

*“A Form of Doric Which Is No Dialect in Particular”
Scotland and the Planetary Classics of Hugh MacDiarmid*

Emboldened by the success of his 1926 poem *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, the Scottish poet and critic Christopher Grieve – better known by his pseudonym, Hugh MacDiarmid – set sight on a new creative endeavor, a work that could “glimpse the underlying pattern of human history,” what MacDiarmid called “Cencrastus, the Curly Snake.”¹ For MacDiarmid, Cencrastus represented the “Gaelic (or Scottish) version of the idea common to Indian and other mythologies that underlying Creation there is great snake,” a snake symbolic of “the principle of change and the main factor in the revolutionary development of human consciousness, ‘man’s incredible variation’.”² If this new work, he thought, could engage “an intricate linguistic apparatus which involves Scottish and Irish Gaelic, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Latin, and Greek,” he might “sing as never Scotsman sang afore,” developing a synthetic style as a “Homage of Consciousness – a paean to creative thought.”³ Yet to write this new poem – the poem that became *To Circumjack Cencrastus* (1930) – proved difficult. Frustrated after nearly four years’ work, MacDiarmid complained to a friend that *Cencrastus* had not achieved what he “intended – I deliberately deserted my big plan.”⁴ While the poem demonstrated “an astonishing knowledge of the whole range of modern European philosophy and religious speculation,” it possessed an “intellectual arrogance,” “pretentious pedantry” and a “super-abundance of needless personalities – scurrilous vilification of

¹ Christopher Grieve, Letter to Helen Cruickshank (February 1939) in MacDiarmid *LHM* (1984) 128.

² Grieve, Letter to Helen Cruickshank (February 1939) in MacDiarmid *LHM* (1984) 128.

³ Hugh MacDiarmid (credited as “Pteleon”), “Blasphemy and Divine Philosophy Mixed: Hugh M’Diarmid’s Extraordinary Poem,” *The Scots Observer* (October 2, 1930) in MacDiarmid *RT2* (1997) 200; MacDiarmid *CPr* (1993) 241; Grieve, Letter to Helen Cruickshank (February 1939) in MacDiarmid *LHM* (1984) 128.

⁴ Christopher Grieve, Letter to George Ogilvie (December 16, 1930) in MacDiarmid *LHM* (1984) 103.

great Scotsmen past and present.”⁵ Moreover, he argued, *Cenchrastus* had not illuminated what Scottish literature then needed most, he thought, namely a “new classicism” – one that could extend the country’s “national principle of freedom on the plane of world-affairs” while rebalancing “Europe in accordance with [Scotland’s] distinctive genius.”⁶

MacDiarmid’s pursuit of a “new classicism” for Scotland was unique from the start: what he desired was not the institutionalized “puerilities, elementary, trifling, schoolboy drilling, and very bad drilling” of nineteenth-century Scottish classical instruction but a form of reception that went well beyond the patriotic vision of antiquity espoused by the Scottish radical John Stuart Blackie (1809–95), professor of Greek at the University of Edinburgh from 1852 to 1882.⁷ Blackie, the author of the 1853 essay *On the Living Language of the Greeks*, had once argued that the Scottish people needed “not new editions of trite Greek plays already edited so often, and tortured so critically, that many a luckless word in them has been put into more antic attitudes” but instead “a scholarship with a large human soul, and a pregnant social significance, which shall not seek with a studious feebleness to avoid, but rather with a generous vigour to find contact with all the great intellectual and moral movements of the age.”⁸ As the outlines of MacDiarmid’s vision of nationalism became clear, he built on Blackie’s thought, believing that, if a ‘new’ Scottish classicism did arise, it would engage more intensely with the fraught politics and social movements of the present while also resolving a central problem plaguing Scottish scholars of the previous century. Though many of Scotland’s prominent Victorians were eager to distinguish themselves from “the dry-as-dust, anti-life affair which English classicism was,” the nineteenth-century Scottish reception of antiquity still seemed to have been effectively split.⁹ Against a ‘Northern’ expression of idealism – motivated by cultural nationalism and a particularly Scottish stress on “democratic intellectualism” – there emerged an opposing ‘Southern’ principle that accentuated “‘Blood and Culture’, according to which, a system of racial exclusiveness was presented as preferable to the

⁵ MacDiarmid *RT2* (1997) 200.

⁶ See also C. M. Grieve (“Hugh MacDiarmid”), “English Ascendancy in British Literature,” *The Criterion* 10.41 (July 1931) 593–613, as in MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 80. Hugh MacDiarmid, “The Caledonian Antisyzygy and the Gaelic Idea” (1931–32) in MacDiarmid *SEHM* (1970) 68, 67.

⁷ Pillans (1848) 28, as cited in Davie (1961) 231. On Blackie’s life and influence, see Davie (1961) 232–44, as well as Wallace (2006).

⁸ Blackie (1855) 10.

⁹ Davie (1961) 223.

anarchism of Scottish democracy.”¹⁰ While Southern scholars, Davie suggested, were keen to amass “out-of-the-way erudition, their Northern counterparts were animated with the purpose of elevating public taste and impressing on the nation at large a respect for classical restraint in the Arts.”¹¹ MacDiarmid, in seeking a ‘new classicism’, aimed to merge something from both these impulses, not merely amassing erudition but articulating a democratic ‘public voice’ in his verse as well. Yet, as he sought this, MacDiarmid’s vision of reception was transformed – not only by his auto-didacticism and incendiary politics but by the erosion of classics’ critical position in British society. As classical learning became increasingly dis-embedded both from its central institutional role as a guardian of British imperial interests and increasingly even from its role as a key accelerant in the ‘nation-building’ movements of Celtic revival, MacDiarmid generated a new and more complex vision. Though he had become, by the early 1930s, irritated with the pragmatism of the National Party, MacDiarmid still believed a ‘new classicism’ might emerge as a catalytic force for Scottish interests, one that would fuse together the project of national reinvention with an anti-imperial, global ideology – principally, the communism of V. I. Lenin (1870–1924).¹² With this in mind, MacDiarmid turned from the heteroglossic Lallans developed for *A Drunk Man* to a polyglossic, synthetic English, “a vision of world language.”¹³ Born from his admiration of Joyce, this multilingual idiom proved artistically promising, but, as MacDiarmid adumbrated it throughout the 1930s, he was led into increasingly radical forms of stylistic eccentricity and ideological isolation. His new aesthetic engendered a deep solipsism for which his synthetic vernacular became emblematic: MacDiarmid’s ‘global’ idiom was, as Matthew Hart notes, “the speech of no singular person, place, or nation-state.”¹⁴ Nonetheless these “private imaginings of a new public discourse” impacted both the range of his poetry and his reputation.¹⁵ This eccentric vision of ‘classicism’ untethered MacDiarmid’s work from clear substantive links to the literatures of Greece and Rome, and in so dominating his later work, his

¹⁰ Davie (1961) 244.

¹¹ Davie (1961) 223.

¹² On MacDiarmid’s political and ‘spiritual’ adoption of Marxism, see Lyall (2011) 68–81, and this chapter, pp. 221–24.

¹³ MacDiarmid’s *In Memoriam James Joyce, From a Vision of World Language* was first published in 1955 with William Maclellan of Glasgow.

¹⁴ Hart (2010) 38.

¹⁵ Haynes (2019b) 16.

penchant for both the idiosyncratic and the incendiary made his poetry a “form of Doric” that was indeed “no dialect in particular.”¹⁶

Though frustrated with the failures of *Cencrastus*, MacDiarmid outlined his “big plan” in a polemical essay he proposed for the pages of T. S. Eliot’s *The Criterion*.¹⁷ Writing to Eliot he asked:

Would you care to consider an article ... discussing the way in which, instead of pooling their resources, or at least acting and reacting freely upon each other (and a common bilingual or multi-lingual public) and giving British literature far more variety, Irish, Scottish Gaelic, Welsh, and, to a lesser extent, Scottish Vernacular, and even English dialect literature ... have been practically excluded from the knowledge of most British people – and consequently have had their potentialities inhibited – by the English ascendancy tendency.¹⁸

Eliot accepted the proposal, and MacDiarmid later dispatched the essay entitled “English Ascendancy in British Literature.” The piece was published in July 1931, motivated by MacDiarmid’s desire to discuss at some length a recent report on primary education by the London Board of Education. MacDiarmid praised some findings from the *Report of the Consultative Committee on the Primary School* (1931), especially the new stress laid on the “need to realize that there are many varieties of English; that it is not the function of schools to decry any special or local peculiarities of speech; and that a racy native turn of speech is better than any stilted phraseology, especially for literary purposes.”¹⁹ As he saw it, the suggestion that schools not discourage “varieties of English” was a welcome departure from long-established practice and policy in Britain, for from the time of Matthew Arnold only the “narrow ascendancy tradition” of English had been encouraged across public life.²⁰ The Elementary Education Acts 1870 to 1893 had notably “made no provision for the teaching of/in anything other than English” so that an entire generation, though “intelligent readers of English,” were “content to ignore Scottish,

¹⁶ Hugh MacDiarmid under the pseudonym, J. G. Outterstone Buglass, “Arne Garborg, Mr Joyce, and Mr M’Diarmid” (September 1924) in MacDiarmid *RTI* (1996) 237.

¹⁷ Grieve, Letter to George Ogilvie (December 16, 1930) in MacDiarmid *LHM* (1984) 103.

¹⁸ Christopher Grieve, Letter to T. S. Eliot (December 9, 1930) in MacDiarmid *LHM* (1984) 434.

¹⁹ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 61.

²⁰ Grillo (1989) 101. MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 61, 67. On language and educational policy in this period, see Grillo (1989) 84–106, and Heffer (2013) 412–68.

Irish, and Welsh Gaelic literatures, and Scots Vernacular literature.”²¹ Rather than “broad-basing” knowledge of literature through “all the diverse cultural elements and the splendid variety of languages and dialects, on the British Isles,” the public had been systematically confined to the “English central stream” of British literature.²² As a result, the British people had heard “but one side of a complicated case” and become victims of what MacDiarmid called “an extensive spiritual and psychological blindness.”²³ Yet this new report suggested that distinctions were to be drawn between “local variations” of dialect and the clear incorrect use of standard English among children.²⁴

There can be no doubt that an attempt to correct local peculiarities too early has a depressing effect upon the child’s power of speech. With young children, the capital aim must be to secure that they begin to use language freely and easily; a nearer approach to the standard speech may be dearly bought by an unnatural reticence on their part. The teacher must boldly face the fact that there are many varieties of the English language; it is not the duty of the school to decry any special or local variations. As the children grow older, more should be done to teach the habits of standard speech. The best dialect words have a picturesque value, especially for literary purposes ... Above all, the degenerate speaking of standard English should not be confused with the speaking of dialect.²⁵

While the report’s recommendations focused largely on dialect, the insistence that certain linguistic variations could develop “freely and easily” gave MacDiarmid hope that the languages of Scotland, Ireland and Wales might perhaps someday enjoy greater recognition.²⁶ Like English dialects these languages were “products of substantially the same environment, and concerned for the most part with the same political, psychological, and practical issues, the same traditions and tendencies, the same landscapes, as poets in English.”²⁷ Yet they were often ignored or dismissed as “valuably complementary” to the central stream of English expression.²⁸ As MacDiarmid saw it, however, their “ancient technique” provided a “corrective” to contemporary English, for

²¹ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 67.

²² MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 67, 68.

²³ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 68, 69.

²⁴ Board of Education (1931) 157.

²⁵ Board of Education (1931) 157.

²⁶ Board of Education (1931) 157.

²⁷ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 68.

²⁸ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 68.

Few literatures offer within themselves so rich a range of alternative values, of material for comparative criticism, as does, not English, but British, meaning by the latter that common culture – in *posse*, rather than *in esse* – which includes not only English (and English dialect) literature, but the Gaelic and Scots Vernacular literatures as well.²⁹

Though Britain still possessed these elements within the wider range of its literary culture, the “narrow ascendancy tradition” had shut forms of Welsh, Gaelic and Scots vernacular literature out, keeping the more salubrious cultural influences of the Celtic far from the collective imagination.³⁰

The report did provide hope, but MacDiarmid felt that the Celtic languages still faced threats on many sides, not least the various attempts to standardize “correct English” as an International Auxiliary Language (IAL), a movement that in the wake of the First World War had gained greater favor among some prominent intellectuals, linguists and politicians.³¹ Led by Cambridge University critics C. K. Ogden (1889–1957) and I. A. Richards (1893–1979), advocates of “Basic English” felt that if language could be simplified and stripped largely of its idiomatic characteristics, then English might be made a more effective mode of international communication.³² Since the Armistice of 1918, Ogden and Richards had pushed for the development of a condensed English, believing that the continued prosperity of postwar Europe depended to some extent on the deployment of a secondary tongue, or common inter-language, which could more easily traverse national boundaries of language and culture.³³ “The so-called national barriers of today are ultimately language barriers,” Ogden declared in 1931,

The absence of a common medium of communication is the chief obstacle to international understanding, and therefore the chief underlying cause of War. It is also the most formidable obstacle to the progress of international

²⁹ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 69, 68, 69.

³⁰ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 67.

