

University of Glasgow

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Level 3: The Scottish Renaissance and its Legacy

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Small Town Life and the Place of Women in
Willa Muir's Novel *Imagined Corners*

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Matriculation Number: XXX

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1. Introduction

Considering the role Scottish women writers have played in the literary scene, it becomes obvious that many of them have been unjustly not recognised by critics of our century. It is especially the case with Willa Muir where one can find this attitude: being married to the famous writer Edwin Muir, she had adapted herself for the sake of the family to the role of the poet's wife, supporting her husband's career while she herself did not display her talent. She stood in the background while her husband was a celebrated figure. The critic Butter believes that "Her greatest work ... was to make possible the production of his poetry."¹ And yet he also acknowledges Willa's literary achievements, just as other critics slowly begin to recognise her work².

This essay will have in its centre the examination of one of her novels, namely *Imagined Corners*, published in 1931. It is a novel which portrays small town life in Scotland and its effects on the inhabitants. Special attention will be paid to a characterisation of the setting Calderwick as well as to the place women have in the Presbyterian community. As far as possible, the role of men will be neglected. To explore this point fully would take too far afield from the examination.

¹Butter, P.H. "Willa Muir: Writer". *Centenary Assessments*. Eds. C.J.M. MacLachlan and D.S. Robb. Aberdeen: ASLS, 1990. 58-74. 59.

² cf. Gifford, Douglas, ed. *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997. 584.

To gain an adequate background, it is necessary to explore Willa Muir's position in society. Main features of this interaction can be found to be transferred by her into the characterisation of the Scottish society as described in her novel. Furthermore, one can easily detect parallels between herself and her female characters. Those and other women will be portrayed, for they possess special traces in their personalities which guide the reader to an understanding of the contemporary society.

2. Willa Muir and Scottish Society: an Interaction

The contemporary role society demanded from women to play manifests itself in the proverb Kirk, Kids, Kitchen. It expresses perfectly well that it was a woman's task to belong to the house, the private sphere. There they had to cope with religion, education, and of course with the household. Patriarchal society forced about a "cult of domesticity"³, and women were regarded as second-class citizens in this system.

Willa Muir herself had refused to accept the role society gave to her as woman since her childhood. In her autobiography *Belonging*, an account of her life with Edwin, she stresses that "I had been too often roused to

³ Devine, F.M. and R.J.Finlay. *Scotland in the Twentieth Century*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996. 189.

resentment in my youth by the bland assumption around me that men were superior to women in all ways..."⁴. When she writes years later her article "Women: An Inquiry", Willa Muir examines this common point of view more closely, and she also tries to find a solution which would suit women and men to gain a fair treatment of both sexes. Basically, she argues that it is the woman who has to develop another understanding of herself and of her position in society, she has to become aware of her necessity⁵. How could Willa Muir herself live up to this ideal of a partnership as the basis between men and women?

Obviously, the domination of men was an attitude unknown to Edwin Muir: instead, the relationship between Willa and her husband seemed to be based upon the principle of equality. "He refused to boast himself up the ladder into becoming a dominant male, and I refused to be pushed down in into female subserviency."⁶. What strikes the reader to be an unusual way to act in a marriage in those days was in fact not wholeheartedly lived, for Willa Muir could not entirely free herself from the private sphere she had to belong to.

When thinking about the production of her literary output, for example, she remembers bitterly how her husband could sit down at the top of the house to write

⁴ Muir, Willa. *Belonging. A Memoir*. London: Hogarth Press, 1968. 38.

⁵ Muir, Willa. "Women: An Inquiry". *Willa Muir: Imagined Selves*. Ed. Kirsty Allen. Edinburgh: Canongate, 1996. 24.

⁶ Muir, Willa. *Belonging...*, 138.

from time to time a poem while she herself studied on the ground floor, interrupted by intruders; yet she had an unbending will to take the burden as a housewife and a writer, so she worked with an enormous speed until late at night⁷.

Taken at the whole, she had clearly sacrificed herself to the needs of Edwin's career. Willa Muir herself was aware of that fact, too, and so she claims:

I am left without a shred of literary reputation. And I am ashamed of the fact that I feel it as a grievance. ... And yet, and yet, I want to be acknowledged.⁸

This citation shows how desperately Willa Muir was striving for an acceptance which she did unfortunately not experience during life-time. The reason that it did not happen was not due to a lack of her ability as a writer, but rather due to the society in which she lived and which put limitations on women.

