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ORCADIAN POETICS OF HOPE
Lyrical Dimensions and (Ex)tensions of the Topos in the Poetry of George Mackay Brown

The reality of Brown's poetic Orkney is very much alive with storytelling. The stories that are told or hinted at suggest the survival of ethical values and a symbolic view of life. This is the world of plentiful impressions and of simple hopes like the hope for a rich harvest. Wind is rendered as "the million whispers of fulfilment in the green ears." Even if the wishes and longings of the people are not directly expressed, they are very forcefully present in the indirect way, encoded in the visual traces of human acts of withstanding toil and hardship.

In the context of literary studies, hope has been defined as a tensional phenomenon conceivable through opposite forces to be found in literary texts, especially those rooted in the Christian system of values and in medieval romance tradition. Flo Keyes in *The Literature of Hope in the Middle Ages and Today* describes hope as "the result of the fundamental tension that inheres in romance literature, the tension between the real and the ideal…. This is true for the hero, for the world, for people's expectations, and for the story outcome. Hope, then, is part of the definition of each of these terms, hope that humankind will somehow find a way to be the best it is capable of being...."[1]

In philosophical terms, on the other hand, hope can be conceived after Søren Kierkegaard as "a reaction to nihilism," and "an experience and an interpretation of life." He names it "a specific form of self-transcendence." Most importantly, the philosopher argues that "Hope is striving for an image of the self that transcends the finitude of life," which is linked to the fact that hope provokes an attitude of "interpretation in which life appears in total and final clarity."[2] Both ways of understanding hope, the one rooted in the historical-literary tradition and the one derived from the above-mentioned philosophy, are relevant for viewing the realization of the literary topos of hope in the poetic output of George Mackay Brown (1921−1996), an Orkney poet, fiction writer, and dramatist. His *oeuvre* also reveals a very strong and at the

[1] Flo K e y e s, *The Literature of Hope in the Middle Ages and Today: Connections in Medieval Romance, Modern Fantasy and Science Fiction* (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland, 2006), 20.

[2] Quoted after Andreas Moe R a s m u s s e n, "Self, Hope, and the Unconditional: Kierkegaard on Faith and Hope," in: *Anthropology and Philosophy: Dialogues on Trust and Hope*, ed. Sune Liisberg, Esther Oluffa Pedersen, and Anne Line Dalsgård (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2015), 235.

same time very subtle (as deliberately kept low-key) influence of a Catholic conceptualization of hope as one of the three theological virtues, along with faith and caritas.

In fact, although the motif of hope seems central in Brown's writing, it has never been pointed out in Brown criticism that the works of this prominent Scottish poet are infused with various indirect and semi-direct realizations of this literary topos. It might be caused by the fact that hope is never named directly in his texts and, moreover, none of Brown's works can be said to be explicitly focused on it. However, the idea of hope defined as: (1) an enduring literary topos related to romance literature, (2) a concept defined by Christian existential philosophy, affecting Brown indirectly through the influence of Kierkegaard on European Romantic and modernist literatures, and (3) a Catholic theological virtue, can definitely be found as one of the basic patterns underlying the making of his fictional and poetic worlds. It can be detected in their constituents, such as the ideological and axiological spheres, in the character structures, and in the broadly understood narrative elements (e.g., conflicts, plot patterns, and others). Since it is impossible within the scope of an article to go through all the aspects of hope in the whole literary output of this prolific author of novels, short stories, essays, dramatic pieces, and poetry, I propose to initiate a scholarly discussion on the presence of hope in Brown's writing by observing some aspects of aesthetic techniques related to this topos in his poetic works. This choice is dictated by the fact that he is perhaps most remembered as an important Scottish poet. For sure, he is at the same time a grossly-overlooked, though in many respects major British and European writer of the second half of the twentieth century, and this justifies the argument that he needs much more critical attention in the field of Polish[3] and international criticism.

As for the Polish connections of Brown, it is worth noting that this Catholic poet was greatly moved by the fact of Karol Wojtyła, the poet of the same generation as himself, becoming Pope in 1978. Brown could sense the unique

[3] The number of translations of Brown's works into Polish is limited, although we can perhaps hope for a change in the situation of almost complete oblivion of Brown's *oeuvre* and of the void in this respect in the publishing market. It was in 1989 that a Polish poet and translator Andrzej Szuba rendered some of Brown's poetry into Polish in a selected poetry collection entitled *Antologia z Wyspy Fok*. With only 2,000 copies printed, the book, produced by the renowned Polish publisher Wydawnictwo Literackie (in the series *Humanum Est*), did not, unfortunately, reach any broad readership. It was nearly thirty years that Polish readers had to wait for two other of Brown's works to be translated into Polish by Michał Alenowicz, both published by Wiatr od Morza. Those were the novels *Winlandia* (2017) (*Vinland*) and *Nad oceanem czasu* (2019) (*Beside the Ocean of Time*). The choice seems very representative of Brown's prose, the more so that the latter work was shortlisted for the Booker Prize for the year 1994. See George Mackay B r o w n, *Beside the Ocean of Time* (London: John Murray, 1994).

combination of the two natures that he thought were redeeming for culture—the poet's and the saint's—in John Paul II. Brown's biographer Maggie Fergusson records the fact that "George had warmed to Karol Wojtyla ever since his election.... He felt him to be a truly good man, and it appealed to him that, like Rognvald Kolson, nephew of Saint Magnus and founder of St. Magnus Cathedral, this pope combined holiness with a love of climbing mountains, of skiing and, above all, of literature and poetry."[4] In saying this she formulates (or perhaps repeats after Brown) the comparison between the Pope and the Orkney saint-poet Rognvald—the nephew of another Orkney saint—Magnus.[5] Fergusson also gives insight into Brown's reaction to the first ever visit by the Pope to Scotland: "In May 1982, he hardly moved from his television during Pope John Paul's II visit to Britain.… As he watched John Paul II celebrate his open-air Mass for 70,000 young people in a rugby stadium in Edinburgh, he was overwhelmed with happiness."[6] Then she hastens to add Brown's exact words uttered in the excitement of the moment: "Such radiance, such goodness. Old and decrepit as I am, I wanted to shout for joy like the kids at Murrayfield."[7] This attitude of joy at seeing the poet-Pope being elected and coming to his country is surely something Brown adopted consciously, as his upbringing was strictly "anti-papist."[8]

To be able to fully comprehend the treatment of hope in Brown's poetry, we need to remember that his religious background was a hybrid one. He only converted to Catholicism in 1961, when he was in his forties. Catholicism, however, had inspired him for many years before his actual mature act of conversion took place, appealing to him through his literary readings and his search for truth. Brown was to a great degree inspired by the Catholic poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins, as well as by the writings and poetry of St. John Henry Newman, another famous convert. Linden Bicket states that "Brown's creative imagination was fired" by the texts of Hopkins "throughout his life," leading to the development of Brown's concept of "art as sacrament."[9] In his

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[4] Maggie F e r g u s s o n, *George Mackay Brown: The Life* (London: John Murray, 2006), 249.