³¹ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 62. On twentieth-century efforts to form an international language, see Eco (1995) 317–36, as well as Pei (1958) and Crystal (1997).

³² On the beginning of Basic English in Britain, see Koenke (2004) 22–52, Stern (2014) 86–97, as well as Howatt and Widdowson (2004) 283–88.

³³ “During a discussion with I. A. Richards on 11 November 1918 Ogden outlined a work to correlate his earlier linguistic studies with his wartime experience of ‘the power of Word-Magic’ and the part played by language in contemporary thought. Ogden converted the *Cambridge Magazine* into a quarterly in which he and Richards published a series of articles as a first draft of the book which appeared in 1923 as *The Meaning of Meaning*. This empirical approach to theoretical confusion about language, setting forth principles for the understanding of the function of language, rapidly became one of the important books of the decade.” Scott (2004).

Science, and to the development of international Commerce. As to the desirability of a Universal Language, therefore, there can be little difference of opinion.³⁴

In combatting the problem of ‘Babel’ in Europe, “Basic English for all” offered to do the work that Latin was thought to have once accomplished as the dominant tongue of political, academic and religious discourse – albeit without demanding “the faith of a fanatic” for Rome’s dead language.³⁵ Though it comprised only 850 words, Ogden insisted that Basic could “meet the universal demand for a compact and efficient technological medium” of speech.³⁶ Complex problems of translation mitigated, ‘Basic’ linguistic exchange could steer nations clear of threats to the

economic, moral, cultural, social, or political status or independence of any person or any people. It must carry no implications of intellectual, technological, or other domination. No one in learning the world language must have excuse for even the least shadow of a feeling that he is submitting to an alien influence or being brought under the power of other groups ... We can guard against this danger only by conceiving a world language in a truly planetary spirit – as a universal medium, not as an extension of the sphere of influence of some one pressure group.³⁷

Moreover, as they envisioned it, the language would not be imposed upon any people but would rather come “into use freely, as a general convenience, under the urge of the everyday motives of mankind,” for as Anglophone countries grew in power and global prestige, English too had become far more pervasive.³⁸ For Ogden and Richards, “Standard English” had been so “enriched and cosmopolitanized,” especially “through the expansion of modern science,” that the spread of its more Basic form might forge greater global understanding and combat claims of a new linguistic imperialism.³⁹

³⁴ Ogden (1931) 13–14.

³⁵ Ogden (1931) 13. “Five hundred years ago Latin was the literary language of Western Europe. Its downfall was due to the awakening of the masses, to their revolt against the routines and dictates of a caste. Today the English schoolboy can acquire no more than a smattering of its complexities after ten years’ intensive misery; the scholar still writes slowly and faultily after twenty years of practice. Outside of Italy, even in the universities, Latin is losing all along the line. As the language of Radio, the language of Africa, the language even of American business, its mere advocacy demands the faith of a fanatic.” Ogden (1934) 11.

³⁶ Ogden (1932) 14.

³⁷ Richards (1943) 11.

³⁸ Richards (1943) 11.

³⁹ Ogden (1932) 13–14. On the charge that Basic English itself constituted a form of “linguistic imperialism,” see Russo (1989) 397–404.

On a popular level, the desire to see idiomatic English debrided, to see its dialects condensed to the most basic and ‘standard’ of components, had already had a broad impact, especially in West End theatres of the postwar period.⁴⁰ The notion, espoused by Ogden and Richards, that English was an efficient “Universal medium” for the swift communication of ideas had been, in a crude way, advanced across the daily criticism of London drama throughout the 1920s.⁴¹ A less literary and less artificial English – an English marked by lack of dialect, accent or artifice – was thought more appealing, better for the understanding of general audiences than anything too experimental. Driven by an aversion for “ornate literary stuff,” St. John Ervine (1883–1971) – the Ulster-born playwright and Unionist – had thus discouraged dialect in theatre, dismissing as “contrived” and “withdrawn from reality” the recent drama of Ireland and England.⁴² Such “literary drama” was, he asserted, “generally full of stiff sentences that have more resemblance to the language used in editorial articles and ‘middles’ printed in the weekly reviews than to the language used in conversation.”⁴³ The especial “business” of the modern playwright was, he believed, “to write dialogue which shall have the look of literature and the sound of the street: it must have the similitude of ordinary conversation and, at the same time, be attractive and compact and shapely.”⁴⁴ As such, dialect that was not “selected and shapely” could perhaps become an impediment to effective dramatic speech, an obstruction, Ervine thought, both to the clear communication of a playwright’s “ideas and intentions” and to the commercial success of theatre itself.⁴⁵ His critique – elaborated across a series of reviews he wrote for *The Observer* in February 1931 – drew out MacDiarmid’s scorn. Ervine had declared “[a]nything that makes oral communication difficult ...

⁴⁰ On theatre in this period, see Barker and Gale (2000).

⁴¹ Ogden (1931) 14.

⁴² Ervine (1928) 17. On the life and dramatic work of Ervine, see Cronin (1988) 7–16.

⁴³ Ervine (1928) 16.

⁴⁴ Ervine (1928) 22. Ervine himself had, in fact, first embraced and exploited his own dialect of Ulster English on stage. In the 1915 tragedy *John Ferguson*, he deliberately employed an Anglo-Irish idiom, hoping to build on the work begun by Yeats, Synge and Lady Gregory. However, he could not get his plays produced in the West End or recognized in London, and in light of the political drama unfolding in Ireland, he turned against the impulses that motivated the dialect-driven drama of the Abbey, telling George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) that Ireland had become a land dominated by “bleating Celtic Twilighters, sex-starved Daughters of the Gael, gangsters and gombeen-men.” See Ervine, Letter to George Bernard Shaw (February 16, 1932) British Library Add. MS 50533 folio 145, as in Vance (1990) 189. On Ervine’s disdain for the Irish Literary Revival, see Vance (1990) 176–89. On the unionist impulses of his work, see McIntosh (1999) 144–79.

⁴⁵ Ervine (1931b).

essentially evil.”⁴⁶ Citing the amateur linguist Richard Paget (1869–1955), he insisted that, though English was “a wild growth” with its “learned words ... a potpourri compounded of hedgerow flowers – Greek and Latin,” its speech could be tamed and “made more useful by conscious effort on our part.”⁴⁷ To develop a plainer idiom, Ervine encouraged actors and writers to read Paget’s 1930 treatise *Babel, or The Past, Present, and Future of Human Speech*, specifically for its methods on making English a “flexible instrument for communication” across the globe.⁴⁸ English was to be standardized through “systematic and scientific study ... with a view to its future improvement” even if the “great majority of the literary world at present” still believed that “the fate of our language ought properly to be left to chance, or rather to herd instinct.”⁴⁹ As Paget saw it, artists and writers fond of this “comfortable policy” – this “*laissez-faire*” approach to linguistic development – were wrong; it was not “practicable to-day, for the fate of English speech is in the balance.”⁵⁰ “If we do nothing,” he exclaimed, “one thing will be likely to happen, namely, that the English language will break up – America going one way, Australia another, and so on, till in the end these different communities will no longer be able to understand one another.”⁵¹ In this moment of apparent crisis, there were, however, unique opportunities as well, for already “[b]roadcasting, long-distance telephony, the talking film, and the gramophone” had conspired to make better forms of “standardization possible, and even comparatively easy to establish.”⁵² New technological media could indeed provide a “unifying influence,” allowing language to overcome the more tribal and fractious impulses of human socialization.⁵³ The scientific precision of a more universal English was within grasp, he thought, but “only by systematic and conscious effort” would there be “unity and an approach to perfection in the future,” an approach that would fulfill the “words of

⁴⁶ Ervine (1931b).

⁴⁷ Paget (1930) 8, 11.

⁴⁸ Ervine (1931a). Paget’s contribution to the study of speech lay in his development of a “theory of pantomimic action of the tongue and lips,” the principles of which became the foundation for the Paget Gorman Sign System. Designed for the deaf and deaf mute, this form of signing was not a language but rather a system of signs, providing a “one-to-one, sign-to-word match” between gestures and English words. On the structure of the Paget Gorman Sign System, see Sutton-Spence and Woll (1999) 14.

⁴⁹ Paget (1930) 83, 9.

⁵⁰ Paget (1930) 92.

⁵¹ Paget (1930) 82–83.

⁵² Paget (1930) 83.

⁵³ Paget (1930) 92.

Genesis,” that there be “one language – and now nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do’.”⁵⁴

Eager to advance Paget’s vision, Ervine promoted the notion that “[c]lear speech and strong speech and fine speech” was not merely an aesthetic preference but a political imperative of great importance.⁵⁵ English had already, he thought, fast become an “exact and simple” tongue, and indeed it was that very “simplicity” that had made it “peculiarly suitable to be a world-language.”⁵⁶ On that account alone, he claimed, the continued existence (to say nothing of revivals) of other dialect forms and “obsolete languages” across the British Isles served no useful purpose.⁵⁷ The surviving traces of Goedelic and Brythonic tongues in Scotland, Ireland and Wales had done little, he felt, to further the “first principle of speech, that its use is to make us clearly understand each other.”⁵⁸ Echoing to some extent the criticism of Irish that Mahaffy once leveled, Ervine mocked

those reactionaries who are all for the revival of obsolete languages. It would not upset me if knowledge of Gaelic perished out of these islands, and if I had the power of dictating in these matters I should forbid the Highlander and the Irishman and the Welshman to continue in the use of his dying speech. When I hear reactionaries orating about the desirability of a diversity of tongues I feel inclined to remind them that what was wrought at the Tower of Babel was confusion. “Go to,” said the Lord, according to Genesis, “let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.”⁵⁹

For Ervine, the desire to preserve a diversity of languages was tantamount to warding off “the day when all men will be able to understand each other,” a time when simply English alone would provide plain-spoken understanding between culturally different peoples.⁶⁰ No longer could language then be exploited for artificial, “sophisticated” aims – the putting on of so-called “literary airs” – but rather “for its purpose, the understanding of each other, and not the preservation of quaintness or the indulgence of literary idiosyncrasies.”⁶¹

⁵⁴ Paget (1930) 93. See also Genesis 11:6.

⁵⁵ Ervine (1931c); Paget (1930) 92.

⁵⁶ Ervine (1931a).

⁵⁷ Ervine (1931c).

⁵⁸ Ervine (1931c).

⁵⁹ Ervine (1931c).

⁶⁰ Ervine (1931c).

⁶¹ Ervine (1931a, 1931b).

Hugh MacDiarmid vilified the Anglophilia of Ervine's universal "world-language."⁶² Denouncing his criticism, MacDiarmid insisted that Ervine had not simply abandoned advocacy for Gaelic languages in Britain but had willingly betrayed his homeland in Ulster as well. Rather than write an English idiom inflected by local dialects of the North, he had chosen to defend the commercial theatre of the bourgeoisie instead, supporting poor, digestible drawing-room comedies focused almost entirely on "winning the London success, and international vogue of a kind, denied to his earlier and better work."⁶³ Robbed of its Ulster English, Ervine's drama had fallen victim to the same "sorry imperialism which has thrust Gaelic and dialect literatures outwith the pale and concentrated on what has become to use Sir William Watson's phrase, 'scriptive English'.⁶⁴ Contrary to Ervine, MacDiarmid believed that as English slowly became "more and more of a world-language," the language was "progressively useless for higher literary purposes."⁶⁵ Without the corrective pressures brought by Scottish, Welsh and Irish literatures, English had become a "far less concentrated and expressive language."⁶⁶ British literature needed, he argued, not only strong infusions from a variety of local English dialects, but those Gaelic, Scots vernacular and Welsh literary traditions that had been "virtually proscribed by the 'English Ascendancy' policy."⁶⁷ If even Scots alone had been "concurrently maintained with the development of 'English Literature'," he speculated

⁶² Ervine (1931b).

⁶³ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 62.

⁶⁴ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 63. MacDiarmid cites the popular Georgian poet William Watson. Watson received a knighthood in 1917 in part for composing the patriotic panegyric "The Man Who Saw" (a poem he dedicated to the prime minister, David Lloyd George). In a 1916 book entitled *Pencraft*, he argued that literature could be divided "into three kinds or orders, and to call them the cantative, the scriptive, and the loquitive." These designations formed a range upon which one could plot kinds of language and speech, the 'cantative' applying to those instances "capable of uttering themselves through but one medium, the medium of quite obviously and literally chanted words," the 'scriptive' being "the essentially *written*, as distinguished from that not necessarily greater but perhaps more elemental thing, the essentially *chanted* word," and the 'loquitive' which "in form and substance is little if at all distinguishable from conversational speech." According to Watson, "the immense middle region" that comprised the 'scriptive' was "absolutely literature; neither a sublimely abnormal, half preternatural phenomenon nor a transfiguration of everyday chit-chat, but absolutely literature." With its "deliberate and ordered language," the 'scriptive' represented language as the "preeminently efficient manner of speech." Watson (1916) 9, 10, 13, 16, 18, 21, 22. On Watson's life and work, see Wilson (1981).

⁶⁵ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 66.

⁶⁶ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 62.