In writing *Imagined Corners* Willa Muir makes use of a small town in Scotland to bring about those aspects of life which had also restricted her as a woman in those days. Therefore, it is crucial to examine the town and its structure more closely.

2. The Town of Calderwick

⁷ cf. *ibid.*, 163.

⁸ Rowland Mudge, Patricia. "A Quorum of Willas. Another Look at Willa Muir". *Chapman* 71 (1922-23): 1-7. 6.

Calderwick is a fictional town on the north-east coast of Scotland, an ancient burgh that attracts tourists in summer time and exists due to trade and agriculture. The life in this town is ordered, there seems to be nothing special about Calderwick. In fact, it could be any town in Scotland, for there are no outstanding features.

Calderwick comes to life with its inhabitants, and it is because of their appearance that the town gains certain characteristics that reveal that it has a personality of its own.

The basic structure of the town is easily sketched: the institution of the church is represented through the Presbyterian minister William Murray, and the field of trade is represented through John Shand, owner of Calderwick's mill. These are the two most important positions, incorporating the most power. Significantly, they are held by men.

The narrative is set in the upper middle class of Calderwick's society, concentrating upon the Shand family and their members. But, as Willa Muir herself declared, the novel "had enough material in it for two novels"⁹, and so it is also the story of the minister's family that is closely connected with the main action. Together both form a ground for a narrative so various to unfold that it needs one basic root to rely on, namely the town of Calderwick itself. It presents itself not just as the

⁹ Muir, Willa. *Belonging...*, 163.

background of the novel: society and traditions even personalise it and it becomes threatening for those who do not conform to the rules. One of the female characters, John Shand's sister Lizzie for example, realises that "If she allowed it, Calderwick would reduce her too in size until she was merely Charlie Shand's wild daughter again."¹⁰.

The destructive power of the town comes frequently into play when mean gossip is spreading around. For this reason John Shand hesitates at the very beginning of the novel to invite his sister, and it is Elizabeth's fate to appear as a failed wife and being the talk of the town, because she does not know how to behave in society.

How narrow-minded the people are becomes obvious when one takes a closer look at the common attitudes. Especially the situation of women embodies a rich source to underline how laughable these attitudes really are. Considering the role of women, it is a woman herself who depicts with her sharp mind the situation of her gender:

They were absorbed in upholding their status as successful people, with power over children, dogs, objects of art and rival competitions. Personalities spreading like trees, thought Elise, measuring their importance by the size of the shadow they cast.¹¹

Whether women smoking cigarettes or men walking arm-in-arm by light with their wives, society holds many traps for the inhabitants to be caught in. No wonder that there

¹⁰ Muir, Willa. *Imagined Corners. Willa Muir: Imagined Selves*. Ed. Kirtsy Allen. Edinburgh: Canongate, 1996. 156.

¹¹ *ibid.*, 231.

is an atmosphere of envy and mistrust, everybody is being observed, turning out to be the next source of gossip.

Calderwick appears to be a prison for the people who live in, and the fact that three of them are running away from the town and the reigning tensions highlights this assumption.

A closer look at single female characters of the novel proves to be useful to gain a deeper insight into Scottish life and its social and moral code.

4. Portraits of Calderwick's Women

Before the female characters of the novel are characterised, it has to be mentioned that the two main stories, which are being told, force an division within the number of women that appear in the novel. Since Elizabeth Shand and Elise Muetze are the main female protagonists of the story, portraits of them and their female relatives and companions will be drawn first. Members of the community like Ann and Mary Watson or Sarah Murray, which belong to a lower scale in society, will be examined next.

Each of the women in the novel offers the reader an insight into the female world of the first decade of the twentieth century. It is interesting to point out their different perception and actual situation of their

position in society. Whenever useful, parallels will be drawn to autobiographical contexts in Willa Muir's life.

4.1. Elizabeth Shand

From the beginning on, Elizabeth is introduced to the reader as a stranger in the town of Calderwick, and she remains one until her final escape. That she does not really belong to the community can be realised soon, for she is talked about a lot before she finally takes actively part in the narrative.

The image the reader perceives from Elizabeth is one of an intelligent young woman who has done well at university. Falling in love with and marrying Hector Shand, the black sheep of the family, brings her to his hometown Calderwick where she has to stand the social position of the Shand family. The expectations from this new role Elizabeth are very high.

Mainly, they can be reduced to her function as Hector's wife, which is to keep her husband on the right track. Indeed Hector himself expects his "precious wife to help him not to make a bloody mess of his life and she turns round and sneers at him"¹². Hector feels hurt and betrayed, because Elizabeth refuses to obey him. She does not want to be dictated what to do and what to think.