[5] Both of these medieval Orkney rulers were recognized as saints sometime after their deaths and they are venerated in the local Orkney and Northern European contexts as responsible for consolidating the Orkney sense of identity. St. Magnus did that by offering himself to die for peacemaking, and St. Rognvald by becoming the first Orkney poet, as well as by erecting the massive local cathedral so as to enshrine the relics of St. Magnus.

[6] F e r g u s s o n, *George Mackay Brown: The Life*, 249.

[7] Ibidem.

[8] Joseph P e a r c e, "Escape from a Puritan 'Wasteland,'" *Catholic Herald*, April 14, 2016, https://catholicherald.co.uk/issues/april-15th-2016/escape-from-a-puritan-wasteland/.

[9] Linden B i c k e t, *George Mackay Brown and the Scottish Catholic Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 39.

autobiography *For the Islands I Sing*, Brown himself admits it was Hopkins who inspired him to notice the divine in the ordinary: "Where does the glory come from, that streams forever through the firmament and the world of nature with its endless variety of creatures, and maintains them and keeps them in their courses, and has a keeping of them always, beginning to end? It comes from God; the marvellous bounty comes from God and belongs to the glory of God."[10] In the above quote, Brown emphasizes that the source the glory of creation is God himself, claiming that all his power can be perceived in the world of nature. The idea is evidently indebted to Hopkins' poem "Pied Beauty," where the reader is asked to join in the perception of universal splendor so as to give thanks together with the lyrical self: "Glory be to God for dappled things – / For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow; / For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim."[11] Brown's words seem to echo, in terms of their semantic impact as well as phrasing the opening of Hopkins' poem, without a verbatim repetition. He praises the glory that "streams forever through the firmament," with the admiration expressed for the "endless variety of creatures."

As for Newman's impact on the Orkney poet, Alison Gray asserts that:

> Learning much from Newman, Mackay Brown too adopted the "phenomenological attitude" that resonated strongly with the reactive ethos of the twentieth century. Newman saw far in advance of his time and was instrumental, along with others, in re-opening a prior period of history that now could emerge for further development. Mackay Brown's readings and re-readings of Newman's *Apologia* [gave him] confirmation of how one can be certain of the truth in one's inner world so marked by doubts and contradicted by one's own social surroundings. Like Newman, an initial vehement tone and hypersensitivity released energies that carried one forward.[12]

As a Brown scholar with background in theology, and privately the poet's long-time friend, Gray notices the crucial inspiration Brown derived from Newman's work that consisted in the defense of his religious beliefs. Brown needed this to face the impact of his social milieu consisting of people who were mostly lukewarm or cold in relation to Christian religious beliefs.

It was only after extended readings of Hopkins and Newman, and a lengthy period of considering the idea, that Brown finally asked to be baptized in the Catholic Church, thus renouncing the "lukewarm" Presbyterianism in which he was brought up,[13] the faith he practiced very loosely, following the example

[10] George Mackay B r o w n, *For the Islands I Sing: An Autobiography* (London: John Murray, 1997), 152.

[11] Gerard Manley H o p k i n s, "Pied Beauty," Poetry Foundation, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44399/pied-beauty.

[12] Alison G r a y, *George Mackay Brown: No Separation* (Leominster: Gracewing, 2016), 175.

[13] See P e a r c e, "Escape from a Puritan 'Wasteland.'"

of his "unconvinced" father,[14] who did not even care enough to baptize his children. Brown's embracing of the Church came with great joy on his part, caused particularly by the experience of the Eucharist and sacramental life, and this shocked his secular or Reformed family and friends.[15] The Christian joy coming from faith, hope, and caritas—the central virtues in the Church of which Brown now became part—marked his spiritual experience ever since his conversion. That joy did not leave him throughout his creative lifetime, providing source of support in times of personal crisis. He resorted to hope amid the turbulent depressive moods that he was prone to, and it helped him withstand the experience of human frailty caused by ill-health that troubled him throughout his lifetime following his youthful tuberculosis. In adult life, his sensitive reclusive nature also led him to fall into alcohol addiction, which he ultimately seems to have conquered. With its liturgy of the Mass, its rich symbolism and ritual, as well as its teaching of God's caritas coming with the regenerative power of sacraments, the Church became his resource of personal hope. He reworked all this artistically, but never too directly, into a Christian agrarian imagery of farming, fishing, and flock-tending, modified also by some cultural memory of pagan myths and legends, natural cycles, and northern elemental settings,[16] as well as tinted with the legacy of British regional writing represented by Thomas Hardy.[17] The offering of Christ is a recurring topic in his poetry, often described using archipelagic decorations, as in "Corpus Christi" (1993):

> And I was at the last hill
> When he was notched with five wounds
>
> I stayed to watch (unregarded)
> When Corpus Christi
> Was unhooked from the black wave
> And wrapped, dripping, in the death net
>
> When bread bakers and fishermen
> Came and lingered at dawn
> Beside the stone of time's ending.[18]

[14] See Ron F e r g u s o n, *George Mackay Brown: The Wound and the Gift* (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 2011).

[15] See F e r g u s s o n, *George Mackay Brown: The Life*, 142.

[16] See Rowena M u r r a y and Brian M u r r a y, *Interrogation of Silence: The Writings of George Mackay Brown* (London and Edinburgh: Steve Savage, 2004), 84.

[17] For a broader discussion of the topic, see Halszka L e l e ń, "Semiotics of Archipelago in George Mackay Brown's Narratives," in *Boundless Scotland: Space in Contemporary Scottish Fiction*, ed. Monika Szuba (Gdańsk: Gdańsk University Press, 2015), 143–4.

[18] George Mackay B r o w n, "Corpus Christi," in *The Collected Poems of George Mackay Brown*, ed. Archie Bevan and Brian Murray (London: John Murray, 2005), 315.