⁶⁷ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 63.

what the results today would have been ... Would such a synthesis or duality of creative output (each element of it so very different that they could have complemented and 'corrected' each other in a unique and invaluable fashion) not have been infinitely better ...?⁶⁸

Nonetheless, in light of the suggestions by the Board of Education, there seemed to be a greater openness to the possibility of better synthesis between the "diverse cultural elements and the splendid variety of languages and dialects, in the British Isles."⁶⁹ The "children of tomorrow," MacDiarmid observed, might yet be relieved of that "subtle but far-reaching psychological outrage which has been inflicted on many generations of pupils and seriously affected the quality and direction of those of them who had literary inclinations."⁷⁰

Relief had already begun to appear in Ireland where the Irish language and literature were experiencing something of an unexpected resurgence in popularity and prestige. During the late nineteenth century, MacDiarmid noted,

highly-educated Irishmen were incapable of conceiving that in this whole corpus [of Gaelic literature] there was anything worth recovering, let alone an entire classical tradition, with its own elaborate technique, its own very different but (if only because incomparable) not inferior values which maintained itself intact – in active intercourse with all contemporary European developments, but unadulterated by them in the integrity of its own modes – for at least two thousand years.⁷¹

This revitalization of an Irish "classical tradition" had not come about, however, through imitating or adapting the literatures of Greek or Roman antiquity: there had been no need to replicate either its forms or its content, for Irish Gaelic, MacDiarmid insisted, possessed an "alternative value of prime consequence when set against the Greek and Roman literatures which are all that most of us mean when we speak of 'the Classics'."⁷² As MacDiarmid saw it, the meaning of 'Classics' had been grossly misinterpreted by poets and artists throughout the European Renaissance. In mimicking the formal trappings of Greek and Roman art, that which was in fact unique and 'classical' in their own native literatures had been filtered through false international standards. The canons

⁶⁸ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 63.

⁶⁹ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 67.

⁷⁰ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 61.

⁷¹ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 63.

⁷² MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 63.

of such neoclassicism, allegedly derived from Greece and Rome, were not classical in any sense but only imitative and productive of arid reformulations of antiquity. Citing Daniel Corkery's study, *The Hidden Ireland* (1924), MacDiarmid declared that "Renaissance standards" were clearly "not Greek standards. Greek standards in their own time and place were standards arrived at by the Greek nation; they were national standards."⁷³ "Caught up at second hand into the art-mind of Europe," Greek principles were acclaimed universal, and under their influence "the youthfully tender national cultures of Europe" slowly atrophied.⁷⁴ The "standards of a dead nation" thus overwhelmed and "killed" the native genius of many latent 'classical' traditions in Europe.⁷⁵ Those "aptitudes through which they themselves had become memorable" were, bit by bit, washed away in largely botched efforts to imitate and "re-discover the secret power that lay behind Greek art."⁷⁶ That power was never retrieved, MacDiarmid felt, and all attempts at doing so had produced only the "sham strength," "uneasy energy" and "death in life" of "mere neo-classical" formalism.⁷⁷

Although imitations of the Greek and the Roman had helped snuff out forms of "national art" across Europe, MacDiarmid thought contemporary Scottish writers could challenge English dominance and break down its "limited channels" with a "new classicism today."⁷⁸ Scottish classicism, however, could not be born of neoclassical rigor nor of mere nostalgia for the Celtic past. On the contrary, the country had to "get down to *Ur-motives* – to get back behind the Renaissance" if it were to "undo that deplorable whitewashing whereby Greek and Latin culture has prevented other European nations realizing their national genius in the way Greece and Rome themselves did."⁷⁹ Rather than ape a foreign tradition, Scottish writers needed to do for their place, their time, what "Greece and Rome themselves" had achieved in their own.⁸⁰ In this endeavor MacDiarmid felt Ireland's recent Literary Revival was instructive. While the reputedly Gaelic "values" prized by Yeats and others were,

⁷³ Corkery (1925) xiv, as in MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 79.

⁷⁴ Corkery (1925) xiv–xv, as in MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 79.

⁷⁵ Corkery (1925) xv, as in MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 79.

⁷⁶ Corkery (1925) xv, xvi, as in MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 79, 80.

⁷⁷ Corkery (1925) xv, as in MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 79, 80.

⁷⁸ Corkery (1925) xv; MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 77, 80. On MacDiarmid's view of the Reformation and Renaissance, see Lyall (2006) 41–43.

⁷⁹ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 80; Hugh MacDiarmid, "Towards a Celtic Front" (1953) in MacDiarmid *SEHM* (1970) 173.

⁸⁰ MacDiarmid *SEHM* (1970) 173.

he confessed, “largely phoney and based on misunderstanding and falsification,” the “Celtic Twilight” had provided “probably the only way at first to get even a modicum of Gaelic culture across in an overwhelmingly hostile environment. It succeeded in doing so and led on to the genuine article.”⁸¹ That genuine article was to be found not only in the apparent revival of the Irish language but also in new “re-translations” of Irish poetry that stressed not “the stars and shadows of Yeats” but the “hard realism and sharp satire” of Gaelic literature.⁸² Yet, even with the gains made in Ireland, Scotland was

still practically a *terra nullius*. We have no study of it a thousandth part as good as Corkery’s or de Blacam’s or Douglas Hyde’s or Eleanor Hull’s books on Irish Literature; and non-Gaelic readers can still only approach the best Scottish Gaelic poems through such inadequate and distorting translations as were those, in Ireland, of Sir Samuel Ferguson and the beginners of the Irish Literary Revival, which have only to be compared with the re-translations, far ‘harder’ and truer to the original Gaelic spirit and free of the ‘Twilight’ nonsense, of such recent translators as Professor Bergin, Mr Robin Flower, or Mr James Stephens, to show how much has still to be done.⁸³

For too long Scottish poets had been focused on composing work in English and thus neglected an “all-in view of the literary production of our country.”⁸⁴ A “mere subsidiary to English letters,” Scottish literary culture had produced no seemingly “first-class work, indispensable or even relevant to the main line of English literary evolution.”⁸⁵ To escape this “creatively inferior” position, poets had to cut through the “crust of imitation” to manifest Scotland’s “potentialities of incalculable difference.”⁸⁶

Though recent Scottish writing had been too “‘hit and miss’ and unscientific” to advance a “renewed manifestation” of the classics in Scotland, MacDiarmid nonetheless set forth three conditions for a broad cultural renaissance.⁸⁷ First, the “rising tide of Scottish national consciousness”

⁸¹ MacDiarmid *SEHM* (1970) 173.

⁸² MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 78, 70.

⁸³ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 77–78. Translations by Osborn Bergin (1873–1950), Robin Flower (1881–1946) and James Stephens (1882–1950) were said to have captured the essence of Irish better.

⁸⁴ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 69.

⁸⁵ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 70.

⁸⁶ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 70, 73.

⁸⁷ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 73. The term “Scottish Renaissance” was first coined in French by the Toulousian critic Denis Saurat (1890–1958). See Saurat (1924) 295–307. On the Renaissance and the rise of modernism in Scotland, see McCulloch (2009).

had to grow to greater heights: for too long, he argued, the central differences between the English and the Scottish imagination had been obscured by the “increasing Anglicization of the latter” even though Scotland’s “assimilation to the English” had never been effective or complete.⁸⁸ Many “deep-seated and unalterable psychological differences remain,” he argued, “Only the ‘surface minds’ (in the Bergsonian sense) of the Scots have been Englished.”⁸⁹ For that reason, it seemed possible – as a second condition – that the formal education at Scottish institutions could be recentered on the study of native literature. “No other people in the world,” he argued,

have ever preferred an alien literature to their own, and practically excluded the latter from the curricula of their schools and universities, in this way; and it is not to be wondered at that English literature, which has never suffered from any such neglect, should have acquired an importance out of all proportion to Scottish. The disparity between the two today may yet be redressed to some extent if anything like the same attention is given to Scottish literature in Scottish schools and elsewhere in Scotland as is presently given to English.⁹⁰

According to MacDiarmid, this “thorough-going reconcentration” would help spread an “all-in view of Scottish poetry,” not a “hopelessly one-sided” view but one that would see Scotland foster and maintain its own “separate literary tradition.”⁹¹ To an extent, some of the groundwork for meeting these two conditions was already developing: the National Party was founded in June 1928, and as such the nationalist movement slowly began to gain better organization and wider public recognition. Its establishment brought together previously separated associations and political interest groups, and in so doing, forced these once “somewhat remote, residually cultural organization[s]” to generate a more concrete ideological

⁸⁸ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 73, 72.

⁸⁹ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 72–73. Drawn by the notion of a “surface mind,” MacDiarmid interpreted Henri Bergson’s *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1912), applying his description of the “crust of imitation” to a distinctively Scottish linguistic context. “When I,” Bergson wrote, “direct my attention inward to contemplate my own self (supposed for the moment to be inactive), I perceive at first, as a crust solidified on the surface, all the perceptions which come to it from the material world. These perceptions are clear, distinct, juxtaposed or juxtaposable one with another; they tend to group themselves into objects. Next, I notice the memories which more or less adhere to these perceptions and which serve to interpret them. These memories have been detached, as it were, from the depth of my personality, drawn to the surface by the perceptions which resemble them; they rest on the surface of my mind without being absolutely myself.” Bergson (1912) 9–10.

⁹⁰ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 73.

⁹¹ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 73.

platform with clear political objectives.⁹² Despite these developments, however, no advent of a renaissance in Scotland could survive, MacDiarmid thought, without mending the radical division of Scottish languages. “The third point,” he suggested therefore, was

the necessity to bridge the gulf between Gaelic and Scots. Both have been tremendously handicapped by circumstances, and yet in their evolution, thus miserably attenuated and driven underground by external factors, they have continued to complement and correct each other in the most remarkable way. I am not going to make use of the terms ‘Romantic’ and ‘Classical’, although these dubious counters do roughly correspond to the Scots and Gaelic traditions in poetry respectively.⁹³

As he saw it, if contemporary writers were to somehow fuse together Scotland’s disseminated tongues, ranging from Highland Gaelic through varieties of Lallans, then they might “lead the way in the great new movement in poetry which is everywhere being sought for.”⁹⁴ To “effectively bridge this Gaelic-Scots gulf,” however, was a unique challenge, not least because the number of fluent speakers of Scottish Gaelic had been gradually diminishing for well over a century.⁹⁵ In 1891 more than 250,000 people spoke the language, but only forty years later that number had dropped precipitously: the British census of 1941 reported less than 130,000 speakers.⁹⁶ As Scottish Gaelic slowly became a cultural curiosity from a once Celtic past, its idiom also was said to have been “choked by an excessive formalism.”⁹⁷ By contrast, most varieties of Lowland Scots faced no threat of extinction, yet their parochial reputation preceded discussion of Lallans serving the national interest. Lack of standardization and a “formlessness” reigned over its twentieth-century writing.⁹⁸ Unfit for literary use, Scots had “gradually lost all the qualities befitting them for major expressive purposes rather than for homely, local uses.”⁹⁹ With

⁹² Brand (1978) 195. The National Party largely grew out of the Scottish Home Rule Association (founded in 1886) led by Roland Eugene Muirhead, the Scots National League (founded in 1904), the Scottish National Movement (founded in 1926) and the Glasgow University Student Nationalist Association (founded in 1927). On the origins of these organizations and their particular contributions to the Party, see Brand (1978) 169–227; Tanner (2004) 63–65; Hanham (1969) 119–30; Finlay (1994) 71–125; as well as Harvie (2004) 28–31.

⁹³ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 73–74.

⁹⁴ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 74.

⁹⁵ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 74.

⁹⁶ On Scottish Gaelic in the twentieth century, see MacKinnon (1991) 121–49 and MacKinnon (2000) 44–55.

⁹⁷ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 74.

⁹⁸ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 74.

⁹⁹ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 74.

the dialects of one language disseminated so widely and the other strangled with a slavish stress on form, English made inroads in a Scotland “miserably attenuated and driven underground by external factors.”¹⁰⁰

Still MacDiarmid believed the “role of our race in history – the special qualities and functions of Scottish nationality” could be articulated in a unifying national language with “necessary dynamic force.”¹⁰¹ There would be no nostalgic return to Scottish Gaelic nor indeed a “puerile” retreat to the parochial – “prevalent conceptions” of Scottish language were “all out of date” and had to change, he thought; what was needed was the innovation of a new synthetic vernacular, a flexible idiom that could then merge various Scots dialects with Scottish Gaelic.¹⁰² Only by bridging this gulf – by forging a new sense of Scottish hybridity – would a “new classicism” begin to take shape.¹⁰³ Advocates of Home Rule, notably Ruaraidh Erskine of Mar, had argued that Scots vernacular possessed no literary merit, that Highland Gaelic alone was fit for national purpose, but MacDiarmid insisted that a new vernacular could be forged if “all the *disjecta membra* of the Doric” were worked “back from the bits to the whole” through a “synthetic process.”¹⁰⁴ This remaking of Scots was no ploy to animate further literary provincialism. Scottish letters had already had enough of “Doric infantilism” with its “instinctive suspicion of cleverness and culture.”¹⁰⁵ What was needed was not further “mental inertia,” he argued, but an idiom that embraced “all

¹⁰⁰ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 73.

¹⁰¹ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 75.

