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Hugh MacDiarmid and the Politics of Consciousness:
A Study of Nationalism, Psychology and Materialism
in the Work and Thought of Hugh MacDiarmid

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Preface

Hugh MacDiarmid and the Politics of Consciousness is a critical study of what I have termed the "political aesthetic" of Hugh MacDiarmid. It is hoped it will be of interest to students of literature and to students of Scottish culture in general. Moreover, although it is, in every sense of the word, a 'critical' study, it is also by its very nature a conscious tribute to one of the great poets of this century.

In writing and researching this thesis I am indebted to many people without whom it would not have been possible to complete my studies, and I gratefully acknowledge their help and support.

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I would also like to acknowledge the friendship and encouragement of the late Morris Blythman ("Thurso Berwick") to whose memory I dedicate this study.

I declare that this thesis has been composed by myself and that the work which it embodies has not been included in any other thesis.

Signed.....*Raymond J. Ross*..... (Raymond J. Ross)
Dated....13/12/84.....

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This passion is the scholar's heritage,
The imposition of a busy age,
The passion to condense from book to book
Unbroken wisdom in a single look,
Though we know well that when this fix the head,
The mind's immortal, but the man is dead.

Yvor Winters "Time and the Garden"

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Abstract of thesis entitled:

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This thesis concerns itself with the conjunction of literature and politics in the work and thought of Hugh MacDiarmid and seeks to explore the nature of that conjunction: what is referred to as MacDiarmid's "political aesthetic".

The thesis sets out to examine MacDiarmid's nationalism, its basis and its relevance to his writing, arguing that his theory of "National Psychology", as I term it, is central to his creative output and one important aspect of which is his imaginative embodiment of his country's "psychology" in his poetic voice: what I have called the "Representative Personality".

As with his nationalism, this thesis also treats of his communism, its roots, nature and influence, and with special regard to his definition of the function of art as "the extension of consciousness" and questions the philosophical viability of his declared materialism. It argues here that, in spite of MacDiarmid's cult of the absolute and the extreme, much of the power and range of his poetry derives from his attempt to reconcile, or compromise between, philosophical idealism and dialectical materialism, and that the resultant tension deriving from his empirio-critical position is a major characteristic in his poetry.

Concomitant with his empirio-criticism is the "God-building" mentality (as opposed to Solovievian "God-seeking") that he shared with many contemporaries, not least in the ranks of Lenin's Bolshevik Party. This is dealt with at some depth as is the influence of Slavophilism on his nationalism and Russo-Scottish parallelism.

The thesis is, in many ways, a comparative study, and always seeks to relate important issues discussed to the relevant historical conditions and so placing MacDiarmid among British and European counterparts. It is not a blow-by-blow account of the poetry, but ranges widely through MacDiarmid's criticism as well, and attempts to define something of the intellectual and imaginative structures which gave power and ubiquity to the voice of the poet.

Raymond J. Ross

INTRODUCTION

This study is an attempt to ascertain the nature of the 'political aesthetic' of Hugh MacDiarmid (C.M. Grieve). The term 'political aesthetic' is not meant to imply any smooth synthesis of politics and poetry which attempts to reconcile, or explain away, the many genuine contradictions in MacDiarmid's creative and critical works. But, having said that, this study does hope to show that there is a greater element of consistency in MacDiarmid than has perhaps been recognised hitherto. The recognition of this consistency is dependent upon relating MacDiarmid to historical conditions, and this is a major emphasis in my thesis.

There has been a tendency in MacDiarmid criticism to date to praise the poetry and disregard the politics, thus treating them as if they were entirely separable items. Moreover, it is noticeable that this line of approach tends to ostracise the communist in MacDiarmid rather than the nationalist. One result of this is that undue emphasis is laid on the quality of the earlier poetry (a quality which no one would deny) at the expense of the poetry of the 'thirties. Although the reasons for this division may be interesting in themselves, the unfortunate result is that we are presented with, in all but name, two MacDiarmids: the MacDiarmid of the 'twenties who, as a nationalist, produced his best work; and the later MacDiarmid whose Marxism obtrudes into his verse and destroys its 'poeticity'.