In the poem quoted above, an Orkney boy is a direct witness to the life of Jesus, including his crucifixion and his descent from the cross. The body of Christ is described here as getting "unhooked," as though Corpus Christi was an animal carcass, with the animal having been slaughtered for meat. The purpose of this grand offering is identified as giving peace to the local agricultural workers, as implied by the image of "bread bakers and fishermen [who] / Came and lingered at dawn." The suggestion of this being "time's ending" gives it a particular eschatological perspective.

All the universal, timeless, and at the same time semi-regional and recognizably historic patterns and influences are realized by Brown in a very unobtrusive, and yet semiotically very potent way. The above poem is characteristic for evoking the sense of pre-industrial Orkney, the archipelago as it was in the years preceding the Second World War, in the 1920s and 1930s of Brown's childhood and early youth. The above poem is also an example of Brown's ability to have disparate layers of history and culture converge. This is to some extent the ability that comes as very natural in the Orkney palimpsestic landscape. The universal quality of Brown's writing is evidently ensured by the poet's adhering to the timeless cycles of community work, such as baking bread, fishing, and farming, and by his evoking the natural cycles of human life: birth, death, and regeneration. The quoted poem uses all these motifs in reference to the religious dimension, which offers hope in the figure Jesus raised to life again through Resurrection. This grand topos is frequently represented through the more domestic and lowly motifs of distinctly Orkney character that are also deeply Christian, like the image of new lambs and spring daisies in the meadows in "Spring: the Kids of Feaquoy Farm." In this poem, the theological mysteries of Easter time are explained through an insight into the cycle of nature and the related cycle of farming in the countryside.

A figure with which Brown associated the above array of motifs was an Orkney saint, Magnus, to whom he turned in his private prayers and to whom he addressed many of his poems,[19] including those commemorating the feast of St. Magnus on 16th April, as "Songs for St Magnus Day," "St Magnus Day," and "St Magnus Day in the Island." He revealed in them the lyrical first person's hope for the saint's help in ordinary human affairs not just in Orkney but anywhere in the world. He asked St. Magnus in a very direct way, as can be seen in the following extract from "Song for St Magnus: 16 April": "friend, have a keeping / Of the shepherds on the hill / Whose ewes are having difficult

[19] Linden Bicket analyzes St. Magnus motif in Brown's writing in Chapter "Magnus." See B i c k e t, *George Mackay Brown and the Scottish Catholic Imagination*, 111–41. For the importance of St. Magnus for Brown, see also F e r g u s s o n, *George Mackay Brown: The Life*, 63.

birth / In the last snow."[20] The lyrical self develops this thought in part five of the seven-fold poem. By the end of this part, there is a sudden shift in the geographical setting and the focus is moved from the Orkney context into an African one. The speaker in the poem intercedes for the women in the countries impoverished by civil wars[21] in Europe and in Africa who work to provide sustenance to their families at the time of hunger: "Be present at the fires / Of women in Bosnia and Somalia / Kneading dough smaller than fists."[22] In another part of the poem, he asks St. Magnus to support Catholic priests, identifying their problems and their crucial role in the world: "Magnus, pray for priests / In this time of hate / (Never such hate and anger over the earth)."[23]

The words in parenthesis work as direct turn to the reader, as if to ask him or her to pray for the priests as well, which is left in the sphere of subtle implication. The lyrical self identifies the saint as a natural patron of priests because of what Magnus withstood as he waited overnight in the "kirk in Egilsay."[24] The poem shows a brief insight into the night of vigil before his martyrdom: "At dawn an old priest lit the paschal candle / *Introibo ad altare Dei.*"[25]

The fact that he finishes part VI of this poem with "*Introibo ad altare Dei*"—the opening fragment of the Tridentine Mass that translates into English as "I will go in to the altar of God," clearly implies the hope and power coming from attending the Eucharist. Jason Goroncy notes that the Eucharist was in the center of Brown's understanding of community and that it remained the core of his particular atemporal perception of time:

> Notions both of time and of community are in fact grounded in and sponsor, for Brown, a vision of creation deeply informed by a Christian vision of history; more specifically, a vision appraised in terms of the Eucharist.... It is the Eucharist, and the world appraised through its eyes, that forms a community in the ways that Brown imagines, and that counters the possibility of "finding symbolic resonance in the present" apart from the community's own history and its hopes for the future.[26]

Brown was, however, very cautious not to be overtly pressing or direct in transmitting this experience of Catholic faith and Christian hope to his readers.

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[20] George Mackay B r o w n, "Song for St Magnus: 16 April," in *The Collected Poems of George Mackay Brown*, 403.

[21] The poem was first published in 1999, at the time when the impact of wars could be felt in particular in Bosnia and Somalia, resulting in massive humanitarian crises.

[22] George Mackay B r o w n, "Song for St Magnus: 16 April," 403.

[23] Ibidem, 404.

[24] Ibidem.

[25] Ibidem.

[26] See Jason G o r o n c y, "The Catholicity of Time in the Work of George Mackay Brown," *Pacifica: Australasian Theological Studies* 29, no. 1 (2016): 22–44.

When he describes the Eucharist, he talks about it in very simple, everyday terms, as in the poem "The Doors of Death":

> A poor man sat at my board.
> He broke the bread into blessings.
> …
>
> Who takes plough to the lord's glebe?
> Lord or labourer,
> It is man sets out on the long road
> The Inn of the Cornstalk.[27]

As it can be seen in the above excerpt, Brown relies on the power of a symbolic use of signs. The words like "bread," "blessings," "lord," "labourer," "long road," and "the Inn of the Cornstalk" can be associated with Christian spiritual existence. Sacramental life is in many other poems suggested by images of dough, seed, wine, salt, fish, ploughing, sowing, flailing, and many more. All these appear very prominently, but never too obviously, in his poetry and prose.[28]

Brown's understanding of his creative mission in terms of vocation or obligation to the people of his community and to the world at large can be seen as encoded in his stylistics. His poems reveal an absolutely non-obtrusive use of Christian and universal mythical symbolism that allows his style and his use of aesthetic devices to be very thrifty, often runic in effect.[29] The reader is invariably made to recognize the evoked stories that point to central human values. In this, Brown is a truly Catholic writer who seems to undertake and realize the Christian conception of the role of literature as expressed in Section 62 of the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, which he might have read or, at least, could have heard about:

> Literature and the arts are also, in their own way, of great importance…. They strive to make known the proper nature of man, his problems and his experiences…. They have much to do with revealing man's place in history and in the world; with illustrating the miseries and joys, the needs and strengths of man…. Thus they are able to elevate human life, expressed in multiple forms according to various times and regions.[30]

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[27] George Mackay B r o w n, "The Doors of Death," in *The Collected Poems of George Mackay Brown*, 448–9.