¹⁰² MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 75.

¹⁰³ MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 74. For discussions of cultural and linguistic hybridity in Scotland, see Crawford (1998) 238–44, Crawford (2000) 111–75, as well as Craig (2004) 229–53.

¹⁰⁴ Hugh MacDiarmid, “The New Movement in Vernacular Poetry: Lewis Spence, Marion Angus” (November 27, 1925) in MacDiarmid *CSS* (1995) 198. Hugh MacDiarmid, “Towards a Synthetic Scots” (August 13, 1926) in MacDiarmid *CSS* (1995) 368–69. Following the publication of Allan Ramsay’s play, *The Gentle Shepherd* (1725), the epithet ‘Doric’ was often used to describe the rough speech of Northumbria and the Scottish Lowlands. The term was appropriated by the critic Alexander Fraser Tytler, Lord Woodhouselee (1747–1813), who, in praising Ramsay’s work, stressed the rusticity and simplicity of his Scots vernacular when compared with the urbane English of London. “To us,” he wrote, “their dialect is an antiquated tongue, and as such it carries with it a Doric simplicity.” Woodhouselee (1852) xxxv, lviii. Gradually, Doric became identified with the dialects of northeast Scotland, and this insistence on a “Grecian Doric” character was common in subsequent criticism. Later, in an unsigned review of N. F. Moore’s *Lectures on the Greek Language and Literature* (1835), an anonymous critic echoed this conceit, arguing that, in “English, the dialect of Allan Ramsay’s *Gentle Shepherd*, and of many of the sweetest songs of Burns, corresponds in no slight degree with the Grecian Doric.” Review of “Moore’s *Lectures on the Greek Language and Literature*,” *The North American Review* 42 (January 1836) 107. On the development of the ‘Doric’ in the modern era, see McClure (2000) 1–13; as well as McClure (2002).

¹⁰⁵ C. M. Grieve, Letter to the *Aberdeen Free Press* (January 30, 1922) in MacDiarmid *LHM* (1984) 756, 754.

progressive and creative tendencies” present in modern literature and forced Scottish poets from their “anti-cultural prejudices,” the

mental and spiritual agoraphobia which has driven them – and to all intents and purposes the rest of Scotland with them! – into a cul de sac, where they bury their minds (as ostriches bury their heads) in the shadow of the blind wall which blocks them out from literature and from life.¹⁰⁶

MacDiarmid derived his experimental vision for Scots in large part from Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922), but it was also the *Landsmål* movement – perhaps Arne Garborg’s *Odyssevskvædet*, a Nynorsk verse translation of *The Odyssey* (1918) – which first showed him a synthetic language of national scope.¹⁰⁷ With the publication of “The Watergaw” in 1922, MacDiarmid began his own unique renovation of the Doric, and its growing “evolutionary momentum” would see him, over the next four years, “think himself back” into its spirit across three collections of synthetic poetry: *Sangschaw* (1925), *Penny Wheep* (1926) and, finally, his landmark long poem *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1926).¹⁰⁸ Composed in 2,685 lines, *A Drunk Man* was a “gallimaufry,” a satirical *patois* steeped in polyglot intrusions from other European languages.¹⁰⁹ The work’s linguistic heterogeneity, he claimed, “pit in a concrete abstraction / My country’s contrair qualities,” what the critic G. Gregory Smith (1865–1932) had called “the Caledonian antiszygy,” the “zigzag of contradictions” and “sudden jostling of contraries” at work in the modern Scot.¹¹⁰ Its “polemical restlessness” set out with some belligerence the “latent potentialities” of “distinctive Scots psychology.”¹¹¹ “(To prove my saul is Scots,” MacDiarmid declared,

I maun begin
Wi’ what’s still deemed Scots and the folk expect,
And spire up syne by visible degrees
To heichts whereo’ the fules ha’e never recked.

¹⁰⁶ Grieve, Letter to the *Aberdeen Free Press* (January 30, 1922) in MacDiarmid *LHM* (1984) 754, 755, 756.

¹⁰⁷ On MacDiarmid’s decision to write in synthetic Scots, see Bold (1990) 121–30.

¹⁰⁸ C. M. Grieve, “Introducing ‘Hugh M’Diarmid,’” *The Scottish Chapbook* 1.41 (August 1922), as in MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 10. On writing “The Watergaw,” see Bold (1990) 137–40. On the development of *A Drunk Man* from manuscript to publication, see Herbert (1992) 42–67, as well as Bold (1990) 180–224. For a broader comparative, transnational account of ‘synthetic’ writing and twentieth-century modernism, see Hart (2010).

¹⁰⁹ M’Diarmid, “Author’s Note,” in M’Diarmid (1926) vii.

¹¹⁰ Hugh MacDiarmid, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, as in MacDiarmid *CP1* (1993) 145. Smith (1919) 4, 20.

¹¹¹ Smith (1919) 4. MacDiarmid *CSS* (1995) 198.

But aince I get them there I'll whummle them
 And souse the cratur in the nether deeps,
 – For it's nae choice, and ony man s'ud wish
 To dree the goat's weird tae as weel's the sheep's!)¹¹²

Though he thought his work had drawn on Scotland's "common trough," MacDiarmid's 'synthesis' did not fare well commercially, and *A Drunk Man* was met with some vociferous, critical reviews.¹¹³ Some considered it sloppy, confusing and peculiar – "It is idle to attempt a coherent account of a poem so deliberately and provocatively incoherent" – while others castigated MacDiarmid for the "constant plangent grieving over his inhibitions."¹¹⁴ Nonetheless, the poem had many early admirers, among them the Irish writer and ancient Greek enthusiast Oliver St John Gogarty, (who lauded *A Drunk Man* for its "wonderfully flexible and containing form") and the poet Edwin Muir (who praised its "instinctive rightness").¹¹⁵ "The form of the present poem," Muir observed,

fixed by the psychological state of the principal character, permits him to express with their appropriate degree of conviction his various intuitions of the world, some of them realistic, some of them fantastic or grotesque. The scheme of the poem might be called indifferently psychological or philosophical; it is the picture of a mind; it is an image of the world as symbolized in the thistle. The world changes its shape, is lost, appears again as Mr M'Diarmid follows the transitions, daring and yet natural, in the mind of the monologist.¹¹⁶

Yet Muir also detected "frequent carelessness of style" in *A Drunk Man*, a "hasty, slipshod manner," which suggested, perhaps, that this artificial fusion of dialects could not be sustained as a shared language across Scottish literature.¹¹⁷ "Hugh M'Diarmid," he later asserted,

has recently tried to revive [Scots Vernacular] by impregnating it with all the contemporary influences of Europe one after another, and thus galvanize it into life by a series of violent shocks. In carrying out this experi-

¹¹² MacDiarmid *CPt* (1993) 83.

¹¹³ MacDiarmid *CPt* (1993) 86. Of its initial print run of 500 copies, only 99 copies sold before the end of 1926. On the poem's lack of commercial success, see Bold (1990) 222–24.

¹¹⁴ Unsigned review, *Times Literary Supplement* 1338 (September 22, 1927) 650–51, as in McCulloch (2009) 46. Unsigned review, *Aberdeen Press and Journal* (November 27, 1926) 5, as in Bold (1990) 223. On the poem's early reception, see McCulloch (2009) 29–52.

¹¹⁵ Oliver St John Gogarty, under the pseudonym "Gog." "Literature and Life: A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle," *Irish Statesman* (January 8, 1927) 432, as in Bold (1990) 223. Edwin Muir, "Verse," *Nation and Athenaeum* (January 22, 1927) 568, as in McCulloch (2004) 74.

¹¹⁶ Edwin Muir, "Verse," *Nation and Athenaeum* (January 22, 1927) 568, as in McCulloch (2004) 73.

¹¹⁷ Edwin Muir, "Verse," *Nation and Athenaeum* (January 22, 1927) 568, as in McCulloch (2004) 74.

ment he has written some remarkable poetry; but he has left Scottish verse very much where it was before. For the major forms of poetry rise from the collision between emotion and intellect on a plane where both meet on equal terms; and it can never come into existence where the poet feels in one language and thinks in another, even though he should translate his thoughts into the language of his feelings. Scots poetry can only be revived, that is to say, when Scotsmen begin to think *naturally* in Scots. The curse of Scottish literature is the lack of a whole language, which finally means the lack of a whole mind.¹¹⁸

According to Muir, MacDiarmid's experiments with synthetic language, however intriguing, were "an isolated phenomenon" unsuited to creating a "complete and homogeneous Scottish literature."¹¹⁹ The "landscape" of its literary world "is not noticeably diversified with poets chanting in synthetic Scots"; he explained: "the village bards who have excruciated us for so long still calmly proceed on their traditional way."¹²⁰ To have "a complete and homogeneous" literature, writers had to choose "a complete and homogeneous language," either Gaelic or English: "There seems to me to be no choice except for these: no half-way house if Scotland is ever to reach its complete expression in literature."¹²¹ Although the country once possessed a vernacular in which "everything can be expressed that a people wishes to express ... we cannot return to it," Muir insisted, "to think so is to misunderstand history."¹²² By the time Robert Burns (1759–96) began composing in Scots poetry, the vernacular was said to have already "lost its richness and thinned to a trickle. It could express feeling, but not sustained thought."¹²³ Dispersed as a variety of provincial dialects, the vernacular had become "what the babbling of children is to the speech of grown men and women; it is blessedly ignorant of the wider spheres of thought and passion, and when it touches upon them its response is as irresponsible as that of the irremediably immature."¹²⁴ Doubtful that Scottish Gaelic provided a better alternative, Muir saw English as the "only practicable" choice for the country.¹²⁵ "This may be a regrettable fact, but it must be accepted," he

¹¹⁸ Muir (1936) 21–22.

¹¹⁹ Muir, "Scotland Once Had a Scots Literature," *The Bulletin* (January 27, 1938) 18, as in MacDiarmid and Muir (2005) 70. Muir (1936) 178.

¹²⁰ MacDiarmid and Muir (2005) 70.

¹²¹ Muir (1936) 178.

¹²² Muir (1936) 177–78.

¹²³ MacDiarmid and Muir (2005) 69.

¹²⁴ Muir (1936) 70–71.

¹²⁵ Muir (1936) 178.

explained, “for there is no Scots language to which we can pass over from the restricted and local province of dialect: there is only English.”¹²⁶ There was no present impediment to a national literature, he maintained: the country had simply to “assert its identity” in English following after “the contemporary case of Ireland.”¹²⁷ “Irish nationality cannot be said to be any less intense than ours,” he explained, “but Ireland produced a national literature not by clinging to Irish dialect, but by adopting English and making it into a language fit for all its purposes. The poetry of Mr Yeats belongs to English literature, but no one would deny that it belongs to Irish literature pre-eminently and essentially.”¹²⁸ Yeats’ example had demonstrated clearly that, even with the strictures of English, new and appropriate forms of expression could be found to express a variety of ‘Celtic identities’ on the British Isles. The tragedy of contemporary Scottish writing lay, as Muir saw it, not in any failure to revive Gaelic or reimagine Scots but with those who clung mulishly to the “bits and patches” of fading dialects while ignoring the precedent of the Irish Revival.¹²⁹

MacDiarmid abhorred the “absurd pro-English prejudice” of Muir’s “sudden attack,” his “stab-in-the-back” betrayal.¹³⁰ He proclaimed him an enemy of Scotland, viciously casting doubt on the Orcadian’s national loyalty and critical skill:

Scotland’s worst enemies have always been Scotsmen themselves, and it is therefore not surprising to find a Scottish writer going far farther in his denigration of Scottish language and literature than even Sir John Squire ... Mr Muir is not exactly a Scotsman himself. He is an Orcadian, and in arguing as he does that a writer in Scots handicaps a critic because the critic must criticise in a different language to that in which the work is written he unwittingly destroys the supposed value of his own remarks on Scots literature, which, by his own criterion, he is incapable of judging save through the disabling medium of a different language. The argument is a nonsensical one.¹³¹

¹²⁶ Muir (1936) 71.

¹²⁷ Muir (1936) 182, 179.

¹²⁸ Muir (1936) 179.

¹²⁹ Muir (1936) 179.

¹³⁰ C. M. Grieve, “Scots As a Literary Medium: Point of View for Burns Day,” *The Bulletin* (January 24, 1938) 13, as in MacDiarmid and Muir (2005) 61. See also C. M. Grieve, Letter to P. H. Butter (December 22, 1966) in MacDiarmid *LHM* (1984) 868. On Muir’s interest in nationalist causes, see Hanham (1969) 160–62, and Bold (1990) 340–43.

