



Off in a Boat

Neil Gunn

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In 1937, the Scottish writer, Neil Gunn, gave up his job in the civil service, sold his house in Inverness, and bought a boat. With his wife and his brother John, he set off on a three-month voyage around Inner Hebrides. The boat had outlived its first youth, and its engine was somewhat cranky; she went tolerably under sail. These are not high recommendations, but for Gunn, and at times his fellow voyagers, the vessel was an argosy of freedom, of adventure and misadventure—for they were fairly inexperienced sailors, and the waters of the region are by no means placid.

Gunn was a Scots nationalist in a sense that goes far beyond the political, even though he thought that an independent Scotland was the only proper basis for a reasonable civilization. He was by nature poetic, uplifted or cast down by changing skies, seascapes, and shores. His descriptions of those things, including their moods, are remarkably evocative. And he is also a passionate historian of his country, exalting its possibilities, anathematizing its shortcomings. The book is illustrated with Daisy Gunn's photographs taken on the voyage, which are palpably amateur but wonderfully telling.

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