[28] See Anna W ę g r z y n i a k o w a, „Browna poezja ku czci chleba," in *Antologia z wyspy fok*, trans. Andrzej Szuba (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1989), 143–4.

[29] See Rasa R u s e c k i e n ė, "That Rune Will Unlock Time's Labyrinth...: Old Norse Themes and Motifs in George Mackay Brown's Poetry," *Scandinavistica Vilnensis*, no. 14 (2019): 116–7.

[30] Second Vatican Council, "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*" promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on December 7, 1965, Section 62.

Looking at the aesthetic and ethical patterns of Brown's poetry, it is very clear that he was trying to accomplish exactly the kind of task delineated above. He was constantly trying to elevate the Orkney way of living and to acknowledge the dignity of the people of the north, who spend their lives among their "miseries and joys."[31] He was striving to fortify them against the storms of the contemporary world by tentatively suggesting the existence of the rock of faith, hope, and caritas. He implied that these three values are redeeming in nature, and used them as catalyst factors which help reveal the essence behind world phenomena. Writing was Brown's way of indicating the values the generalized northern community and individuals should try to regain. With the condensed symbolic poetics of his works, he was tempting his readers to consider Christian hope, along with faith and caritas, as the sources of Orkney and Northern European culture. In all this he was never too sentimental, opting rather for the symbolic-naturalistic patterns of the troubles of life redeemed by rare moments of joy. This is, as it seems, the core of his understanding of hope, as well as being the essence of his faith-fortified, spiritual and poetic attitudes.

One might well ask why Brown was doing that. Why was he seeking for the sources of hope and ways of fortifying faith? The answer may be found in a broader reflection on how literature of post-romance origin uses the topos of hope. In *The Literature of Hope in the Middle Ages and Today*, Keyes argues: "If the world around one is a happy, healthy world, one need not search for ways to heal it or change it. Hope is not needed until the world falls short of our needs."[32] This is precisely the kind of thinking which seems to emanate from Brown's works focused on hope. His creative output is the response to the contemporary loss of meaning and undermining of values, and a remedy for the crisis of understanding the place of man in the scheme of things. Due to his negative assessment of the departure from the previous, tradition-established ways of life, Brown tries to actively counterbalance the negative impact of progress. He resorts to the time-established mission of the poet and the man of letters—the artist of the word—consisting in a restoration of the sense of identity. In all his poetry and elsewhere, he shows the rays of hope rooted in traditional community life that comes into contact with the elements. A crucial part of his aesthetic strategy is evoking the northern nations' history, with tentative emphasis on the paradigms of the prevailing life and of natural balance. He draws richly on the cultural legacy of Neolithic Orkney, Old Norse literature, Icelandic sagas, *The Orkneyinga Saga*, traditional Scottish ballads, and others, taking them as the prevailing model for composing the poetic or

[31] Ibidem.

[32] K e y e s, *The Literature of Hope in the Middle Ages and Today*, 21.

fictional worlds based on duality of "the concrete and abstract, the mundane and sacred."[33]

The confirmation of the above tendencies in his writing can be found in many written-down recollections of Brown's friends. In her biography of the poet, entitled *The Seed Beneath the Snow*, Joanna Ramsey recalls Brown's mature views of the role of poetry, which she heard directly from him in the last decade of his life.

> George went on to explain his view of the true purpose of poetry: "to enable us to come to terms with those powers that cannot be denied, that surround us wherever we turn." Poetry, he believed, has the power to reconstruct the way in which we see and experience the world: "The Furies ... are transfigured, they become the kindly ones, the powers we have feared have been our friends always. But this knowledge doesn't come easily or too soon."[34]

This reminiscence shows the poet's understanding of literature as a source of hope, found in the practical realization of the artist's program of creative life. However, one can also sense here some traces of a double ethical as well as phenomenological understanding of creative hope. This is the dual understanding that can be derived from modern ontology and epistemology. One might associate it with the philosophical argument which Brown might not have known directly, but of which, being the man of his times, he might have had an intuition: "Hope [can be considered] as the basis for the condition that has, since Heidegger, come to be known as *Dasein*, the unique being-in-the-world of self-conscious being."[35] To Brown, this sort of being-in-the-world is connected with culture and with nature, which nourishes this culture. He does not yield to modern pessimism but instead works on regenerating culture by returning to its roots. In this, he appears to be deeply Catholic and religious, as he seems to follow another intuition grasped in *Gaudium et Spes*. The gist of the idea omnipresent in Brown's poetry is expressed by the title of the relevant chapter of the document, namely, "Proper Development of Culture." The same message is even more extensively delineated in Section 53: "Man comes to a true and full humanity only through culture, that is through the cultivation of the goods and values of nature. Wherever human life is involved, therefore, nature and culture are quite intimately connected one with the other."[36]

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[33] R u s e c k i e n ė, "That Rune Will Unlock Time's Labyrinth...": 117.

[34] Joanna R a m s a y, *The Seed Beneath the Snow: Remembering George Mackay Brown* (Dingwall: Sandstone Press, 2015), 72.

[35] Nancy B i l l i a s, "Hope as a Moral Virtue," in *The Resilience of Hope*, ed. Janette McDonald and Andrea M. Stephenson (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), 22.

[36] *Gaudium et Spes*, Section 53.

This intuition can be found both in Brown's poetic texts and elsewhere, explaining the incessant focus of Brown's poetry, fiction, and drama on the culture-established and nature-inspired cycles of rural, farming, and fishing life. The expression for which the author opts is highly patterned and organized, being also very "minimalistic" and operating with "static images as if preserved for eternity."[37] His obsessions are calendar poems, cycle poems, seven-fold poems, poems based on the number twelve, which make it possible to observe the cycle of life in the natural world. He never forgets the human dimension, though, and his primary focus is always the individual experience of the phenomena taking place in the natural world.