¹³¹ MacDiarmid and Muir (2005) 61–62; MacDiarmid never forgave “slithy Edwin” Muir for the opinions he espoused in *Scott and Scotland*, and he often attacked Muir’s poetry and his character. “I cannot agree,” he told Peter Herbert Butter (1921–99), Regius Professor of English

For MacDiarmid, Muir's insistence that remaking Scots was a "petty provincial fad" was tantamount to a "wholesale attack" on both his poetic idiom and the national aspirations of Scotland.¹³² Muir's "contemptuous dismissal" simply reflected a characteristically "English inability to tolerate anything that does not 'do pujah' to themselves. It is this inordinate English ascendancy policy," MacDiarmid complained, "that has determined all their history, and accounts for their ruthless treatment of Irish and Scottish and Welsh Gaelic, the Scots vernacular, and their own dialects."¹³³ Yet such a "snobbish English Tendency," he argued, had certain key facts wrong, for

the Normans at the time of the conquest were as inferior in literary culture and barbarous compared with the inhabitants of England as the Romans were inferior to the Greeks when they made themselves masters of Greece. In precisely the same way it is true that there is nothing inherently inadequate in Scots for the expression of the full range of modern literary purposes – the fact that Scots is not used for a fraction of these is due to other factors than its own inadequacy altogether.¹³⁴

Furthermore, the examples Muir had offered of Yeats and the Irish Revival were equally mistaken, not least because Yeats himself "was an enthusiastic supporter of the Lallans movement and used to go about reciting certain Lallans lyrics which he greatly admired and had memorised."¹³⁵ Moreover, "the whole Celtic Twilight business" had at best, he claimed, "only tinkered with the fringes" of an authentic renaissance in

Language and Literature at the University of Glasgow, "that he is a good, let alone an important, poet. I do not believe at all from my knowledge of him in his professed Christianity or his near saint-hood of character. On the contrary I do not believe he had any intellectual integrity at all." C. M. Grieve, Letter to P. H. Butter (December 22, 1966) in MacDiarmid *LHM* (1984) 868. See also C. M. Grieve, Letter to F. G. Scott (July 13, 1940) in MacDiarmid *NSLHM* (2001) 184. Muir, for his part, later insisted that MacDiarmid's work with Lallans had helped to revive something of Scottish language. "Because of [MacDiarmid's] example," he wrote in 1951, "there has been a revival of the Scottish language, a language which has proved that it is full of vigour, colour, and potentiality. A new poetry without the mark of parochialism which used to cling to Scottish verse, has been written in it, along with poetry by Scotsmen in English, and the remarkable work of Somerled MacLean in Gaelic. There is no parallel to all this in Scottish literature since the days of Fergusson and Burns." Muir (1951) iii–iv. On Muir's unwillingness to engage with MacDiarmid's persistent attacks, see Butter (1966) 152–56.

¹³² MacDiarmid and Muir (2005) 64, 62.

¹³³ MacDiarmid and Muir (2005) 62, 61.

¹³⁴ MacDiarmid and Muir (2005) 61.

¹³⁵ MacDiarmid enjoyed noting that he had once sent "Mr Yeats and 'A.E.' (the late Mr G. W. Russell) representative collections of contemporary poems in English by Scottish poets like Mr Edwin Muir, the late Messrs William Jeffrey, William Soutar, Frederick Branford and others. They found the entire collection quite devoid of merit and said that this confirmed them in their support of the Lallans movement." Hugh MacDiarmid, Letter to *The Scotsman* (December 5, 1950) in MacDiarmid *LHM* (1984) 795.

Celtic literature, perhaps even “dodging ... the issue.”¹³⁶ No new reign of classicism in Irish literature had emerged from the behest of Yeats’ literary politics, MacDiarmid argued, and the poet himself had admitted as much, having often confessed profound disappointment with Revival-era writing, writing that spoke in the

sweet insinuating feminine voice of the dwellers in the country of shadows & hollow images. I have dwelt there too long not to dread all that comes out of it. We possess nothing but the will & we must never let the children of vague desires breathe upon it nor the waters of sentiment rust the terrible mirror of its blade.¹³⁷

For MacDiarmid, Yeats had recognized too late the need for a “Gaelic classical tradition,” a tradition forged not with “fine-spun, tenuous, shadowy stuff” – the “accepted products” of Revival – but with a “distinctive Irish-English,” a hard, hybrid idiom whose “variety” and “virility” could “get back, through the twilight, to the Gaelic sunshine.”¹³⁸

By the time his fierce debate with Muir took place, however, MacDiarmid’s incendiary approach to art, life and politics had already embroiled him in significant turmoil of both a political and a personal nature. By the early 1930s his thirteen-year marriage to Margaret Grieve, née Skinner, was disintegrating as broader support for his involvement in the nationalist movement was evaporating as well.¹³⁹ In spring 1933 John MacDonald MacCormick (1904–61), secretary for the Council of the National Party, notified him that the party had declined his renewal of membership.¹⁴⁰ MacDiarmid’s desire to use “the National Party as a means of introducing Communism into Scotland,” his penchant for preaching “from the Nationalist platform Scots Communism, Republicanism etc.,” was, MacCormick explained, “completely at variance with the Policy of the National Party,” and so

¹³⁶ Hugh MacDiarmid, Letter to Kenneth Buthlay (March 4, 1953) in MacDiarmid *LHM* (1984) 863.

¹³⁷ Yeats, “To George Russell (Æ)” (April 1904) in Yeats *CL3* (1994) 577, cited by Hugh MacDiarmid in “A Roland for an Oliver” (April 1955) in MacDiarmid *RT3* (1998) 343.

¹³⁸ Hugh MacDiarmid, “The Norman Conquest” (July 1955) in MacDiarmid *RT3* (1998) 347. Hugh MacDiarmid, “An Irish Poet: Oliver St John Gogarty” (September 1928) in MacDiarmid *RT2* (1997) 221. On the parallel positions that MacDiarmid and Yeats occupied within revival movements whose aims included “the wider cultural repudiation of English hegemony,” see Crotty (2011) 20–38.

¹³⁹ Amid allegations of infidelity, the couple divorced on January 16, 1932. On their marriage, see Bold (1990) 242–46, 259–64, 267–68.

¹⁴⁰ MacDiarmid had allowed his membership in the National Party to lapse “some time after 10 May 1930.” He was not, therefore, as has often been repeated, expelled from the party so much as prohibited from reinstatement. See Manson (2011) 76.

by a vote of fifty-five against thirty-eight, MacDiarmid was deemed a political isolate, ineligible for renewed membership.¹⁴¹ His strong left-wing sympathies as well as his propensity to savage any opponent were considered too great a liability for the National Party's plan to merge with the more conservative, more unionist Scottish Party led by John Kevan MacDowall (1891–1958). As MacCormick put it, MacDiarmid was “politically one of the greatest handicaps with which any national movement could have been burdened.”¹⁴²

Grieve had joined our platform and in characteristic manner had hurled contempt at everything English ... His love of bitter controversy, his extravagant and self-assertive criticism of the English, and his woolly thinking, which could encompass within one mind the doctrines of both Major Douglas and Karl Marx, were taken by many of the more sober-minded of the Scots as sufficient excuse to condemn the whole case for Home Rule out of hand.¹⁴³

MacDiarmid, in reaction, poured his venom into a series of Scots verses, mocking ‘King John’ MacCormick and his band of moderate Home Rule enthusiasts. That “troupe of gibbering lunatics” had convinced him that there was “nae ither country’ neath the sun / That’s betrayed the human spirit as Scotland’s done, / And still the betrayal proceeds to the complete / Dehumanisin’ o’ the Scottish breed.”¹⁴⁴ Ostracized, he felt that “Nae man, nae spiritual force, can live / In Scotland lang,” and so he encouraged his contemporaries to disavow the National Party:

For God’s sake leave it tae.
Mak’ a warld o’ your ain like me, and if
‘Idiot’ or ‘lunatic’ the Scots folk say
At least you’ll ken – owre weel to argue back –
You’d be better that than lackin’ a’ they lack.¹⁴⁵

In remaking his own world – his political and aesthetic vision as well as his domestic world – MacDiarmid sought isolation and self-imposed exile, moving with his Cornish companion Valda Trevlyn (1906–89) to

¹⁴¹ “37. From J. M. MacCormick, National Party of Scotland” (May 10, 1933) in Manson (2011) 73–74. The vote was not without controversy: some considered MacCormick decidedly “narrow-minded” in his view of MacDiarmid’s contributions to the Party. See “39. From N. C. Jack, National Party of Scotland” (May 31, 1933) in Manson (2011) 74, 76.

¹⁴² MacCormick (1955) 35, as in Bold (1990) 235.

¹⁴³ MacCormick (1955) 35, as in Bold (1990) 235.

¹⁴⁴ Hugh MacDiarmid, Letter to Neil Gunn (May 19, 1933) in MacDiarmid *LHM* (1984) 250; Hugh MacDiarmid, “Letter to R. M. B.” in MacDiarmid *CP2* (1994) 1273.

¹⁴⁵ MacDiarmid *CP2* (1994) 1273.

Whalsay in summer 1933. The “Outer Isles,” exclaimed Ezra Pound, “How the hell *you* are ever to find out anything in Outer Isles with nothing but the shit of Fleet Street and the Pooping of McFarty and Co. governing 96% of British printing kzzrist alone xknoze.”¹⁴⁶ Despite Pound’s exasperation at this move – he risked becoming, like Basil Bunting (1900–85) off on the Canary Islands, “no more central” Pound warned – MacDiarmid remained on Whalsay for nearly nine years, his imagination kindled by the strange visual character of the Shetland and Faroes’ ‘stone’ worlds.¹⁴⁷ Its “impression of barrenness and monotony” was deceptive, for in radiating a “very moderate aspect,” its apparent “absence of variety of colour and form and the landscape, however different to that which one been accustomed, has its own completeness and complexity.”¹⁴⁸ Its “Deictic, fiducial stones” engendered something of a creative renewal, and thus MacDiarmid began experimenting with a “synthetic English – not Scots,” a new, more multilingual ‘world’ language that ‘got’ into

this stone world now.
 Ratchel, striae, relationships of tesserae,
 Innumerable shades of grey,
 Innumerable shapes,
 And beneath them all a stupendous unity,
 Infinite movement visibly defending itself
 Against all the assaults of weather and water,
 Simultaneously mobilised at full strength
 At every point of the universal front,
 Always at the pitch of its powers,
 The foundation and end of all life.
 I try them with the old Norn words – hraun
 Duss, rønis, queedaruns, kollyarun;
 They hvarf from me in all directions
 Over the hurdifell – klett, millya hellya, hellyina bretta,
 Hellyina wheeda, hellyina grø, bakka, ayre, –
 And lay my world in kolgref.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ “84. From Ezra Pound” (December 28, 1934) in Manson (2011) 122–23.

¹⁴⁷ “84. From Ezra Pound” (December 28, 1934) in Manson (2011) 123.

¹⁴⁸ Hugh MacDiarmid, “Faerøerne” (January 12, 1934) in MacDiarmid *RT2* (1997) 357.

¹⁴⁹ Hugh MacDiarmid, “On A Raised Beach,” in MacDiarmid *CPI* (1993) 423, 426–27. C. M. Grieve, Letter to William Soutar (July 5, 1933) in MacDiarmid *LHM* (1984) 148. MacDiarmid likely knew these Norn words from Jakob Jakobsen’s 1897 book, *The Dialect and Place Names of Shetland: Two Popular Lectures*. The words in this passage can be roughly glossed as follows: hraun, meaning “rough, rocky place, wilderness”; duss, meaning “thrown-up heap”; rønis, meaning “cairn” or “stone-heap”; queedaruns, meaning “white rocky place”; kollyarun, meaning

Moving beyond the Doric of *A Drunk Man* and *Cenchrastus*, he brought his “aesthesis in vain to bear” on Whalsay, retrieving many languages, living and extinct, to make a ‘learnèd’ poetry of “kindred form ... Alpha and Omega, the Omnific Word. These stones have the silence of supreme creative power.”¹⁵⁰ He became “an angle-titch to all” the stones’ “corrugations and coigns,” and as his interest in linguistic hybridization grew further, MacDiarmid began to insist that a new poetics of world language might, in fact, give voice to forms of genius present in all literatures and nationalities.¹⁵¹ In juxtaposing “alternative value(s) of prime consequence,” poetry – perhaps the mind itself, MacDiarmid suggested – could be unshackled from “our helpless submission to a fraction of our expressive possibilities.”¹⁵² “[D]espite minor differences,” all restrictive forms of dialect and standardized language, he explained,

employ only a very small fraction – and for the most part all the same fraction – of the expressive resources of the language in question ... The reason why nineteen-twentieths of any language are never used is shrewdly related to the problem of the freedom of the consciousness. As Dostoevski said, all human organizations tend to stabilise and perpetuate themselves – to become a ‘church’ and to short-circuit human consciousness. This is most marked in our language-habit.¹⁵³

The “particular habits of intellection” encouraged by industrial capitalism and the concomitant dominance of English had choked the public with “incrustations” masked with the names of thought and reason, for “what we call ‘thought,’” he explained, “is generally only ‘rationalism’ of our preconceived or inherent prejudices, or limitations, conscious or unconscious, of our powers of thought to suit our interests.”¹⁵⁴ Drawing on the metaphysics of Bergson, MacDiarmid argued that the “misleading superficial ‘crusts’” of prejudice had to be “broken through to release the

“high rocky place”; hvarf, meaning “turning, disappearance”; hurdifell, meaning “steep, rocky hill, full of downfallen boulders”; klett, meaning “shore rocks”; millya hellya, meaning “between the smooth rocks”; hellyina bretta, meaning “the steep or sloped rock”; hellyina wheeda, meaning “the white rock”; hellyina grø, meaning “the gray rock”; bakka, meaning “cliff, or steep rocky shore”; ayre, meaning “beach or piece of sandy shore”; kolgref, meaning “a pit for burning coals.” See Jakobsen (1897), especially 79–80, 84–85, 88–89, 92.