¹² *ibid.*, 94.

The quarrel that emerges between the young couple is just the climax of a series of misunderstandings and wrong expectations. Their love is built upon sensual attraction, wrongly misinterpreted by Elizabeth as true love. Hector himself is proud of having her as a valuable property. "She was the biggest success he ever had. ... He was the first man she had ever fallen for."¹³. Elizabeth is for him merely an object, she has to be there for him according to the role as a good wife. Once he returns home in the evening and is deeply disappointed not to find Elizabeth in the drawing-room. He believes that her place to be is in the house. After all, this is just one tradition Elizabeth has to struggle with. Her new role as wife is puzzling her in a way that she feels a strong loss of identity:

...she awoke with an anguished feeling that she was lost and no longer knew who she was. ... There was sweat on her brow and her heart was thumping; the world stretched out on all sides into dark impersonal nothingness and she herself was a terrifying anonymity¹⁴ .

Elizabeth first does not want to adapt to the conventional opinion her new role requires, but after the argument between herself and Hector she finally decides to become the noble wife society wants her to be. Her self-reproaching attitude to be unable to attract and to keep a husband can also be found in Willa Muir's *Belonging*: there she clearly states her failure as a wife

¹³ *ibid.*, 44f.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 64.

at a point when Edwin wants to leave her in favour of a German student named Gerda¹⁵. Just as Elizabeth identifies herself wholly with her husband, it is also Willa Muir who feels that "if Edwin and I did not belong together, I now Belonged nowhere."¹⁶.

Torn in two, Elizabeth is experiencing an identity crisis, rooted in the restrictive role as a dutiful wife. The marriage of herself and Hector fails not only because of the inadequacy of Hector as a husband, as Robb suggests in his interpretation¹⁷.

It is also because of the expectations society has, Elizabeth's unwillingness to follow them and her romanticism which prevents her from gaining a realistic understanding of the actual situation.

Significantly, it is a woman with the same name, namely Lizzie Shand, her sister-in-law, who comes to rescue her. Instead of perceiving the end of Hector's love like the end of the world, Elise opens to her a new perspective. Although Elizabeth is an intellectual young woman who sometimes comes to think about criticising her husband and the way he treats her, she is still crying for him. When she and Elise are on the train that brings them to a promising future in Europe, Elizabeth only feels that the

¹⁵ cf. Muir, Willa. *Belonging...*, 84.

¹⁶ cf. *ibid.*, 84.

¹⁷ cf. Robb, David S. "The Published Novels of Willa Muir." *Studies in Scottish Fiction: Twentieth Century*. Eds. Joachim Schwend and Horst W. Drescher. Peter Lang: Frankfurt a.M., Bern, New York, Paris, 1990. 149-161. 158.

¹⁸ cf. Willa Muir: *Imagined Corners...*, 281.

vines in the landscape are crippled, just like herself¹⁸. That her husband ran away with another woman had destroying effects on her, but there is still hope left, for she also possesses an apparent strength.

4.2. Elise Muetze

Just like Elizabeth is much talked about before finally taking part in the narrative, it is also with Elise that one finds a whole range of opinions and attitudes towards the woman before she finally appears. This fact marks her as a stranger, too, who does not belong to the town's community.

The reader gets to know that Lizzie, as she was called in her youth, ran away from Calderwick with a married German man at the age of nineteen. Being ashamed of having an outsider as a member in the family, her brother John did not want to meet her again. Nevertheless, it is due to his affection that he invites her twenty years later.

Elise Muetze, having married a German scholar, is a widow when she returns to Scotland in order to find herself again after Karl's death.

The doppelgaenger-motiv that one is involuntarily aware of because of the same name of the two main protagonists, gives us a hint to the parallels in the women's lives. To

be not accepted from Calderwick is just one similarity, to identify themselves through men another.

And yet Elise Muetze suffers another loss of identity as Elizabeth does. The cause of Elizabeth's crisis is to become married to a man, while Elise suffers to have lost one. Sadly she remembers that "Karl had been her measure for so long that without him she was lost."¹⁹.

His death reveals another aspect of Elise's life which can also be compared to Willa Muir's. Elise claims that Karl survived in the literature he produced, while she herself had nothing to show; one can assume that this feeling to be "anonymous nourishment"²⁰ for her husband's career corresponds to Willa Muir's role in her marriage to Edwin.