In his poems, the Orkney farming and marine reality are connected to hope despite the dark aspects of life, such as death in childbirth, or death at sea, or the toils of a tinker's struggle for survival. This is the essence of Mackay Brown's understanding of human life, described in his archipelagic life stories. Among frequent pictures of figuratively represented human hope, there are the poetic scenes of women standing on the shore—either waiting for the return of the sailors, or peacefully contemplating their failure to return. An example of such a text is "The Old Women," which traces the scornful reactions of old village women to the drunkenness of the lyrical self. The poem ends with showing their tears shed at the death of a young sailor.[38]

A composite poem "Haiku: for The Holy Places," included in the posthumous collection *Travellers* published in 2001, interprets the Orkney reality of "hills half-sunk in the sea"[39] by means of a compassionate and hopeful perspective, pointing to the redeeming goodness of people amidst hardships characteristic of this location. The part of this poem entitled "The Northern Sky" is rendered through the imagery of contrastive "poles of light and darkness."[40] "Sea and cliffs," described further on, are compared to an artistic individual who seems to be both a sculptor and a poet: "Sea, old sculptor, carves from the western ramparts / Stack and cave and skerry, / Sweep harpist, with sagas of salt and stone."[41]

The pictures of stability get combined in images of life and death. The kirkyard is described along with the kirk as "always by the shore," while the tombstones are suggested to tell "The legends of the dead, their carved names

[37] R u s e c k i e n ė, "That Rune Will Unlock Time's Labyrinth...": 117.

[38] See George Mackay B r o w n, "The Old Women," in *The Collected Poems of George Mackay Brown*, 460.

[39] George Mackay B r o w n, "Haiku: for The Holy Places," in *The Collected Poems of George Mackay Brown*, 460.

[40] Ibidem.

[41] Ibidem.

/ Faced east, into first light, among sea sounds."[42] The geographical direction of east is here symbolically used to represent the Holy Land. This spiritual location, as the spatial context for the poem's semantic sphere, is also strongly suggested by the title of the sequence of haiku-like verses.

The reality of Brown's poetic Orkney is very much alive with storytelling. The stories that are told or hinted at suggest the survival of ethical values and a symbolic view of life. This is the world of plentiful impressions and of simple hopes like the hope for a rich harvest. Wind is rendered as "the million whispers of fulfilment in the green ears."[43] Even if the wishes and longings of the people are not directly expressed, with the saga-like poetics of restrained emotions, they are very forcefully present in the indirect way, encoded in the visual traces of human acts of withstanding toil and hardship. This much can be seen in the part of the poem "Haiku: for The Holy Places" entitled "Island Faces." The lyrical evocation of the contrast between the countenances of the farming and fishing folk is reconciled through the shared feature of stoicism visible on all the faces. Hope is also implied by the fact that people agree to be changed by the elements and yet constantly look ahead:

Island Faces
Many masks merge here, in an island face—
Pict, Norseman, Scot
Face of a crofter, gnawed with loam
Face of fishermen, seaman—
Gray of the sea, eyes level as horizons.[44]

Describing the face of a typical islander, the poet uses the concept of multiple masks, which becomes the image of intercultural convergence. It situates Orkney in the middle of a glocal (i.e., global and, at the same time, local), temporally suspended yet also constantly changing macrocosm, which is at the same time depicted as an insular microcosm. It shows the glocal culture which looks ahead of time hoping for survival, while it is deeply immersed in its complex, many-strand history. Another example of an image of hope working through the steadfast waiting and dynamic action is encoded in the image of seabirds at the cliff:

Fishing Bird
It waits, rock-fast, wind-flung
Wing-wind-enthirling
One flash from the sea's hoard.[45]

[42] Ibidem.
[43] Ibidem.
[44] Ibidem, 461.
[45] Ibidem.

We can see here that whenever Brown describes nature, it is clear that the sense of the image exceeds that of the element of natural wildlife although it also surely comprises it. As Dominique Delmaire asserts:

> Brown declares early on in his career that he belongs with those Orkney writers—poets, in fact—that are "interested in essences." For him, thanks to poetry one can "look on life as it was viewed, perhaps, by an angel's eye, *sub specie aeternitatis*,"[46] thus glimpsing what the abbot in *The Voyage of Saint Brandon* calls "a divine order and pattern beyond the range of the five human senses."[47] But, in order to achieve this, the poet must become a demiurge in miniature.[48]

In defining Orkney as a holy place Brown creates a multifarious and multi-faced reality structured so as to point to the eschatological dimension of human life. The reality in question is conceived in universal terms and it evokes the sacred. We can see how another section of the poem "Haiku: for The Holy Places" defines Orkney people in terms of biblical imagery. Brown applies the same set of images that Jesus used in his parables to explain the essential truths of human life to his disciples. Here those images serve to convey the sense of archipelagic, glocal, but also universal identity of man and his place in quotidian life:

> *Fishermen and Crofters*
> They hold the keys to earth and ocean,
> Earth-key the plough;
> Sea-opener, the net and sinker....[49]

In Brown's *oeuvre*, the storytelling in the poems has a compact, runic, and heraldic quality, while the narrative of a human life is conveyed through the tell-tale every-day objects used in apparently static but ultimately symbolic, dynamic ways. These are elements such as "keys," "plough," "net," "sinker," "corn," "fish," or "doors." All of them entail some action, some ritual, some rite of passage. The doors close and open, the corn is produced and eaten, the fish is caught and shared. Brown's way of telling these truths of life relies on making a strong contact with a common reader, the addressee that he envisaged for his poetry from the start of his career, as he stated in an early collection of

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[46] Quoted after George Mackay B r o w n, *An Orkney Tapestry* (London: Quartet Books, 1973), 160.

[47] Quoted after George Mackay B r o w n, *The Voyage of Saint Brandon*: *Three Plays* (London: Chatto & Windus and Hogarth Press, 1984), 146.

[48] Dominique D e l m a i r e, "Rhythm as Spiritual Pursuit in the Poetry of George Mackay Brown," *Études britanniques contemporaines*, no. 39 (2010), https://journals.openedition.org/ebc/2805?lang=en#entries.

[49] George Mackay B r o w n, "Haiku: for The Holy Places," 461.

poems *Loaves and Fishes* (1954). He confessed in a letter to a friend that he intended his poetry to "be simple and forthright and such as a crofter or a fisherman would read and remember with pleasure."[50] In the poems, the readers are confronted with the rudimentary stages of the cycle of life. The characters are shown coming into the archipelagic world or departing from this world, while the aim of their lives and deaths is not directly commented upon, but implied. Invariably, people are heading to some larger, possibly heavenly, reality, while the supposition is kept very low-key in terms of wording, as in the section of the poem "Haiku: for The Holy Places" entitled "Fishermen and Crofters":

> Seventy years nourished with corn and fish,
> They open the mysterious door,
> Go, most into earth,
> a few through the door of the sea.
> They gain the richness of man through the elements.[51]

Although death is shown going "into earth" or "through the door of sea," the suggestion is of this being part of a larger human journey. Hope for the spiritual reality and abundant life is thus expressed, while the life on earth is shown just as a stage on the way there, as suggested by the phrase "they gain the richness." The hardships of life, epigrammatically rendered as "the elements," are thus perceived with the hopeful attitude for their positive ultimate sense.