¹⁵⁰ MacDiarmid *CPr* (1993) 423, 428, 429.

¹⁵¹ MacDiarmid *CPr* (1993) 423.

¹⁵² MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 63; C. M. Grieve, Letter to *The Free Man* (December 9 1933) in MacDiarmid *LHM* (1984) 771.

¹⁵³ Grieve, Letter to *The Free Man* (December 9, 1933) in MacDiarmid *LHM* (1984) 771.

¹⁵⁴ Hugh MacDiarmid, “Constricting the Dynamic Spirit: We Want Life Abundant” (May 2, 1936), as in MacDiarmid *RT2* (1997) 548.

dynamic spirit which has no more to do with these incrustations than a running stream has to do with a layer of ice which forms on its surface.”¹⁵⁵ To unleash this kind of dynamism, one had to seek *le mot libre*, a “‘freedom of speech’ in the real meaning of the term – something completely opposed to our language habits and freely utilising not only all the vast vocabulary these automatically exclude, but illimitable powers of word formation in keeping with the free genius of any language.”¹⁵⁶ Thus, in contrast to the Basic English encouraged by Ogden and Richards, MacDiarmid felt that no adequate ‘world’ language could take the shape of rudimentary, seemingly straightforward intercultural communication. On the contrary, given the sheer diversity of language and literatures, only a difficult synthetic medium could resist the ‘imperial’ or broad ‘ascendancy’ model of international language, one which would see a single language feign translation of all human cultures, nationalities and knowledge through its idiom.

While MacDiarmid’s vision for this collective medium was more literary, its politics more expressly aesthetic, he drew on parallel, practical models of ‘Interlanguage’, especially those advanced by contemporaneous communist thinkers in Britain. One was the suffragette and anti-fascist agitator E. Sylvia Pankhurst (1882–1960), whose 1926 book *Delphos: The Future of International Language* bemoaned that “language-barriers” still obstructed the “desire for world-friendship long latent amongst the kindlier and wiser people of all nations, and now quickened to an ardent flame by the agonies of the World-war.”¹⁵⁷ Pankhurst believed, nonetheless, that the cause of “world-friendship” could be helped, in part, by developing an international “Interlanguage,” if such a tongue could indeed “*provide the greatest possible intelligibility: therefore it must reach the widest possible internationality.*”¹⁵⁸ In no way could it be characterized as global if other distinctively national modes of expression were eradicated through the official imposition of a more ‘basic’ form.

The Interlanguage cannot be the creation of Governments. No Government attempts to dictate in regard to the grammar and syntax of the national tongue. Even in France such matters are left to the *Académie*. Government schools everywhere teach according to the generally accepted

¹⁵⁵ MacDiarmid *RT2* (1997) 548.

¹⁵⁶ Grieve, Letter to *The Free Man* (December 9, 1933) in MacDiarmid *LHM* (1984) 771.

¹⁵⁷ Pankhurst (1926) 6, 7. On Pankhurst’s communism and its influence over her view of world language, see Romero (1987) 181–82.

¹⁵⁸ Pankhurst (1926) 7, 48 (emphasis in the original).

canons established by those who make a special study of the given subject. So with the Interlanguage: it will develop with the general consensus of world-opinion, led by the specialists. Its discovery and perfection must be mainly the work of philologists, working, not as propagandists and politicians, but as scientists and students. After the philologists will come the stylists; the poets, and thinkers.¹⁵⁹

According to Pankhurst, no national tongue could be especially equitable serving as a “world auxiliary” language: to encourage global prosperity, the Interlanguage had to emerge from “definite scientific principles,” the “general consensus of world philological opinion” and not forms of political and linguistic aggression.¹⁶⁰ To this end she promoted endowing “interlanguage research” and establishing “[c]hairs of synthetic philology ... in all universities.”¹⁶¹ Far from antagonizing existing national languages, the Interlanguage would operate “much like Latin,” the “master-key to the most universally employed of the great speech-families” and would engender “a readier and deeper understanding” of many national tongues.¹⁶² Employed in separate fields of human endeavor, national and international language could therefore work in harmony, she argued, their knowledge together doing much to “accelerate the spread of learning and the breaking down of social barriers.”¹⁶³

Probably fifty (perhaps even thirty) years hence no one will be troubled by learning the Interlanguage. It will be acquired at the toddling age, side by side with the mother-tongue. The schools will be wholly bi-lingual. The Interlanguage and the native language will be used in teaching children, who will enter school with a familiar-speaking knowledge of both. For arithmetic, geometry, mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, the geography and history of foreign countries, the Interlanguage will be the vehicle of instruction, the national language being employed for the literature,

¹⁵⁹ Pankhurst (1926) 86.

¹⁶⁰ Pankhurst (1926) 44, 41, 87–88.

¹⁶¹ Pankhurst (1926) 87.

¹⁶² Pankhurst (1926) 50, 47. Pankhurst favored the adoption of Interlingua, a form of scientifically simplified, uninflected Latin (*Latino sine flexione* or IL) designed by the Italian mathematician and linguist Giuseppe Peano (1858–1932). According to Pankhurst, IL deserved the “palm for linguistic excellence, amongst the existing interlanguages ... because it is the first systematic attempt to build up an inter-European vocabulary on a consistent scientific basis; because it goes furthest in the elimination of grammar, under the guidance of observed tendencies in natural language; above all, because it is a logical etymological attempt to create the poor man’s simplified Latin, which will open to him the nomenclature of the sciences, and will enable him to understand the prescription of his doctor and the legal phrases contained in the lawyer’s presentment of his case.” Pankhurst (1926) 84–85.

¹⁶³ Pankhurst (1926) 50.

history, and geography of the native land. Elocution will be practised in both tongues.¹⁶⁴

MacDiarmid felt likewise: a synthetic ‘world’ language would not threaten parochial idioms or diminish the importance of national literary expression. On the contrary, its essential quality would be its sheer complexity, its ability to house the exceptional character of all literatures while creating a “vivid sense” of their “very different historical, psychological and practical affiliations.”¹⁶⁵ These polyglossic aspirations moved MacDiarmid beyond heteroglossia, synthesizing not dialects of the same tongue but the very ‘classical’ essences drawn from “the whole range of *welt-literatur*” and its forms of “many-sided knowledge.”¹⁶⁶

For MacDiarmid, no conflict existed between this vision and the nationalist ambitions of his early verse, for “the Communist Party of Great Britain,” he noted, was “the only party which has the restoration to Scotland of a Parliament of its own as a plank in its platform.”¹⁶⁷ More than any other progressive party, Communist Britain understood that Scotland “with its splendid old Radical and Left Wing tendency” had an essential role to play in a “United Front against Fascism and War,” for if the country were to “pull its full weight on the side of Peace and the Commonwealth of Mankind at this great turning-point in human history,” then the “possibility of the development of the Scottish culture” might be more fully ensured.¹⁶⁸ While a certain “fascising pseudo-satisfaction” – that of Oswald Mosley (1896–1980) and the British Union of Fascists – was on the rise, even among some Scottish nationalists, MacDiarmid considered his “adequate synthetic medium” an essential

¹⁶⁴ Pankhurst (1926) 93–94.

¹⁶⁵ MacDiarmid (1943) 7.

¹⁶⁶ MacDiarmid *LP* (1994) 354.

¹⁶⁷ Hugh MacDiarmid, “Burns Today and Tomorrow” (1959) in MacDiarmid (1996a) 276. On MacDiarmid’s “Nationalist Internationalism,” see Hart (2010) 51–78.

¹⁶⁸ Hugh MacDiarmid, “Scottish Culture and Imperialist War” (1937) in MacDiarmid *RT3* (1998) 8. MacDiarmid believed a “Celtic USSR” – a socialist union of Ireland, Scotland and Wales – could diminish English ascendancy. See Hugh MacDiarmid, “Celtic Front” (1939) in MacDiarmid *RT3* (1998) 21–26. His interest in a “Celtic USSR” originated, in part, from his formative experiences during the First World War: “I was associated with soldiers,” he later explained, “who were English, Welsh, Irish and so on. And I found that wherever these elements were brigaded together, we got on very well – Irish, the Welsh, the Scots but not the English. That caused me to think. And when I came back to Scotland, after serving several years for a war that was ostensibly fought for the determination of small nations – poor little Belgium and all that – I was suddenly confronted by the fact that I didn’t know anything about my own country of Scotland, and I didn’t see why on earth so many friends of mine had been slain fighting a war that we didn’t know anything about.” Hugh MacDiarmid, as interviewed in *Hugh MacDiarmid: No Fellow Travelers*, a film for the 1972 Edinburgh Festival, directed by Oscar Marzaroli (Ogam Films, 1972).

way by which human consciousness might be freed from the bonds that had long “cribbed, cabbined, confined” expression among the disenfranchised and impoverished.¹⁶⁹ Its idiom could help throw off “the bias given to human mentality by economic, political, religious, and other factors (including above all the *vis inertia*),” thus fulfilling Lenin’s dictum that communism “must not abandon the old.”¹⁷⁰ “Communism,” he had declared – in remarks MacDiarmid fondly repeated –

becomes an empty phrase, a mere façade, and the Communist a mere bluffer, if he has not worked over in his consciousness the whole inheritance of human knowledge ... made his own, and worked over anew, all that was of value in the more than two thousand years of development of human thought.¹⁷¹

However marginal a country’s wealth, military power or global prestige might be, each “nation, once fully realised on its own terms” could articulate its political genius and aesthetic potential free from imperial forms of interference, whether such forms were officially imposed or culturally inherited.¹⁷²

Given such influence, it is of little surprise that MacDiarmid hoped to wean ‘classicism’ and the ‘classical’ off abstract principles drawn from Greek and Roman civilization. Imitating or conforming to a kind of marmoreal, or neoclassical, reception of antiquity would inevitably limit vital expressions of contemporary national culture. “I have,” he explained,

no more use for ‘consistency’ of this kind than I have for any other shibboleth which tries to confine the infinite vitality and potentiality of humanity to any particular ‘rut’, and my objection to any such process is precisely the root of my nationalism. I do not believe in – or in the desirability of – any ‘likemindness’, any ‘common purpose’, any ‘ultimate

¹⁶⁹ MacDiarmid *RT3* (1998) 8. Grieve, Letter to *The Free Man* (December 9, 1933) in MacDiarmid *LHM* (1984) 771. MacDiarmid *RT2* (1997) 548. See also Linehan (2000) 124–49, and Pugh (2006).

¹⁷⁰ MacDiarmid *RT2* (1997) 548. Lenin (1973) 439.

¹⁷¹ Often incorrectly cited (as by MacDiarmid himself in *Lucky Poet*) as originating in Lenin’s final speech from 1922, “Speech at a Plenary Session of the Moscow Soviet,” these remarks are from a speech to the Russian Young Communist League given in October 1920. MacDiarmid knew this English translation from the 1933 book *Lenin*, written by the journalist Rajani Palme Dutt (1896–1974). Dutt argued of Lenin that he saw communism not as a “special body of doctrines or dogmas ... ‘ready-made conclusions’ to be learnt from textbooks,” but rather as “the outcome of the whole of human science and culture, on the basis of an exact study of all that previous ages, including especially capitalist society, had achieved.” Dutt (1933) 64–65. See the text of Lenin’s speech in a later translation in Lenin (1974) 286. See also Hugh MacDiarmid, under the pseudonym “Arthur Leslie,” “The Poetry and Politics of Hugh MacDiarmid” (1952) in MacDiarmid *SEHM* (1970) 29–30, as well as MacDiarmid *LP* (1994) xxxi–xxxii, 153, 355.

¹⁷² Lyall (2006) 19.

objective', but simply in 'life and all that more abundantly', in the lifting of all suppressions and thwarting and warping agencies. My communism in this sense is purely Platonic.¹⁷³

Despite these aspirations, however, Hugh MacDiarmid was no trained linguist. Christopher Grieve had come into the world with few social or educational advantages, having been raised by working-class parents in the mill town of Langholm. He had little exposure to the classics or even to contemporary European languages in his schooling at Langholm Academy. When he did move to Edinburgh in 1908 to train as a teacher at Broughton Junior Student Center – an institution whose curriculum was said to include the “Liberal Arts subjects – English, Languages, Maths, Science, History, Classics, Geography and Art” – the instruction he received was little more than basic.¹⁷⁴ Nonetheless, MacDiarmid continued to associate a certain creative magnetism (as well as his own frustration, sexual and otherwise) with the presence of classics, Greek in particular. He wrote later how

... greatly I love to hear a girl
Back from three years at school
Say to her father in fluent Greek
'Morning, old lad: like your eggs fried or boiled?
Going to be cursed hot to-day
But thank Heaven I've nothing to do
But grill ἡλιάζω on the lawn
And smoke καπνίζω a handful
Of cigarettes σκιρτεῖν or χειροπηδᾶν'
– All in Plato's or Xenophon's style and vocabulary,
Only borrowing from the modern language
The few words necessary
For purely 20th century things,
And wish I might be found so speaking too
fhios dom fhéin some fine day
Tho' I appreciate Euripides' use
Of archaic diction too,
But alas I can speak no Greek,
And am now too old to learn.
And nil leiyecas ogam air.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ MacDiarmid *RT2* (1997) 549.