So, for example, David Daiches has argued that "As man and poet MacDiarmid was not interested in human welfare in the ordinary sense" and that "all his gestures to the virtues of the proletariat and the great simple qualities of the masses are rhetorical gambits and ploys rather than statements of faith".⁽¹⁾ And Christopher Harvie has argued that "In MacDiarmid inappropriate language and false ideology betray one another".⁽²⁾

Contrary to such statements, this study is designed to show how integral, in fact, are MacDiarmid's politics to his poetry (and criticism). Furthermore, rather than accept the division of the two MacDiarmids, this work is intended to reveal the unity and development of MacDiarmid's political aesthetic from youth to maturity.

In order to do this it is necessary to lay a great many (notably ideological) ghosts to rest: for example, the supposed antagonism between nationalism and communism which has been overplayed as one of the poet's 'contradictions'. It is only the refusal to distinguish between the right to self-determination (never denied by Marx, Engels, James Connolly or John Maclean) and theories of racial, bourgeois or imperialist nationalisms, that allows this confusion to occur. The development of MacDiarmid's early nationalism into workers' republicanism is entirely logical and quite consistent with his Marxism.

It is necessary to clarify many such points, not simply for their own sake, but in order to gain a clearer vision of the intellectual parameters and imaginative structures which allowed MacDiarmid to write with such scope and depth. This study, in other words, will focus on the cultural question which with MacDiarmid always underlies the political question and, when evaluated, the latter will be evaluated in the light of the former.

MacDiarmid himself rarely held back from social and political engagement and any adequate appreciation of his work must necessarily take this into account. As a poet MacDiarmid saw himself as a 'Bard' of his people and a spokesman of his class, and with regard to his own work it is certainly true that

..any utterance that is not pure
Propaganda is impure propaganda for sure !

The role of protagonist for nation and class is central to MacDiarmid's creative urge. In donning the mantle of Bard, he was in fact declaring himself a 'Representative Personality', thereby expressing in his work, as he thought, the aspirations, character and ideals of his people. For C.M. Grieve, "Hugh MacDiarmid" personifies the Scottish character, its aspirations and ideals. Hence, my adoption of the term 'Representative Personality'.

This study begins by examining the early years in order (a) to draw attention to certain dominant characteristics in MacDiarmid's own personality, aspects which he would later politicise and claim were representative of Scottish psychology or character; (b) to show that from the outset of his literary career his artistic consciousness and his political consciousness are inseparable; (c) to illustrate how the thoughts and struggles of the young writer anticipate later writings and ideas; (d) to highlight certain experiences and influences which were to condition his later thinking and writing; and (e) to explain why his early work is not as overtly politicised as his later work.

Having established this background, the second chapter deals in more detail with MacDiarmid's theory of National Psychology and his interpretation of the function of art as the extension of consciousness which are related, respectively, to his nationalism and his communism. This chapter shows how he set about analysing and mythologising his environment in a quite consistent fashion and relates this to his desire to be what I have called a representative Personality.

The third chapter examines the nature of the extension of consciousness as envisaged by MacDiarmid and sets his theory of letters against his practice, arguing that the central tension in his writing derives not from any supposed antagonism between nationalism and communism but from

an attempt to reconcile philosophical idealism with dialectical materialism.

Chapters Four and Five pursue the notion of the extension of consciousness to reveal in a new light the influence of Russian thought and writing on MacDiarmid, thus showing the development and character of his Russo-Scottish parallelism. Chapter Four is concerned in particular with the distinction between God-building and God-seeking, and argues that MacDiarmid, far from being a Solovievian God-seeker (as has often been intimated), was in fact - in keeping with his empirio-critical position (the attempt to reconcile idealism with materialism) - a God-builder much after the fashion of such Bolshevnik intellectuals as Maxim Gorky and Anatole Lunacharsky. Chapter Five, the final chapter, illustrates the influence of Slavophilism on MacDiarmid with special regard to his messianic nationalism, the countervailing influence of Leo Shestov, and questions the centrality of Soloviev's Sophiology in his oeuvre.

As this outline implies, it will be necessary, because of the scope and range of the material, to interrupt the particulars of my argument at certain points in order to elucidate some difficulties and problems so that these particulars may be approached with a thorough understanding of their character and importance.

The question of idealism and materialism, for example, must primarily be understood philosophically in order to understand how MacDiarmid's empirio-criticism affected his writing. But it is also necessary to place this influence in its historical-cultural context to demonstrate how MacDiarmid's intellectualism was shared to a considerable extent by a significant number of his contemporaries or near-contemporaries, Russian, European and British. Moreover, it is necessary to stress the political implications of philosophical dispute with special regard to the poet's claim to be an out-and-out materialist, and so place MacDiarmid accurately in an intellectual tradition which permeated to the extremes of Europe, thereby gauging something of the nature and stature of his political aesthetic. In short, in mapping the mind of MacDiarmid, one has to investigate significant elements in the cultural/political history not only of Scotland, but of Britain, Europe and Russia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, thereby establishing him in what may be accurately called the Nietzschean-Marxist tradition.