In shaping his poetic pictures of Orkney community, Brown artistically revives and symbolically reinterprets the Northern European Christian tradition. The legacy of culture is what he sees as the source of hope for the secularized modern world. Brown seems to take on the responsibility of "the artisan of culture of [his] community,"[52] which is a crucial element of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council. When talking to his family and friends about his own occupation, the poet often described himself as a craftsman of the word, comparing himself to a maker of tables.[53] This comparison was not a way of downgrading himself. It revealed his attitude to literature as providing spiritual and (meta)physical sustenance.

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[50] George Mackay B r o w n, Letter to Ernest W. Marwick, January 12, 1954, Kirkwall Library Archive, D31/30/4, quoted after Dominique D e l m a i r e, "The Subject and his Stories: Lyricality in the Narrative Poetry of George Mackay Brown," *Temporel: revue littéraire et artistique*, May 10, 2012, http://temporel.fr/The-Subject-and-his-Stories.

[51] Ibidem.

[52] *Gaudium et Spes*, Section 55.

[53] As remembered by Fraser Dixon and Alison Gray, revealed in conversations with the author of this article in February 2016.

Notably, the combined aesthetic and spiritual treatment of the topos of hope results from Brown's early recognition of the regenerative mission of a poet. He went as far as to suggest that this mission is similar to that of a saint. In his thinking, the two figures can and should work to rebuild the broken foundations of community life. The poem "Prologue," which opens *The Storm*, his first poetic volume of 1954, formulates this idea long before his formal conversion, demonstrating that some of his ideas germinated throughout his lifetime. In "Prologue," Brown expresses the hope that a poet and a saint—represented as a kind of tandem of spiritual workers—can rebuild the ruin the Scottish nation and Orkney has come to through the impact of certain religious reformers. Short as it is, "Prologue" seems to be Brown's anticipatory projection of numerous themes and concerns from his future writing, providing a sort of program-defining statement.[54] Apart from pinpointing his focus as his homeland—the archipelagic reality of the Orkney Islands—it redefines the poet's identity in terms of his role for the community in which he lives. Only then does he state his larger-scale mission for the whole of Scotland. In his confession of why he engages in poetic acts, named as "singing," the lyrical self is all the time universal, as demonstrated by his choice of wording. He suggests establishing connections with different groups of people so as to provide them with aesthetic pleasure and to inspire them with spiritual hopes for a potential regeneration. Thus his poetry offers an insight into the essence of the modern crisis of culture.[55] All the time, his voice is exceedingly patterned, and highly rhythmical in effect, the two features which will always remain the indication of the "divine order"[56] in Brown's poetry:

> For the islands I sing,
> and for a few friends;
> not to foster means
> or be midwife to ends.
>
> For workers in field
> and mill and mine
> who break earth's bread
> and crush her wine.[57]

[54] Archie B e v a n and Brian M u r r a y, "Introduction," in *The Collected Poetry of George Mackay Brown*, xii.

[55] This crisis of culture, as Rowena Murray and Brian Murray show, has been an ongoing concern for Brown, who tried to counteract it, the way he could and on the scale he thought appropriate, with his writing. See M u r r a y and M u r r a y, *Interrogation of Silence*, 124–5.

[56] See D e l m a i r e, "Rhythm as Spiritual Pursuit."

[57] George Mackay B r o w n, "Prologue," in *The Collected Poems of George Mackay Brown*, 1.

While the poet expresses here his personal obligation of singing for his friends, he hastens to add his hope for influencing other groups. They are people engaged in physical work of various types, named through a deeply biblical, symbolic imagery of farmers and workers producing the Eucharistic signs: bread and wine. The symbolic connection of wine to the Christian story of the Incarnation and the Redemption is clear as in Scotland wine is not a typical regional product. This makes bread and wine signs of hope resonant with the universal sacramental image of salvation, as well as pointing to the realization of the human mission of caritas through labor.[58] When the lyrical first person ultimately states, "For Scotland I sing," he shows his intention to be a voice heard everywhere. He hopes to have an impact on the nation he finds physically, culturally, and—implicitly—spiritually ruined:

> For Scotland I sing,
> the Knox-ruined nation,
> that poet and saint
> must rebuild with their passion.[59]

Although it seems like Brown is here strongly against the Reformation as a whole, it is rather the expression of his particular scepticism about the universally positive impact of John Knox on Scottish culture. Brown's attitude was inspired by his teacher and friend Edwin Muir,[60] another Scottish modernist poet of Orkney origin.

As Brown's life in the Orkney community demonstrated, he worked as its cultural convenor, inspiring many artists and people broadly connected with culture to come to Orkney or even to settle there. Ever since its founding in 1977 by a group of his friends and himself, he would invite some renowned poets and writers to the St. Magnus Festival. Brown was also a mentor to poets of a younger generation, such as Alastair Mackie (1925–1995), Alan Spence (born 1947), and Alan Riach (born 1957), to name but a few. Many of them recall, with warm feelings, the fact that it was enough to write a letter to him, sending some early poetry, and come over to tea when visiting Orkney, without arranging the date for the visit.[61] Rowena Murray and Brian Murray

[58] See *Gaudium et Spes*, Section 45.

[59] George Mackay B r o w n, "Prologue," 1.

[60] See Edwin M u i r, *John Knox: Portrait of a Calvinist* (New York: Viking Press, 1929); see also F e r g u s o n, *George Mackay Brown: The Wound and the Gift*.

[61] Alan Riach mentioned it in a conversation with the author of this article in February 2016. In a conversation of May 2014, Alan Spence shared his moment of visiting Brown without prior notice: the then budding poet was "introduced just by knocking at his door." Both poets remember Brown's kind words of encouragement and the older colleague's sound, but gently expressed criticism. Riach and Spence have become very influential Scottish poetic voices.

claim that Brown's writing actually boosted tourism in Orkney: "Like Scott, Wordsworth and Burns, Brown created an industry of visitors to the places he described imaginatively; tourists have been drawn by the descriptions of a creative writer."[62]

Brown was indeed very open and, one can say, ecumenical in his personal contacts as well as influences. The effect he had indeed spread far and wide, as can be exemplified by the friendship he made with Sir Peter Maxwell Davies (1934–2016), the Master of the Queen's Music (2004–2010), as well as the friendship with the Church of Scotland Minister Ron Ferguson. We can see an example of the power of his works to affect people in the fact that *An Orkney Tapestry* was the chief reason for Maxwell Davies moving to Orkney in 1971. The world-famous composer settled in an Atlantic-facing traditional croft in the valley of Rackwick on Hoy as he got fascinated with the location after reading Brown's text overnight. Maxwell Davies, who was an atheist, later on composed many works to the texts by Brown, for instance the chamber opera *The Martyrdom of St Magnus* (which premiered in 1977), inspired by Brown's novel *Magnus* (1973).[63] A similar spiritual influence is remembered by Ron Ferguson, Brown's biographer, in *George Mackay Brown: The Wound and the Gift*. Ferguson acknowledges that while coming, with his family, in 1990, to take over services in St. Magnus Cathedral, he was filled with doubts and fears. He states that he found faith and support that he needed in Brown's poetry: "Will the hushed congregation want me to believe *for* them? Can I even believe for myself? Probably, yes, with a bit of help from the poets. Maybe even from the bard of Stromness himself."[64] Brown's writing evidently gave people hope.

