semantically ambiguous "Faroes"[5] for the blunter "Norlands," which announces almost aggressively that this is a northern, Nordic space. The move—at least at first pass—trims the cultural and historical specificity of the Faroes down to a generic, almost allegorically blank, synecdoche of the Nordic on behalf of an Anglophone audience in search of the cold-exotic, a readerly category hardly in short supply in the 1930s, the era of W.H. Auden's poetic embrace of the Arctic, Norse and Thulian.[6]

Indeed, the novel thematises the Pan-Scandinavian or Nordist outlook early on when Arbuthnot and Hannay reminisce about the older Haraldsen. Haraldsen's missions in Africa and further afield—Arbuthnot, a British intelligence officer, notes ruefully that he once "'got into Kashgar, and we had the deuce of a job getting him out'" (1992: 958)—as a "'professional gold-seeker *in excelsis*'" (1992: 955) were, the reader learns, in the service of accumulating enough wealth to fund "'a sort of Northern Renaissance of which he would be the leader'" (1992: 956). As Sandy explains to Hannay:

> "His youth was before the days of all this Nordic humbug, but he had got into his head that the Northern culture was as great a contribution to civilization as the Greek and Roman, and that the Scandinavian peoples were destined to be the true leaders in Europe. He had their history at his fingers' ends, and he knew the Sagas better than any man I've ever met—I'm some judge of that, for I know them pretty well myself. He had a vision of a great Northern revival, when the spirit of Harald Fairhair would revive in Norway, and Gustavus Adoplhus and Charles XII would be reborn in Sweden, and Valdemar the Victorious in Denmark." (1992: 955-956)

Sandy's account of Haraldsen's ambitions in this expository scene is tinged with ambivalence, echoing Hannay's retrospective examination of Lombard's empire-building aspirations in the novel's first chapter. Both present cartographic fantasies of the late nineteenth century—Pan-Nordism, Rhodes-ian imperial expansionism—as benignly innocent when compared to the fascistic Aryanism of what Sandy euphemistically calls "this Nordic humbug," but they are also set up as Romantic to the

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[5] One etymological hypothesis is that 'Faroes' does indeed mean something like 'sheep islands,' but it is a contested one.

[6] The role of the Nordic imaginary in British writing of the 1930s, the period of W.H. Auden and Louis MacNeice's *Letters from Iceland* (1937), is covered with wonderful detail by Peter Davidson (2004), who also briefly discusses the role of northwards journeys in Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps*.

point of childishness. Lombard's "very young man's talk" has "fire and poetry" (1992: 935) in it but is ultimately marred by what Hannay sees as its "crudity"; the older Haraldsen was, according to Sandy, "principally a poet" (1992: 955) and the tone of Arbuthnot's sketch is softly chiding. That Marius Haraldsen's vision is, at best, quixotic is made obvious when his son dines with Hannay and details what has passed since the episode in southern Africa:

> The old man's ambition for his son seemed to have been a kind of blend of Sir Walter Scott and Bismarck and Cecil Rhodes.
>   Of course, it didn't work—that kind of scheme never does. The young Valdemar (his Christian name was Valdemar) went stolidly through an immense curriculum, for he was clay in his father's hands, but the result was not the Admirable Crichton of the old man's dreams. He went to college in Denmark and Germany; he did two years in a Copenhagen bank; he travelled from Greenland in the west to the White Sea in the east, and even got as far as Spitzbergen, and there were not many places in Scandinavia and its islands on which he had not turned his unseeing eyes. But he did it all as a round of duty, for he had not a spark of his father's ardour. A scholar he became, and a keen naturalist, but nothing more. He wanted a quiet life, and the future of the Northern races was no more to him than a half-forgotten fairy tale. (1992: 989)

Buchan seemingly employs both Hannay and Sandy's clubbish irony to jack up a tension internal to the novel between the generic Scandinavianism or Nordism connoted by the palling of the real-life Faroes into the Norlands and the absurdity of grandiose, homogenising ethnoprojects. As Christopher Harvie (1991) shows, Buchan was on the surface an imperialist and a unionist, but close reading of his fiction, especially elements of the Hannay sequence, may reveal an "other, [Scottish] nationalist persona" (1991: 38) drawn to locality and particularity, sceptical at times of the abstractions of the supra-national. In the light of this scepticism, the Norlands start to look like a tiered joke, which merges Anglophone fantasies about the Nordic with the Nordic's most grandiose fantasies about itself only for this chimera to be confounded by the specifics of place. Conspicuously, the invaders killed by the Norlanders in Haraldsen's folk-tale are themselves Norse, and when Anna rallies the whale-hunters to her family's defence she "[strikes] a note which reverberated through all their traditions, the note of peril from strangers—Norse and Scots rovers, Algerian pirates" (1992: 1116). The Norse, emblematic of Nordic history to the casual observer, are as alien and unfitting as not only "Scots" but the much-more far-

travelling "Algerian pirates" in this location which initially seems to be archetypical for them.