Furthermore, this dependence on men is even evident in John's case, for it is his love as a brother that gives Elise a sense of her own value.

But the dependence is not just a mental one, it turns also out to be financial. With a shock Elise has to realise that it was John's financial support during the last twenty years that enabled her to lead the kind of lifestyle she has now. It is a bitter experience for Elise, being deprived of her pride and feeling like one of those ordinary women who were "economic parasites"²¹ in her eyes. The return to Calderwick makes her painfully

¹⁹ *ibid.*, 147.

²⁰ *ibid.*, 149.

²¹ *ibid.*, 230.

aware of the image of the fallen woman society perceives her to be:

Aunt Janet despises me as a prostitute. Mabel envies me as a successful prostitute. John worries about me as a prostitute turned respectable, who may elapse again at any moment. Not one of my kin can accept me as I am.²²

When Elise meets Elizabeth, very soon a feeling of trust establishes itself between those two women. Caird's question about the exact function of Elise cannot simply be answered as being "meant to be a turning point in the action"²³. It is indeed one insofar as that Elizabeth herself becomes aware of other opportunities how to see the world she lives in. Her escape with Elise is a start into a promising new future. Elise has vague plans, according to the *Gebiet* she discovered for herself, namely "to clear away stones of prejudice and superstition so that other girls might grow up in a more kindly soil."²⁴. Elizabeth is meant to take part in her enterprise to establish a new social code. This can clearly be evaluated as a triumph of self-determination over the patriarchal-minded society.

4.3. Janet Shand

²² *ibid.*, 164.

²³ Caird, Janet. "Cakes Not Turned. Willa Muir's Publishes Novels". *Chapman* 71 (1922-23): 12-19. 13.

Janet Shand is a crucial character in the novel, for she represents all those values society stands for.

It is interesting to know that it was her who brought up young Hector Shand after his mother's death, so the old woman has a close relationship to him. Whenever attacked, she defends Hector, whether it is his seduction of Bell Duncan or his first escape from Calderwick.

With the jealousy of a mother she observes the coming of his bride. To guarantee their high social scale she wants to introduce Elizabeth to a woman's customs in Calderwick. Yet Aunt Janet cannot free herself from mistrusting her: "Elizabeth, she felt, was not quite the right kind of wife. There was something that made one uncertain"²⁵. She expects Elizabeth to fulfil the role as a proper wife. From her point of view, representing the one from society, that means to lead Hector into the right direction, to take a place at church and to behave according to her status in Calderwick.

Unfortunately, Elizabeth does not match with the role Aunt Janet has in mind for her. She herself has to observe that Elizabeth is talking to her maid on the street and that she is sitting so close to the Reverend, that her foot is placed between his feet²⁶. It is Aunt Janet who reproaches not only Elizabeth for this behaviour, but she also wants Hector to dictate his wife how to behave accordingly to the moral code in town.

²⁴ Muir, Willa. *Imagined Corners...*, 281.

²⁵ *ibid.*, 24.

No wonder that Aunt Janet also despises Elise, she even "hates her like poison"²⁷. Just as Elizabeth is unwilling to conform to the rules society has set up, Elise has broken them, so both are outsiders from a society Aunt Janet stands for. Her refusal of them is at the same time a refusal from society itself.

4.4. Mabel Shand

Mabel is married to Hector Shand, owner of Calderwick's mill and a successful business man. What is striking about her personality is the self-confidence she possesses. She is aware of the powerful position her husband holds within the community. She knows that she "hooked the biggest fish in the town of Calderwick"²⁸, as she herself proudly puts it.

Mabel is a very calculating and materialistic person. She married John although she considers him to be too old for her. It seems, the only thing she enjoys is her own prettiness. Her outward appearance and the high social status of the Shand family result in a self-confidence that makes her feeling "marked out for superiority, unlike the majority of the Calderwick women"²⁹.

²⁶ cf. *ibid.*, 75f.

²⁷ *ibid.*, 78.

²⁸ *ibid.*, 8.

²⁹ *ibid.*, 8.

The rivalry that arises between her and Elizabeth is based upon Elizabeth's inability to behave according to her social position: Mabel thinks of her as a vulgar creature, because she seeks Mrs Scrymgeour company. In Mabel's eyes, Elizabeth is also doomed to fail as a woman, for she clearly lacks those traces of womanliness society expects women to have. Mabel's dislike is strengthened, because Elizabeth managed to marry Hector, John's half-brother, and she is liked by John as well as by Elise.