The body of Brown's writing shows that he perceived his mission to work on recovering the world of lost values as the job of rebuilding the community through the little ones. In Brown's numerous works, the central compositional principle is that of drawing the reader's attention to the rejected men. He shows reverence for them, elevates their stance, reveals some faith in them, or at least hope for a change in their situation, be it upon their death. This is so in the poem "The Death Bird,"[65] which shows a contrast between the rich grocer and the local drunkard Peero, only to imply the elevation of the poor. The death of the unfortunate one is announced by a lark's singing "wildly

[62] M u r r a y and M u r r a y, *Interrogation of Silence*, 62.

[63] See Peter M. D a v i e s, "Pax Orcadiensis," in *Selected Writings by Peter Maxwell Davies*, ed. Nicholas Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 127–8.

[64] See F e r g u s o n, *George Mackay Brown: The Wound and the Gift*.

[65] For a more extensive discussion of the poem in question, as well as of the patterns of the little objects and little people, see Halszka L e l e ń, "(Nie)świętość rzeczy najmniejszych a aksjologia codzienności w *Antologii z wyspy fok* George'a Mackaya Browna," in *Święci i świętość w języku, literaturze i kulturze*, ed. Halszka Leleń and Tomasz Żurawlew (Kraków: Universitas, 2018), 325–6.

cheering / Peero's sweet translation / From ratflesh to light."[66] Brown seems to be realizing what *Gaudium et Spes* advocates in Section 27, namely taking the attitude of "reverence for men": "Everyone must consider his every neighbour without exception as another self, taking into account first of all His life and the means necessary to living with dignity, so as not to imitate the rich man who had no concern for the poor man Lazarus."[67]

Earlier in the same text, in the chapter entitled "The Dignity of the Human Person," it is made clear that "the mystery of man" may be realized only "in the mystery of the incarnate word." This association is called "taking on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ the Lord."[68] This is accomplished by Brown in his choice of the metaphors of the agrarian, rural type to describe the common everyday toil of archipelagic community and transpose their hardships into the reality of the parables of Jesus.[69] We can see this quasi-parabolic, universalizing tendency reflected in Brown's numerous poems, such as "Beachcomber," "Tinker's Wife," and "Halcro," where the poet's focus is the weak and the rejected by the community. The poet draws attention to the people of the lowest levels of the archipelagic social ladder through exploring their little hopes and moments of existential and spiritual delight. We can see this principle at work in the poem "A Child's Calendar," which enumerates the seasonal glimpses of Orkney community life and landscape from the little one's perspective, only to relate them all to the story of the Incarnation:

> Nothing in November
> But tinkers at the door, kenning, with cans.
>
> Some December midnight
> Christ, lord, lie warm in our byre.
> Here are stars, an ox, poverty enough.[70]

The imagery of the birth of Jesus is indeed a frequent topos applied figuratively in Brown's writing.[71] His poems recreate the sensory impressions experienced by some little characters of archipelagic Orkney, while they also evoke

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[66] George Mackay B r o w n, "The Death Bird," *The Collected Poems of George Mackay Brown*, 26.

[67] *Gaudium et Spes*, Section 27.

[68] Ibidem, Section 22.

[69] See W ę g r z y n i a k o w a, *Browna poezja ku czci chleba*, 146.

[70] George Mackay B r o w n, "A Child's Calendar," in *The Collected Poems of George Mackay Brown*, 123.

[71] It has been discussed by Linden Bicket in Chapter Five, "The Nativity of Christ," of her monograph. See B i c k e t, *George Mackay Brown and the Scottish Catholic Imagination*, 142–74.

the universalized reality of numerous Nativity scenes. A frequent technique is recalling the petty trials and tribulations of life in the islands, as in the poem "Themes" from the 1959 collection *Loaves and Fishes*. In this poem, Brown connects the archetypal figures of tinkers, women waiting for the sailors on the shore, and ploughmen working in the field, thus creating a composite picture of endurance. The imagery is clearly Christian and biblical. It is rich in allegorical and symbolic overtones evoked by simple concepts, such as "corn," "love," "birth," "death," the "sea," and the "earth." The text is focused on showing the mounting of multi-sensory images:

> Tinker themes cry through
> The closes of my breath—
> Straw and tapestry shaken
> With kennings of love and birth;
> Odyssean corn returning
> Across furrows of death;
> Women scanning the sea;
> Ploughmen wounding the earth.[72]

The poetic picture of the world suggests the hope that words can grasp to reproduce the essence of the experience of the reality. One can clearly see here the logocentric focus of Brown as a poet and writer who always strives to grasp the experience through the poetic means of textual organization. The range of phonetic devices he employs is impressive without ever being overwhelming. The use of the local color of the island (evocations of tinkers, women and ploughmen engaged in everyday toil which serves survival through such activities as breathing and eating, giving birth, and dying) is framed so as to draw attention to the making of words, the essence of *logopoeia*, according to Greek etymology of the term. Thus Brown's poems suggest meanings related to hope and endurance, at the same time representing them in the phenomenological and aesthetic way.

Looking at the above examples, we can find in Brown's works an understanding of hope close to the Catholic reflection on this value present in the teaching of John Paul II. Brown finds and affirms hope in the world as if noting that "creation is permeated with a redemptive sanctification, even a divinization."[73] One might go as far as to say that Brown, like the Pope that he admired so much, seems to cherish "*the fundamental affirmation of the value of existence, the value of creation and of hope in the future life* [which]

[72] George Mackay B r o w n, "Themes," in *The Collected Poems of George Mackay Brown*, 21.