¹⁷⁴ Kerrigan (1988) xv. On his early education, see MacDiarmid *LP* (1994) 218–32, Lyall (2006) 56–65 and Gish (1984) 8–19.

¹⁷⁵ MacDiarmid *CP2* (1994) 797. ἡλιάζω, meaning “to bask in the sun”; καπνίζω, meaning “to smoke”; σκιρτεῖν, meaning “leap, dance, frisk, buck” (commonly of calves); and χειροπηδᾶν,

MacDiarmid left Broughton without receiving a certificate to qualify him as a teacher. He was glad of it, though, it seems, for he did not want to become institutionalized by the “Scottish teaching profession,” by those “hopeless Safety-Firsters ... conscienceless agents of the Powers-that-Be” who continually bend “the knee to Baal in this connexion or that, or grovelling together, obliged, in order to secure their jobs, to tout and belly-crawl.”¹⁷⁶ Grieve’s failures with formal schooling, however, only emboldened his belief that Scotland’s guardian institutions remained irrepressibly Anglicized and British; they were therefore not suited to the educational needs of the more ‘authentic’ Scottish student, a student he considered not unlike himself. From a young age he had “an unusual readiness of speech,” “a fluency in the use of a very extensive vocabulary,” which later helped him become an ardent autodidact.¹⁷⁷ MacDiarmid’s profound self-regard often saw him preen:

I have never met anyone who has read anything like as much as I have, though I have known most of our great bookmen; and it is a common experience of mine to have professors and other specialists in this or that language or literature, or in subjects ranging from geology to cerebral localization or the physiological conditions of originality of thought, admit that I am far better read even in their own particular subject than they are themselves. The range of reference in all my books bears this out.¹⁷⁸

MacDiarmid’s “pugnacious pride” about his learnedness masked, as Scott Lyall suggests, an “insecurity as to the absence of an institutional basis for such learning,” but, however much he fretted about his own lack of formal instruction, MacDiarmid took a decidedly dim view of the “Scottish Educational System as a whole,” believing it had “been utterly de-Scotticized and adapted in the most shocking fashion to suit the exigencies of English Imperialism and the Capitalist system.”¹⁷⁹ For that

meaning “to be bound, handcuffed.” Some of the Greek used by MacDiarmid in this passage alludes obliquely to the capture of Dionysus in Euripides’ *Bacchae* (434–60). On the source of the Irish Gaelic in the passage, see Introduction, p. 11157.

¹⁷⁶ MacDiarmid *LP* (1994) 229.

¹⁷⁷ MacDiarmid *LP* (1994) 229.

¹⁷⁸ MacDiarmid *LP* (1994) 13.

¹⁷⁹ Lyall (2006) 57. MacDiarmid *LP* (1994) 229. MacDiarmid’s pugnaciousness often found impressive expression in insults against the political and literary establishment. For example: “My aim all along has been (in Ezra Pound’s terms) the most drastic *desuetization* of Scottish life and letters, and, in particular, the de-Tibetanization of the Highlands and Islands, and getting rid of the whole gang of high mucky-mucks, famous fatheads, old wives of both sexes, stuffed shirts, hollow men with headpieces stuffed with straw, bird-wits, lookers-under-beds, trained seals, creeping Jesuses, Scots Wha Ha’evers, village idiots, policemen, leaders of white-mouse factions

reason, in part, he felt that his “interest in *welt-literatur*,” his own half-read exposure to many languages and literatures, was more than enough to carry synthetic verse “much further than it has yet been carried by anyone else known to me.”¹⁸⁰

As MacDiarmid pushed ahead with his synthetic experiments, he began composing in 1937 a sprawling poem, *Cornish Heroic Song for Valda Trevlyn*, dedicated to his second wife.¹⁸¹ Drawing on “corrective” ‘classical’ values from literatures past and present, MacDiarmid no longer sought, as he had done for Scots, simply “a form of Doric which is no dialect in particular” but a “new literary language” drawn from many expressions of human speech.¹⁸² In so doing, however, he felt himself at odds with, if not a rival of, the prior examples of Celtic revival and nationalist renaissance, especially the example of Yeats and the Irish Literary Revival.¹⁸³ As Hart has noted, MacDiarmid’s earliest attempts to remake Scots came at something of cross purposes, marked with an ambivalence as to whether he wanted revival and preservation – a “project of linguistic recovery” – or something aimed more purely at experimentation and invention, what Hart calls the “avant-garde hypostatization of linguistic scholarship.”¹⁸⁴ As the writing of *Cornish Song* progressed, MacDiarmid pushed the impulse towards revival and preservation aside emphatically, and instead embraced a transnational cosmopolitanism modeled on Arne Garborg (1851–1924) and Joyce whose “European range in technique and ideas” had “striking affinities” with his own practice.¹⁸⁵ “Theoretically – and to some extent practically,” he told *The Free Man*,

and noted connoisseurs of bread and butter, glorified gangsters, and what ‘Billy’ Phelps calls Medlar Novelists (the medlar being a fruit that becomes rotten before it is ripe), Commercial Calvinists, makers of ‘noises like a turnip’, and all the touts and toadies and lickspittles of the English Ascendancy, and their infernal women-folk, and all their skunkoil skulduggery.” MacDiarmid *LP* (1994) 149.

¹⁸⁰ MacDiarmid *LP* (1994) 13; C. M. Grieve, Letter to William Soutar (January 14, 1938) in MacDiarmid *LHM* (1984) 168.

¹⁸¹ On the composition and publication history of *Cornish Heroic Song for Valda Trevlyn*, see Herbert (1992) 157–225. See also Bold (1990) 346–80.

¹⁸² MacDiarmid *SP* (1992) 68; MacDiarmid *RTI* (1996) 237.

¹⁸³ On MacDiarmid’s competitive relationship with Yeats, see Crotty (2011) 32–36. For his view of the Irish Revival, see also Bold (1985) 4–5.

¹⁸⁴ Hart (2010) 67.

¹⁸⁵ MacDiarmid *RTI* (1996) 237, 233. Alan Bold suggests that MacDiarmid’s “opinion of Yeats was qualified by his disapproval of Yeats’s ‘pro-Fascist’ politics. Yeats’s Celtic Twilight period did not appeal to MacDiarmid though he felt that Yeats would be acknowledged as ‘the greatest poet of his period in the English language ... mainly by virtue of his later work.’” Bold (1985) 8.

I go further and agree with Joyce in regard to the utilisation of a multi-linguistic medium – a synthetic use, not of any particular language, but of all languages. Personally, I write in English, or in dialect Scots, or in synthetic Scots – or in synthetic English – with bits of other languages. I recognise the values of any language or any dialect for certain purposes, but where I am concerned with the free consciousness I cannot employ these – I must then find an adequate synthetic medium.¹⁸⁶

Likening himself to Joyce, MacDiarmid insisted (often in pseudonymous reviews praising his own work) that “in cerebral and psychological interpretation” he was doing for Scotland something “like what Mr Joyce has done for Ireland,” for “Mr M‘Diarmid thus resembles Mr Joyce in his attitude to the religion of his countrymen, to sexual problems, to political and cultural nationalism, to humbug, hypocrisy, and sentimentalism, [and] in his preoccupation with ‘interior revelation.’”¹⁸⁷ Whether or not MacDiarmid’s work reflected an authentically Joycean character, he did go far, by sheer number, with his synthetic idiom, producing between the years of 1937 and 1939 more than 20,000 lines of verse, an amount that showed, he claimed, how he had left “Joyce at the starting-post so far as the use of multi-linguistics is concerned.”¹⁸⁸

Yet, as critics of *Cornish Heroic Song* have suggested, MacDiarmid’s attempts at ‘world’ poetry still remained clearly marked with “the ineradicability of English.”¹⁸⁹ His idiom was not so much a global language inflected with a wide range of syntactic patterns and complex code-switching but instead an “English coloured with exotic quotations.”¹⁹⁰ When faced with the poem’s synthesis, English readers can with relative ease, as Hart observes,

recognize textual representations of nonstandard language precisely because of the homogeneity of modern spellings and the parallel homogeneity of phonemic representations of the nonstandard. Likewise, the deviations from English that are such a marked feature of MacDiarmid’s poetry are largely sketched against more familiar syntactic and phonological canvasses, so that his “World Language” requires that we own a good dictionary (or have access to Google) but not, in Kamau Brathwaite’s words, that we reprogram the very “software of the language.”¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁶ Grieve, Letter to *The Free Man* (December 9, 1933) in MacDiarmid *LHM* (1984) 771.

¹⁸⁷ MacDiarmid *RTI* (1996) 238, 237.

¹⁸⁸ Grieve, Letter to William Soutar (January 14, 1938) in MacDiarmid *LHM* (1984) 168.

¹⁸⁹ Hart (2010) 68.

¹⁹⁰ Bold (1990) 360.

¹⁹¹ Hart (2010) 68.

MacDiarmid's idiom – suffused in foreign intrusions – did ensure that his verse would appear “lexically deterritorialized” for English readers, especially when compared with other conventional or seemingly ‘accessible’ forms of poetry, yet it is important to note that this ‘deterritorialization’ was not absolute.¹⁹² His idiom does not require to any substantive degree the parallel activation of multiple languages, semantically or phonologically, nor does it effectively generate meaning across multiple tongues – not as Joyce had tried perhaps to do more effectively through the “strange slithery slipping, dreamy nightmarish prose” of *Anna Livia Plurabelle*.¹⁹³ Its idioglossic fusion radiated what Æ called “wild meanings arising out of arcane affinities with other words, the whole gurgling and slipping like water.”¹⁹⁴ Nevertheless, though many have thought the poem's apparent “erudition ... sometimes bogus,” MacDiarmid still believed his “huge” *Cornish Heroic Song* had “worked out all the interconnections,” the “mutual inter-activity” needed, to exorcise the “linguistic imperialism” of English ascendancy.¹⁹⁵ That tendency with its “magnificent insularity / Which is the pride of the Anglo-Saxon mind,” he wrote, had been seen squarely in calls that Basic English be adopted “as the supra-national language,” a reality which

Would imply the acknowledgment of Anglo-Saxon supremacy.
The proof of this is that all arguments adduced
By Professor Richards and his colleagues
Are all based on our manifold superiorities:
We are richer, more numerous,
More civilised, more virtuous than the rest!
– All dreams of ‘imperialism’ must be exorcised,
Including linguistic imperialism, which sums up all the rest.¹⁹⁶

Criticism of Basic English notwithstanding, the synthetic poetry MacDiarmid was producing with a “vast international vocabulary” reflected parallel schemes for summing “up all the rest.”¹⁹⁷ The self-taught insularity and crippling isolation MacDiarmid experienced on the

¹⁹² Hart (2010) 68.

¹⁹³ Æ, “*Anna Livia Plurabelle*,” *Irish Statesman* xi (December 29, 1928) 339, in Deming (1970) vol. 2: 396.

¹⁹⁴ Æ, “*Anna Livia Plurabelle*,” *Irish Statesman* xi (December 29, 1928) 339, in Deming (1970) vol. 2: 396. For a comparative account of *Finnegans Wake* and *In Memoriam James Joyce*, see Freedman (1992) 253–73.

¹⁹⁵ Freedman (1992) 269; MacDiarmid *LP* (1994) 26; MacDiarmid *CP2* (1994) 790.

¹⁹⁶ MacDiarmid *CP2* (1994) 789–90.

¹⁹⁷ MacDiarmid *CP2* (1994) 790.

Shetlands made him more vulnerable, it seems, to delusions of apocalyptic clairvoyance: the “multitudinous waves of speech” his verse possessed had “language elements,” he fantasized, which “effectively combined” could “utterly change the nature of man.”¹⁹⁸

Even as the recently-discovered plant growth hormone,
 Idole-acetic acid, makes holly-cuttings in two months
 Develop roots that would normally take two years to grow,
 So perchance can we outgrow time
 And suddenly fulfil all history
 Established and to come.¹⁹⁹

Addressing not just the Scottish but Anglophobic nationalists drawn from across “Cornwall, Scotland, Ireland, Wales,” he exhorted “young Celts arise with quick tongues intact” to do what their “elders” lying “tongueless under the ocean of history” had reputedly not done: claim alternative ‘classical’ values and rive away “the heavy oily blood-rich tongue” of the “white whale,” England’s “hideous khaki Empire.”²⁰⁰ By effectively depleting any clear connection to Greek and Roman literature from the ‘classical’ and ‘classicism’, MacDiarmid dislodged classics from the once seminal role it played in enfranchising the English ruling class; the culturally enforced guardianship of the Celtic and other minority literatures was to be deposed. As the “identity-forming power” of classics shifted elsewhere, its authority was employed to serve ‘new’ postcolonial constituencies, where “Anglocentric” hegemony was not reinforced or seen as a given condition of British imperial inheritance.²⁰¹ “Red blasts of the fire come quivering – yes, we dare,” MacDiarmid declared,

To shoot out our tongues under the very noses of the English.
 The fate of our forefathers has not made us afraid
 To open our mouths and show our red glory of health;
 Nay, we sail again, laughing, on the crown of the sea,
 “Not so much bound to any haven ahead
 As rushing from all havens astern,”
 The deepest blood-being of the white race crying to England
 “Consummatum Est! Your Imperial *Pequod* is sunk.”²⁰²

¹⁹⁸ MacDiarmid *CP2* (1994) 787, 781.

