

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 Polish³ 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

⁴ Maggie Fergusson, *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 Fergusson, *George Mackay Brown: The Life*, 249.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ Joseph Pearce, “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 Bicket, *George Mackay Brown and the Scottish Catholic Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 39.