The Island of Sheep, then, raises the issue of a gap between the simplifications involved in revivalist Romantic ethnologies and the awkwardness of empirical encounters with the spaces and peoples they intend to incorporate. Even Haraldsen's late conversion to what resembles a berserker archetype, which the text teases us into thinking that *it* thinks might be racial memory—a shocked Sandy claims that the Dane "'reverted to type for a little'" (1992: 1133)—is marked out as a self-conscious, rather literary act by Hannay's interpolated summary of the Norland folk tale in his depiction of D'Ingraville's death. Douglas Kerr's analysis of the scene claims it is "enacted in a thoroughgoing Nordic atavism, […] evidence of something like a racial unconscious" (2008: 160) but this reading is rather flattening: Haraldsen is *acting out the idea* of an intrinsic racial spirit by raising himself up to a legend whose finer points imply the interrogation of such an idea. Subsequently, Hannay's vignette of the mustered whalers, who have "(l)ike Haraldsen […] gone back to type—they were their forebears of a thousand years ago" (1992: 1133) reads as an ironisation of the idea of "type" as the ambiguous relation of the Norlands to the Nordic—are the Norlanders Nordic, Norse or simply, irreducibly Norlandic?—is again quietly raised.

Hannay's description of the "ensanguined Norlanders" (1992: 1135) is doubly significant because it can draw attention to the fact that many of the perceptions of the Nordic in *The Island of Sheep* are attributed to the narrator, a character Harvie represents meanly but not inaccurately as "rather dull and boorish" (1991: 49). A facet of this dullness may be a givenness to see things through their clichés; its complement in boorishness might be a tendency to, in different circumstances, snipe at those same things. So the boor in Hannay finds a measure of cynical comedy in, say, Marius Haraldsen's delusions of a Northern Revival, but is also occasionally suckered by the gaudy imagery of other people's Romantic nationalisms, thus vacillating between under- and over-subscription.

What's more, he does so as a Scot, and there are instances in the text when Hannay maps the Norlands using a Scottish gazetteer. Passing

Halder, the second biggest island of the Norlands,[7] he remarks on how its shoreline is "marvellously corrugated, deep-cut glens running down from peaks about 3,000 feet in height"[8] (1992: 1076) and on Haraldsen's Island he casts his eye over "swampy lochs which looked as if they might furnish difficult fishing" (1992: 1081). Both "glen" and "loch" are Scottish—and, what's more, Scots-Gaelic—geonyms, and it is notable that it is in the Norlands that Hannay, a Scot by birth but not an inhabitant of Scotland for the vast majority of his life, should slip into this register. He interprets the Nordic through the Scottish, but it is also in the Nordic that he *becomes* discernibly Scottish, as in his aside that the Island "reminded me of Colonsay, a low, green place cradled deep in the sea" (1992: 1076-77). Colonsay is one of the—at the time of the publication of *The Island of Sheep*, culturally Gaelic—Hebrides off Scotland's west coast, halfway between the two much more well-known islands of Islay and Mull: it is a comparative allusion obscure enough to suggest that it is targeted specifically at the Scottish reader. Yet, as if to complete the circle, "Colonsay" is of Norse, rather than Gaelic, etymology.