Members of the family realise Mabel's snobbish selfishness. Elise refuses to follow Mabel's request to be taken to Europe, considering her to be "the very devil"³⁰. Hector, on the other hand, does not take Mabel seriously, he regards her just as a "skirt"³¹. He focuses on the outward appearance of this woman, for he knows she lacks any intellectual abilities. Instead, she solemnly relies upon her social ambitions. In this behaviour she is supported by Aunt Janet and accepted by the community.

4.5. Emily Scrymgeour

Mrs Scrymgeour's role in the novel can insofar not be underestimated, for she is the reason to light the problematic basis of Elizabeth's marriage to Hector.

³⁰ *ibid.*, 225.

³¹ *ibid.*, 239.

Her husband is a doctor in Calderwick, so she possesses an equal position in society as any upper middle-class woman. But, as Aunt Janet reveals, "the nice people in this town don't think very much of her"³²: she is always informed about the gossip in town, and she suckles her baby by herself. Aunt Janet wants Elizabeth not to associate any longer with Emily. She also influences Hector, and Elizabeth's desire to stay on friendly terms with Emily is the cause that launches the fatal argument between her and Hector.

Emily's attitude towards Elizabeth's identity crisis consists of the need to point out to her the role a wife nowadays should play: it is the acting to be a perfect wife that encourages Elizabeth to adopt this new burden. She is taking the advice so seriously that she really tries to change herself for Hector.

That Elizabeth evaluates Emily inferior to Elise can be felt by the doctor's wife. She jealously remarks about Elise that she is of course "ever so much interesting than us old-fashioned housewives in Calderwick"³³. Their different understanding of the position of a wife clashes in their opinions about having babies. Emily tells Elizabeth that getting a baby would humiliate Hector³⁴ whereas Elise rejects this idea. Instead, she believes

³² *ibid.*, 75.

³³ *ibid.*, 253.

³⁴ *cf. ibid.*, 125.

that "Marriages that need children to hold them together are merely copulations."³⁵.

In the end, Emily is the one who tells Elizabeth involuntarily about Hector's escape with Bell Duncan to Singapore. At that point of time, Elise has taken over from Emily the position as a confidant of Elizabeth, so it is left to her to comfort the betrayed wife.

4.6. Mary and Ann Watson

The story of Mary and Ann Watson is one of the less important in the narrative, for it does not contribute to the action of the novel itself. But their lives serve as an useful example to illustrate the problematic relationship between women and the church and their position in the private and the public sphere.

Mary Watson is the owner of a shop in Calderwick she inherited from her father. She is a very dominant person and grudges especially against the ministers of her church: it is widely acknowledged that she is famous for driving them out. Religion plays an important role in her life. But, being a woman, she was not allowed to inherit the eldership of her father.³⁶ There are no clerical functions she is allowed to take.

³⁵ *ibid.*, 246.

³⁶ *cf. ibid.*, 11.

Her Christian attitude must remain doubtful, for the argument with her sister Ann reveals an eccentric woman who does not care about loving her next-of-kin like herself. In fact, she reproaches Ann just like Ann reproaches Mary, it is impossible for the reader to decide which side to take, for both seem to be wrong.

One day, after an argument with her sister who locked her out of the house, Mary is so desperate to call the minister Murray to help her getting into the house again. Mary wants the minister to put the fear of God into Ann, and indeed he makes use of this fear when he threatens both of them to cut them off from the communion and other religious activities³⁷. That the Watson-sisters finally bend to the minister's orders is clearly not due to conviction, but due to the fear to cause a scandal that would shatter their social position and their desire to achieve respectability.

Their roles in the community of Calderwick are defined from their father, their lives are pre-determined. He had a deep impact on their futures by giving the shop to Mary and the house to Ann. Mary Watson acts in the novel as a business woman and therefore qualifies herself to belong to the public sphere, like men do. Ann, significantly having become bed-ridden in the course of time, is bound to the house. At one point she confides herself to William Murray, claiming that she "never got a chance to

³⁷ cf. *ibid.*, 104.

³⁸ *ibid.*, 20.

do anything else. I've just been buried alive here-buried alive."³⁸.

At the end the two quarrelling sisters are united again. Sense triumphs, but the basic problem still remains.