[73] J o h n P a u l II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, ed. Vittorio Messori (New York: Knopf, 2005), 22.

is neither a naïve joy, nor a vain hope."[74] This is the way Pope John Paul II conceptualized hope in *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*. Brown's way of describing hope inherent in the archipelagic existence is definitely Christian and Catholic without his ever stating the fact more openly. It is very consistent with the argument that underlies the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, which is clear when we look at the opening paragraph of this document. It specifies that the hope of common people is connected with the troubles of daily existence and the indelible precariousness of life. These difficult aspects are identified as the center of the attitude of solidarity of the followers of Jesus towards humanity:

> The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every man. That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds.[75]

As a member of the Orkney community as well as a European poet conscious of his mission, Brown cherished hope in the crucial identity-shaping role of literature, poetry, and narrative. He conceived this as the realization of the aesthetically shaped and aesthetically responsible ancient art of storytelling. It seems that with his work he was trying to give Orkney and Northern European culture and people a sense of identity, as well as to establish and consolidate their sense of belonging, and thus to (re)instill hope.

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[74] Ibidem. Emphasis in the text.

[75] *Gaudium et Spes*, Section 1.

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ABSTRACT / ABSTRAKT

Halszka LELEŃ, Orcadian Poetics of Hope: Lyrical Dimensions and (Ex)tensions of the Topos in the Poetry of George Mackay Brown
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The article overviews the literary topos of hope in the poetic works of major Scottish Catholic writer George Mackay Brown (1921–1996). It turns out that hope, conceived as a theological virtue, determines the underlying patterns of his literary worlds, although Mackay never made it overexplicit or an obvious conclusion for his readers to draw. Rather than directly speak of faith and of the joy of hope that faith brings, Brown opted for the indirect frames of narrating the poetic stories of individual and community ascent and demise, followed by regeneration. His lyrical visions of Orkney archipelagic communities are made universal by focusing on the cycles of human life, represented by birth, toil, and death, often described as entering some further "door." The use of Gospels-rooted plain imagery of farming and fishing makes it possible for the poems to touch upon the fundamental truths of human life and to infuse them with the Christian system of beliefs. In foregrounding this aspect, Brown gently conducts his poetic and ethical mission of working for the benefit of his archipelagic homeland, for Scotland, and for humanity in general. Inspired by Gerald Manley Hopkins and St. John Henry Newman, he seems to have launched upon the mission of reviving the sense of union of the whole creation so as to counter the modern crisis of culture. Brown's imagery of hope and faith can also be set against the Catholic teaching on hope expressed in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes* and in the book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* by John Paul II, whom Brown greatly admired. In Brown's poetic world, art has a sacramental dimension and it can therefore inspire people with hope. At the same time, hope is represented as a virtue which can be found in the most unlikely and poorly facets of individual and communal life. Brown finds glory and hope in the world of everyday work and scarcity. His lyrical evocations get their energy from the juxtaposition of some fundamental signs, highlighted by a sparing use of poetic devices. He frequently operates with runic compactness and saga-like emotional restraint. With the use of the technique of understatement, the idea of hope that permeates the life of an individual and the community among the common daily hardships is all the more powerful and persuasive for the reader who is encouraged to play an active role in searching for the dispersed textual signs.

Keywords: Catholic and universal dimensions of hope, Scottish archipelagic poetry, poetic vision of Orcadian life patterns, George Mackay Brown

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Halszka LELEŃ, Orkadyjska poetyka nadziei. Liryczne wymiary i napięcia toposu w wybranej poezji George'a Mackay'a Browna
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Artykuł bada wielowymiarową realizację toposu nadziei w utworach poetyckich jednego z ważniejszych szkockich pisarzy katolickich George'a Mackay'a Browna (1921-1996). W szczegółowym oglądzie okazuje się, że u Browna nadzieja rozumiana w duchu nauczania Kościoła katolickiego (jako cnota teologiczna) jest podstawą wielu estetycznych uporządkowań i zabiegów w obrębie konstrukcji świata lirycznego. Nigdy jednak nadzieja nie jest ukazywana w sposób zbyt natarczywy dla w dużej mierze protestanckich i ateistycznych czytelników dzieł poety. Zamiast mówić otwarcie o wierze i o radości płynącej z nadziei, którą wiara przynosi, Brown wybiera niebezpośrednie sposoby snucia poetyckich narracji o indywidualnych i wspólnotowych wzlotach i upadkach, przy czym upadki są nieodmiennie drogą do jakiegoś odrodzenia. W poezji Browna liryczne wizje archipelagu Orkadów i jego wspólnot są przy tym ujmowane jako uniwersalne. Zostaje to osiągnięte poprzez liczne odwołania do cyklu ludzkiego życia, na który składają się narodziny, trudy istnienia i śmierć, często ukazywana jako przejście przez jakieś kolejne „drzwi". Użycie prostych, nawiązujących do życia rolników i rybaków, znaków i symboli, zaczerpniętych z preindustrialnych realiów wyspiarskich, jak i z tekstów Ewangelii, sprawia, że wiersze te dotykają fundamentalnych prawd ludzkiego życia i pozwalają naświetlić je za pośrednictwem chrześcijańskiego systemu przekonań i wartości. Poprzez uwypuklenie tych elementów Brown realizuje wizję misji nie tylko poetyckiej, ale też etycznej – pracy dla dobra swego archipelagicznego społeczeństwa, dla Szkocji i dla szeroko pojętej ludzkości. Czerpiąc inspirację z poezji Gerarda Manleya Hopkinsa i św. Johna Henry'ego Newmana, Brown podejmuje swego rodzaju poetycką misję odzyskania, czy też uzyskania, poetyckiego zjednoczenia całego stworzenia, tak aby przeciwdziałać współczesnemu kryzysowi kultury. Sposób, w jaki Brown wykorzystuje topos nadziei i motyw wiary, daje się przy tym zestawić z nauczaniem o nadziei wyrażonym w Konstytucji duszpasterskiej o Kościele w świecie współczesnym *Gaudium et spes* oraz w książce *Przekroczyć próg nadziei* Jana Pawła II. W poetyckiej wizji Browna poezja nabiera swego rodzaju wymiaru sakramentalnego i ma za zadanie inspirować ludzi nadzieją. Brown przedstawia nadzieję jako życiodajną wartość, którą odnaleźć można w najmniejszych i najmniej spektakularnych elementach życia wspólnotowego i jednostkowego.

Słowa kluczowe: katolickie i uniwersalne wymiary nadziei, szkocka poezja archipelagiczna, poetycka wizja życia na Orkadach, George Mackay Brown

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