In addition to Hannay's almost-unconscious linguistic and similetic registration of the Scottishness of the Norlands, and thus the Norlandic qualities of Scotland, the earlier scenes at Laverlaw—when the novel really begins its great northwards push—also offer grounds for thinking Buchan was inserting Scotland into Nordic cartographies. It is here that Haraldsen begins to recover from his anxieties about the machinations of the gang who seek to ruin him, and where Hannay notes that his friend's eyes have acquired "the pale blue fanaticism of the north" (1992: 1059). At one point, Haraldsen, traipsing over the hills of the Borders to attend a village wedding with Hannay, Sandy and Lombard declares "with

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[7] "Halder" is, if based on geoactuality, presumably analogous to Eysturoy; The Island of Sheep sits across a channel "perhaps two miles wide" (1992: 1076) from Halder and is thus, if one insists on equivalences, a fictionalised Kalsoy. However, when Hannay first sights the Island of Sheep he is "abreast of Halder" (1992: 1076), but the Island appears "to […] port" (1992: 1076), which doesn't match the zero-world unless for some reason the boat had been turned to face south. This may seem pedantic, but Buchan had visited the Faroes in the year before the writing of the novel and thus one might conclude that the siting of the Island is another textual prank on the reader.

[8] Again, the only peaks approaching such a height in the Faroes are on Eysturoy.

abstracted eyes" that "'This place is like the Norlands […] I have smelled this smell at midsummer there, when there was a wind from the hills'" (1992: 1054). Later in the same sequence, the group witness a fight between farm dogs at the close of the festivities, a seemingly mundane occurrence which makes Haraldsen think of Samr, the dog who "'died with Gunnar of Lithend'" and "'reminds [him] of what [he] had forgotten'" (1992: 1058). It is this which makes him decide to return to fight a decisive battle on the Island, emphasising Haraldsen's distance from home as emblematised in his desire to return but also denoting a profound yet obscured link between disparate points on the map. One can smell the Norlands in Scotland, and encounter the distant echoes of Norse myth, and when one gets to the Norlands they find a miniature Scotland, at least in Hannay's case.

Yet, as we have seen, the idea of the Nordic that Buchan seems, via Hannay, to be submitting Scotland for inclusion within is one which the novel is constantly at pains to problematize. At its worst—"this Nordic humbug"—it is National Socialist ideology; in more benign forms—which, despite Sandy's not entirely convincing defence of Marius Haraldsen, are inevitably vulnerable to the requirements of fascist and chauvinistic logics themselves—it is Romantic abstraction. The Nordic is shown repeatedly to be a literary production rather than a natural fact, and the location used as its allegorical emblem is in any case the site of a mythologised history of resistance to the "Norse." *The Island of Sheep*, published only a couple of years after MacDiarmid's famous tract on the Scottish crisis of identity, toys with the idea of a third way—neither Gaelic nor Scots, but Nordic—while all the time hinting at the contingency of such a solution. At the end of the novel, the proneness of the Nordic idea to projection is disclosed in a passage which transforms the Island into a sort of Valhalla of the subjective:

> Now that the nightmare had gone, the Island seemed a happy place, where life could be worthily lived in the company of sea-tides, and friendly wild things, and roaring mornings, and blissful drowsy afternoons. To me it was Fosse, and to Sandy it was Laverlaw, but both, so to speak, set in a world of new dimensions. To Lombard, the man who I had once thought of as degenerated into a sleek mediocrity, it was a revelation. It had brought back something of his youth and his youth's dreams.
>
> (1992: 1137)

Marius Haraldsen's bastion of the Northern Revival is, in the final account, over-generalised into a crude—or "boorish"—Hannayan

metaphor for the sheer singularity of any given image of a home. Despite the superficial invitations the novel offers its reader to participate in a racialized essentialism which might yet make room for Scotland, *The Island of Sheep* might instead be read as pursuing such an essentialism into the corner of an absolute, atomised modularity which renders identitarian obsessions with the "true nature" of a nation as beside the point.

"No darkness at midnight": World War II and Scotland's Imaginary North

The reader of Linklater's *The Dark of Summer* might also be forgiven for taking it as an invitation to see Scotland as "essentially" Nordic, especially in light of its author's background in the Orkney Islands and unmistakeable concern with investigating the shared cultural history of Scots and Scandinavians. As well as *The Men of Ness*, the astonishingly prolific Linklater wrote a biography of the Scottish-born Swein Asleifsson entitled *The Ultimate Viking* (1955) and histories of the Orkney and Shetland Islands which penetrated deeply into their Norse heritage. Unlike Buchan, he was a card-carrying nationalist, even standing unsuccessfully for election for the SNP's predecessors the National Party of Scotland in 1933, and his nationalism could take the form of hostility to the Gaelicist outlook that the likes of MacDiarmid came to embrace in the Thirties. In a retrospective of his work published in the *Times Literary Supplement* in 2000, Liam McIlvaney quotes the protagonist of Linklater's first novel *White-Maa's Saga* (1929) as thinking "damn their Celtic revival" (2000: 14) to themselves, and goes on to add his own analysis of this, stating that:

> The surly, hard-nosed Norseman, casting a cold eye on his Celtic contemporaries, was a role that Linklater relished. It was also one he could play with conviction—his work does stand at an angle to the often mythopoeic writings of [Lewis] Grassic Gibbon, Neil Gunn and Hugh MacDiarmid. (2000: 14)

One might supplement McIlvaney's point here by suggesting that Linklater's project was, at times, an *alternative*, Nordicised mythopoesis of Scottishness but, if this was the case, *The Dark of Summer* hints at anxieties regarding such an undertaking. Published in 1956, the year after his book on Asleifsson, it is, as its title might suggest, a thematically and tonally heavier work than the majority of his fiction, which leans towards

the comic. Set between the middle of World War Two and the aftermath of the Korean War, its geographical focus ranges from the Faroes to North-East Asia, but it always remains anchored to the various groups of islands north of Scotland and west of the Scandinavian Peninsula. Its narrative is driven by a MacGuffin-like conspiracy supposedly operating under the auspices of Vidkun Quisling to foment rebellion along the length of the Atlantic fringe and bring Bretons, the Irish, the Hebrideans, Orcadians, Shetlanders and Faroese to the Axis cause. This is intercut with the story of an eighteenth-century feud between Shetland landowners, a descendant of whom turns out to be Quisling's ear in Shetland and whose daughter eventually marries the spycatcher narrator Tony Chisholm.

Similarly to *The Island of Sheep*, *The Dark of Summer* depicts a staggered, northwards, "long, cold journey" (1999: 23) as Chisholm, after being offered his mission to the Faroes in London, takes a train to Edinburgh, then another across the Forth, then a flight to Kirkwall on Orkney, then a boat to the naval base at Scapa Flow, finally sailing to the Faroes on board an armed trawler. The trip allows for topographical sketches which illustrate the segue between Scotland and the Nordic world:

> It was a sullen, windless day, and to the west a mass of impenetrable purple cloud lay over the Grampians. We skirted the mountains, and beyond Inverness flew over a sombre land so pocked and pitted with small lochs that it looked like an old coat full of holes: a land worn out. (1999: 33)

This is a reasonably accurate description of Sutherland and Caithness, the regions "beyond Inverness," but it is also knowingly an evocation of the top-down appearance of northern Sweden and Finland. Then, after an overnight crossing of "the cold vacancy of the winter sea" (1999: 46), Chisholm comes onto the bridge to find coming into view a sight very similar to Hannay's "marvellously corrugated" landscape, "mountain-tops rising, abrupt and savage, from invisible submarine bases […] clad imperfectly, with snow; not, like the alps in winter, brilliant peaks of solid snow, but ragged heights that showed the naked rock beneath thin shawls" (1999: 47). Here, the earlier trick is inverted and a Nordic vista is implicitly compared to a Scottish one: the Faroes look unmistakably like the "abrupt" shores of parts of Skye, Lochaber and Wester Ross,

where mountains also crash suddenly into the sea and the salt air drags snowlines out into "thin shawls."

Chisholm's mission involves him visiting Bömlo and Tórur, two alcoholic Faroese nationalists who are suspected of harbouring a spy who has arrived under the pretence of being one of a number of "refugees from Nazi dominion" (1999: 50) fleeing Norway. Of the genuine refugees, Chisholm calls them "men and women of indomitable minds who, refusing to live under the tyranny of a Teutonic philosophy and German policemen, preferred the dangers of the sea" (1999: 50) and maps the seaborne escape: "[m]ost of the boats had made for Shetland, which lay nearest the Norwegian coast, but some had reached Orkney and some the Faroes" (1999: 50). Linklater thus alerts his reader to the entangled nature of the peripheral Scottish and the peripheral Nordic: Scotland's Shetland is nearer to Norway than the Danish-owned Faroes are, and the Faroes themselves are much nearer to Scotland than they are to continental Scandinavia. Wartime intensifies the traffic through this messy political space, reopening historical routes of maritime migration, and the Faroes, remaining in Allied hands as a vital strategic outpost after Denmark's fall in 1940, operate as a *de facto* part of insular Scotland, a fact symbolised by Chisholm bringing Bömlo and Tórur whisky rather than schnapps to loosen their tongues.