4.7. Sarah Murray

Sarah Murray is another character in the novel on whom one can examine the religious attitude of the town. She functions as the minister's sister, and she herself sees that as her main characteristic feature as well³⁹. Since her parent's death she cares for her brothers William and Ned, and this is not an easy task. Especially Ned's illness drives her into a desperation she finds hard to bear. Knowing that she cannot count on William, she breaks down one day and finds out that she has done

Thankless work. Ay, thankless work. ... Not one of them valued what she had done. ... If it wasn't for the women the world would be in a gey queer state. And the women got little credit for it. Ay, well, she would do her part, as she had always done, thanks or no thanks.⁴⁰

Sarah Murray exemplifies the Calvinistic way of life. Accepting pre-determination, she tries to gain the status of the elected by fulfilling her duties in a daily routine, believing in the God-given order of the world. It is the hard work and her religious belief from where

³⁹ cf. *ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 202.

she gets the strength to stand the problems of lives. But her breakdown proves that she is only human, and her capacity is not enduring. With Ned's destiny to be sent to an asylum and with William's death she experiences another test from God she has to stand. Still suffering, Sarah Murray turns now into a desperate, bitter woman who struggles with her life.

4.8. Bell Duncan

It is not satisfying for the sake of this essay to portrait Bell Duncan intensively, for she is not fully developed by Willa Muir. Bell is rather a flat character, and the only justification to mention her lies in her alliance with Hector Shand.

She is one of those women in Calderwick who present the non-respectable side. Her Scottish dialect clearly marks her to belong to the lower scale, and her seduction from Hector Shand years ago does not prevent her to trust him again and to fly with him to Singapore. There, he will surely let her down again.

She and her female friends are usually left to hope for a good marriage that will heighten their social status. Bell's friend Millie for example dreams of getting married to Charles Macpherson, who is working at a

fish-shop, and to found a family with him to become a respectable inhabitant of Calderwick⁴¹. Becky, Bell's elder sister is sceptic; she expects that "Once a man gets what he wants he flings you off like an old glove."⁴². She clearly refers to Bell's case, knowing that men enjoy those women's company, but do not have serious plans to spend the rest of their lives with them.

5. Conclusion

With her novel *Imagined Corners* Willa Muir created an outstanding piece of work about characters, habits and prejudices in a Scottish small town we could have found everywhere in those days. She describes how narrowness and traditions force their will upon the inhabitants until for some the urge to escape is the only way out. The power of the community has a deep impact on women. They suffer the most under the valid moral code, determined by a Calvinist dogma that rejects freedom and free will. Their position in society and the role they have to play is defined by men. Dependency on them can be found within every female character of the novel.

For Elphinstone the one main task of the novel is the question how to succeed in "the desperate struggle of the intellectual woman to take her place in the public

⁴¹ cf. *ibid.*, 209.

⁴² *ibid.*, 209.

sphere while fulfilling her role in the private one"⁴³. The title itself reveals the main solution: with *Imagined Corners* Willa Muir expresses limitation and boundaries, but she also points out that these aspects are imaginative, for there is a chance to escape the pressure of social and religious turmoil. The keyword is self-realisation, and that is what the heroines of the novel are striving for at the end.

The fact that Willa Muir mirrors her contemporary Scotland with a remarkable sense of social realism is just one quality of the novel. Undoubtedly, she describes a period of time in this century in a way that shows the exact structure of society in those days - a fact that requires an outstanding ability of perception and presentation.

Another interesting aspect is the autobiographical issue. Some attempts have been made in the course of the essay to give evidence to the thesis that Willa Muir's female characters obviously carry out certain features of herself. Being married to a husband who was as unwilling as she to bend totally to the social code was Willa's rescue not to experience the crises her heroines have to. Although the autobiographical instants remain to be not in the scope of this essay, it is still worthwhile to mention them or even to devote an own examination to this topic.

⁴³ Elphinstone, Margaret. "Willa Muir: Crossing the Genres". *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*. Ed. Douglas Gifford. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996.

Finally, the attention of the reader should be drawn to the homosexual aspect some critics can find in the novel. Whyte for example speaks of "lesbian implications at the close of Willa Muir's *Imagined Corners*"⁴⁴ , but one should doubt whether the author had such an ending in mind. An escape with a woman does not equal that any sexual consequences can be drawn from that fact. Especially, because Elise is thinking of a man she wants Elizabeth to fall in love with.

After all, the themes which are discussed in the course of this essay are just a selection out of a variety of much more. Willa Muir's novel provides a rich source of fascinating aspects which still have to be examined. Critics have just started to discover her literary output, and the re-evaluation she deserves will hopefully place her among the most important and talented writer Scotland has ever produced.

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⁴⁴ Whyte, Christopher, ed. *Gendering the Nation*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995. xviii.

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