¹⁹⁹ MacDiarmid *CP2* (1994) 781.

²⁰⁰ MacDiarmid (1977) 10.

²⁰¹ Haynes (2019b) 12; Crawford (2000) 30.

²⁰² MacDiarmid (1977) 10.

That his global synthesis possessed an eschatological vision, heralding new international unity, that this vision moreover did not subject particular forms of national expression to a forced assimilation imposed by “supra-national language,” was never in doubt for MacDiarmid.²⁰³ Yet the difficulty of his synthetic English – to say little of the fact that his work was forged in radical isolation – made finding a venue for publication troublesome, even among those considered more sympathetic to the avant-garde. Writing to Eliot in February 1938, MacDiarmid proposed a large, 4,000 to 5,000 line section of *Cornish Heroic Song* for publication in *The Criterion*, a portion he had re-entitled *Mature Art*. The work was

a “hapax legomenon of a poem – an exercise in schlabone, bordatini, and prolonged scordatura” and it is, I am very safe in saying, a very advanced example of ‘learned poetry’, much of it written in a multi-linguistic diction embracing not only many European but also Asiatic languages, and prolific in allusions and ‘synthetic poetry’, demanding for their complete comprehension an extremely detailed knowledge of numerous fields of world-literature. At the same time the logic of the whole is quite clear, and most of the poem should be understood by almost anyone who reads while he runs – if he runs fast enough.²⁰⁴

Eliot responded politely, noting that, while his poem appeared to be an “extremely interesting, individual, and indeed very remarkable piece of work,” *The Criterion* could not afford to print it in its entirety: “There can be no doubt that it is something that ought to be published, but the question is how, and by whom ... I cannot get my colleagues to consider undertaking a work in verse of this size. I cannot afford to lose much money for them on poetry.”²⁰⁵ Instead, for *The Criterion*’s final issue of January 1939, Eliot chose to publish only a small, nine-page excerpt – the “First Appendix (Cornwall)” – of MacDiarmid’s “extremely long unpublished poem.”²⁰⁶ Later, larger portions of *Mature Art* would appear in 1955 when MacDiarmid pledged himself to the “forward-straining vision” of Joyce, refashioning parts of his long poetic sequence as *In Memoriam James Joyce, From A Vision of World Language*.²⁰⁷

²⁰³ MacDiarmid *CP2* (1994) 789.

²⁰⁴ C. M. Grieve, Letter to T. S. Eliot (February 4, 1938) in MacDiarmid *LHM* (1984) 446.

²⁰⁵ T. S. Eliot, Letter to C. M. Grieve (June 8, 1938) in MacDiarmid *LHM* (1984) 447.

²⁰⁶ The poem was published under the title “Cornish Heroic Song for Valda Trevlyn.” See MacDiarmid (1939a) 195–203. On Eliot’s exchanges with MacDiarmid in this period, see Harding (2002) 101–2.

²⁰⁷ Eugène Jolas, “Style and the Limitations of Speech,” *Irish Statesman* (January 26, 1929) in Deming (1970) vol. 2: 399. On the composition of *In Memoriam James Joyce*, see Benstead (2019).

The initial difficulty, however, of finding a publisher – or indeed of appealing to a wide audience – did not faze MacDiarmid. Years earlier he had scoffed at the suggestion that *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* ought to be divided into sections for the common reader. Such divisions would simply be “‘hand-rails’” to “‘raise false hopes in the ingenuous minds of readers whose rational intelligences are all too unsusceptible of realising the enormities of which ‘highbrows’ of my type are capable – even in Scotland.”²⁰⁸ In similar fashion he once demanded that the nationalist periodical *The Voice of Scotland* (of which he was then editor) maintain its “highly specialised appeal to the ablest minds,” impacting opinion solely among the social, political and artistic elite, not among commoners.²⁰⁹ A “continuity of culture” could be maintained not by popular acclamation but “by a very small number of people indeed – and these not necessarily the best equipped with worldly advantages.”²¹⁰ Far from shirking the ambition of *Cornish Heroic Song*, MacDiarmid plunged himself further into work. Beginning a memoir, *Lucky Poet* (1943), to recount his “desperate” struggles, he cast himself as a ‘learned’ poet then embarking “on a course ... in the teeth of all the opposition of those who hate versatility,” and versatility, MacDiarmid boasted, was at the heart of *Cornish Heroic Song*: its virtuosic synthesis of languages deployed nothing less than what Coleridge called the mind’s “prime & loftiest Faculty,” the “esemplastic power” of human imagination.²¹¹ “Is this not what we require?” he declared,

Coleridge’s esemplasy and coadunation
 Multeity in unity – not the Unity resulting
 But the mode of the conspiracy
 (Schelling’s *In-Eins-Bildung Kraft*)
 Of the manifold to the one,
 For, as Rilke says, the poet must know everything,
 Be μηρίδονος (a phrase I have borrowed

²⁰⁸ M’Diarmid (1926) viii.

²⁰⁹ MacDiarmid (1939b) 19. On MacDiarmid’s approach, see Baker (2016) 315–17.

²¹⁰ MacDiarmid (1939b) 19. Eliot (1939) 274.

²¹¹ MacDiarmid *LP* (1994) xxxi, xvi, as first introduced by Coleridge in chapter 10 of *Biographia Literaria* (1817). Coleridge (1983) vol. 1: 168–71. On “esemplastic power,” see also Samuel Taylor Coleridge, chapter 13 of *Biographia Literaria* in Coleridge (1983) vol. 1: 295–306 as well as Coleridge, *Notebook* 24.72 (February–June 1813), where esemplasy is contrasted with the “Imagunculation”: “His Imagination, if it must be so called, is at all events of the pettiest kind—it is an Imagunculation—How excellently the German Einbildungskraft expresses this prime & loftiest Faculty, the power of co-adunation, the faculty that forms the many into one, in *eins Bildung*,” Coleridge (1973) note 4176. See also Kathleen Coburn’s explanatory notes on this passage in Coleridge (1973) note 4176.

From a Greek monk, who applies it
 To a Patriarch of Constantinople),
 Or, as the *Bhagavad-Gita* puts it, *visvato-mukha*.²¹²

While Coleridge had coined “esemplastic” from the Greek, εἰς ἕν πλάττειν – an anglicization of Friedrich Schelling’s notion, *Ineinsbildung* (the so-called interweaving of opposites) – MacDiarmid saw in the neologism further evidence that his synthetic techniques – those he had worked out with the “sudden jostling of contraries” of the “Caledonian antiszygy” – had broader reach across history.²¹³ According to Coleridge it was Shakespeare, above all, who possessed not merely “poetic genius” but the “power of reducing multitude into unity of effect ... modifying a series of thoughts by some one predominant thought or feeling.”²¹⁴ That fact made Shakespeare “our myriad-minded” poet – an ἀνὴρ μυριόνοῦς – whose mastery of “combination” and “intertexture” authenticated the aphorism (sometimes attributed to the Roman grammarian Pseudo-Acro): “Poeta nascitur non fit.”²¹⁵

Yet the ‘myriad-mindedness’ that Christopher Grieve was eager to arrogate to his own pseudonymous mask, Hugh MacDiarmid, was not as inborn as the grammarian imagined but one which MacDiarmid had acquired on the Shetlands, where by January 1942 he had spent nearly nine years “rowing about on lonely waters; lying brooding in uninhabited islands; seeing no newspapers and in other ways cutting myself completely away from civilised life.”²¹⁶ As a student at Langholm Academy, Grieve had been considered “utterly unamenable to discipline of any kind,” so much so that his headmaster spoke of a “terrible vein of recklessness” that ran through him.²¹⁷ It was the development of Grieve’s irreverence, though, that drove him to invent Hugh MacDiarmid and his ‘myriad-minded’ global classicism. That classicism prized, he thought,

²¹² In *Lucky Poet* (1943) MacDiarmid did not write μυριόνοῦς but instead “mindedness” in Greek lettering, with no accentuation: “μινδεδνεσς.” See MacDiarmid *LP* (1994) 122, as well as MacDiarmid *CP2* (1994) 1016.

²¹³ On “esemplastic,” see Coleridge (1983) vol. 1: 168–171. Smith (1919) 20, 4.

²¹⁴ Coleridge (1983) vol. 2: 20.

²¹⁵ From the Latin: “a poet is born, not made.” From the Greek μυριόνοῦς, Coleridge translated “myriad-minded.” This can be roughly rendered as “complex and multiform in the variously versatile wisdom,” as by House (1953) 33. Coleridge encountered the term μυριόνοῦς in 1801 in Naucratius’ eulogy of *Theodorus Studites* (759–826), published in William Cave’s *Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Historia Literaria* (1688–99) vol. 1: 509–13; and in the 1743 edition, vol. 2: 8–11. Parts of the passages from Cave are reproduced in Coleridge’s notebook 21.195 (December 1801). See Coleridge (1957) note 1070. On “Poeta nascitur non fit,” see Ringler (1941) 497–504.

²¹⁶ C. M. Grieve, Letter to Neil M. Gunn (May 19, 1933) in MacDiarmid *LHM* (1984) 250.

²¹⁷ MacDiarmid *LP* (1994) 227.

not neoclassical forgeries of the Greek and Roman but a broad openness to the possibility that all nations could realize their genius “to classic effect as the Greeks themselves did.”²¹⁸ However, even as MacDiarmid desired “something far more radical than a return to any ‘classical’ formalism,” he himself possessed little fluency with those modern and ancient languages on which he purported to draw to classic effect.²¹⁹ Yet still he bullishly called on these, convinced that his being “an omnivorous reader” would help him bring together “vital contemporary poetry no matter in what European country or language it was being produced.”²²⁰ Thus while a sense of being cut off from an operative “continuity of culture” always haunted MacDiarmid, that “remoteness” proved to be a “stimulating rather than obstructive” force for his work.²²¹ Opposing “intellectual apathy” he claimed to work with

... material founded, like Gray’s, on difficult knowledge
 And its metres those of a poet
 Who has studied Pindar and Welsh poetry,
 But, more than that, its words coming from a mind
 Which has experienced the sifted layers on layers
 Of human lives – aware of the innumerable dead
 And the innumerable to-be-born,
 The voice of the centuries, of Shakespeare’s history plays
 Concentrated and deepened,
 ‘The breath and finer spirit of all knowledge,
 The impassioned expression
 Which is in the countenance of all science.’²²²

Although MacDiarmid’s forms of linguistic appropriation were compromised by his aggression, they still nonetheless fertilized powerful synthetic experiments in Scots and in English, experiments predicated not on nostalgia for the purity of classics but on a vision of greater global integration. This future MacDiarmid marked with spectacular fantasies of multilingual fusion on which the “whole life” of all traditions and cultures would depend.²²³ To enact again what “Greece itself had done,”

²¹⁸ Hugh MacDiarmid, “Wider Aspects of Scottish Nationalism” (November 1927) in MacDiarmid *RT2* (1997) 61.

²¹⁹ MacDiarmid *RT2* (1997) 60.

²²⁰ Hugh MacDiarmid, “The Future of Scottish Poetry” (June 24, 1933) in MacDiarmid *RT2* (1997) 209.

²²¹ Eliot (1939) 274. Carne-Ross (1979) 9.

²²² MacDiarmid *CP2* (1994) 1013, 1014.

²²³ Carne-Ross (1979) 5.

to understand the “Ur-motives” that had shaped the fundamental form of all literatures, one had to turn the ‘classical’ impulse away from a fatal drift towards imitation.²²⁴ The ‘classical’ was, for him, a predominantly local phenomenon, something that could be weaponized in forms of invention and resistance against English ascendancy. By deploying something akin to what the historian C. L. R. James (1901–89) defined as the “postcolonial prerogative,” MacDiarmid believed the “native potentialities” of so-called minor languages and peripheral literatures could reconfigure themselves and upset the dominant linguistic, economic and social conditions of the present.²²⁵ Mere revival, mere renaissance, could aspire to something beyond, a reality bent closer to the synthetic manifestation of a “world-soul,” a “cosmical unity still more perfect.”²²⁶

²²⁴ MacDiarmid *LP* (1994) 375. See also MacDiarmid, “The Caledonian Antisyzygy and the Gaelic Idea” (1931–32) in MacDiarmid *SEHM* (1970) 74.

²²⁵ MacDiarmid *RT2* (1997) 61. See also Gikandi (1996) 18–20, Bhabha (2004) 248–52, as well as Greenwood (2019) 576–607.

²²⁶ MacDiarmid, “A Russo-Scottish Parallelism,” in MacDiarmid *SEHM* (1970) 41.