As it turns out, his Faroese subjects of inquiry turn out not to be protecting a Nazi or Quislingist spy, but to have (more or less) killed one by imprisoning him in their outhouse where he freezes to death. They are loyal to the British, but with the caveat that they have bought into an esoteric form of Nordist nationalism whose aims might be realised after the war. Tórur offers an expansive, inebriated disquisition on this which Chisholm paraphrases:

> Until the last act of the tragedy the Faroese would loyally support Britain and its allies, but at the same time they must think of the future. For they would survive! They and all the old lands of the Norsemen, on the fringes of Europe, would be left intact, and the old Norse power would come to life again. The future of civilization lay in the hands of the sea-coast peoples and the islanders, from Tromsö to Reykjavik, from Tórshavn to Kirkwall and Thurso, to Stornaway and Wexford! And in their hearts they must carry, joyously, the burden of their coming greatness!
> (1999: 62)

In this outlook, there is no real distinction between the Nordic and Gaelic worlds, but, where the novel has previously implied its willingness to

imagine Scotland and what lies to its north as a continuum, such a stance is presented here as frivolous drunk-talk. Chisholm witnesses the speech in the company of Sergeant Fergusson, a stereotypically unimpressed Lowland Scot, who mutters "'Bullshit! Plain bullshit!'" (1999: 62) periodically, as if to remind us that Scottish Nordism might not be so much a way out of the antisyzygy as yet another potential source of aggravation within it. Moreover, the theory Tórur parrots has been offered to the Faroese by the spy, whose geofantastic vision the two Faroese appreciate even while feeling murderously aggressive towards his short-term goals.

However, the other character who is won over by such an idea shows that it cannot be entirely disentangled from such aspirations. After his visit to the Faroes, Chisholm undertakes a stormy voyage south to Shetland, the spy's body lashed to a bulkhead, to interrogate a (fictional) Yeats-quoting associate of Quisling called Mungo Wishart. Wishart, propelled "by the madness of a fixed idea, the temper of a fanatic" (1999: 123), writes fulminating, fascistic screeds against the decadence of Britain, London, Scotland, even Shetland itself, as Chisholm discovers while reading one of them during his visit:

> In Nelson's day there were three thousand Shetlanders in the Royal Navy; and what historian has ever given Shetland credit for its share in victory? None! Shetland lies beyond the pale of London's interest.
> But I put no blame on London. London is no worse than Lerwick, our puny capital, a smug little town infested by Scotchmen. London is merely bigger. Both of them need a purging of their inferior blood and a new flux from the north. (1999: 104)

Wishart is, like Tórur—and Buchan's older Haraldsen—ludicrous, but more dangerously so in his openness to the explicitly chauvinistic elements of Nordism, Sandy Arbuthnot's "Nordic humbug." *The Dark of Summer* positions itself as open to affinity, but it is also more than alert to how swiftly affinity can curdle into belligerence and exclusionism. Chisholm opens the novel by saying that he intends to retire to where "there is, at the top of summer, no darkness at midnight" (1999: 1), clearly a tease on the novel's part to make the reader think the referent is Scandinavia when it is, in fact, Shetland. Everything is done to draw together Scottish and Nordic space, but a counterargument is raised by which the politicisation of this contraction is made to look susceptible to fascist logics of superior and "inferior blood."

Both novels, then, engage in a double game as far as the relationship of Scotland to its northern neighbours goes, inviting their readers to balance spatial proximity and cultural affinity against the tensions within conceptions of the Nordic. As such, they offer counsel to the present, in which "going into the north" can look like a solution to the frustrations Scotland has with its position within the Union, but which is complicated by the fact that the Scottish nationalist imagination of the Nordic tends to the idealistic and overlooks, amongst other things, the groundswell of right-wing populism in Sweden, Finland, Denmark and elsewhere. Moreover, the shibboleth of "nations similar to Scotland" increasingly held to by contemporary nationalists and many in the SNP runs a significant risk of allowing that similarity to be perceived not only as economic and cultural, but as grounded in biological essentialism or racially intrinsic. Fantasies of 'northern' belonging are always compromised to some degree by the racialisation of the concept of north, a fact which Buchan and Linklater, perhaps surprisingly, alert the reader to.

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