This study, then, is primarily a study of the intellect which produced and shaped the poetry rather than a detailed account of the poems themselves. That is, it pretends towards an intellectual history of the man and his times.

- 1 Review of Complete Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid, New Edinburgh Review 45 (Spring 1979).
See also R.J. Ross "Professor Daiches and Dr. Grieve" New Edinburgh Review 47 (August 1979).
- 2 Christopher Harvie "MacDiarmid the Socialist" Scottish Labour History Society Journal 16 (1981) p.9.

CHAPTER ONE

The Early Years

These early days, wrote Hugh MacDiarmid in Lucky Poet, his autobiography written largely in the 'Thirties and published in 1943,

..made me a man naturally fitted for Communism - a man, moreover, who found ready and waiting in himself by the time he came to write poetry a sound relationship between the political thinker in him and the artist.. If I came in the end to Communism.. I also grew into it through a class-conscious upbringing which conditioned but did not distort my view of life. (1)

MacDiarmid's blend of Nationalism and Communism was undoubtedly central to his artistic output, both as source of inspiration and as subject-matter, by the time he wrote these words. It is the growth of, and the nature of this "sound relationship" between political thinker and artist, what in fact constitutes MacDiarmid's 'political aesthetic', that is our general area of concern. But before approaching the complexities of this relationship itself, it is necessary to say something of its growth and to test, for example, the chronological accuracy of MacDiarmid's claim.

Given his penchant for exaggeration, especially where matters of self are concerned, and his sometimes inaccurate memory, it is necessary to indulge a certain element of scepticism with regard to the poet's retrospective claims. We shall therefore have to establish clearly, and in some detail, not only the matter of, but the manner in which this political-artistic fusion came about. It will become apparent that it was not until the early 'Twenties - when C.M. Grieve discovers 'Hugh MacDiarmid' - that anything approaching a sound relationship can be said to have developed.

Our first chapter is thus largely concerned with the years preceding the appearance of Grieve's now famous pseudonym, but not exclusively so. In attending to these difficult years of maturation, we shall assess something of his early political involvement and his early writings, his war experiences, his state of health and mind, and so pinpoint certain emotional and psychological ~~tendencies~~ which, while as yet largely unpoliticised, are nevertheless seminal to his latterly acclaimed political aesthetic. It must be noted at the outset that in dealing with these issues it is not our intention to define any such thing as the 'MacDiarmid

Psychology'. Simply, in order to map the development of the political aesthetic, we shall have to attend to certain psychological tendencies which came to characterise much of his writing. Without examining them no full understanding of the political aesthetic and its conjunction of extremes would be possible.

Further to this, the definite psychological crises which MacDiarmid underwent were directly related to his struggle for artistic or poetic expression, and he had to win some measure of success in that struggle before the artist in him could join forces with the political thinker.

Much of the material in this chapter, with regard to both the poet's struggle and his political involvement, is drawn from his correspondence with his ex-teacher, George Ogilvie. As private letters they can be trusted to reflect MacDiarmid's aims, his problems, and his state of mind at the moment of writing, more accurately than his retrospective public pronouncements - or at least, where there is a contradiction the letters are less likely to be the result of (political) posturing or a deliberate dialectical thrust.

Moreover, as correspondence, the Ogilvie letters are perhaps more important than any other because of the high regard in which the young MacDiarmid held George Ogilvie. Ogilvie was the most important figure in his early life, even, as the letters sometimes hint, to the exclusion of his first wife, Peggy Skinner. In the earliest letter extant, undated but certainly written around or before mid-November 1911, MacDiarmid writes:

I look back to you as I look back to my dead father, to my mother and one or two others. (2)

Ogilvie, who taught him English at Broughton School in Edinburgh, is from the first closely identified with MacDiarmid's creative urge, being a source of inspiration and encouragement for the young man's literary endeavours. Writing from "Somewhere in the East" in September 1916 (while serving with the Royal Army Medical Corps), MacDiarmid laments his

inability to produce something creatively worthwhile for Ogilvie:

I found it increasingly and finally absolutely impossible to write to you again. The loss has been mine, and an incalculable one. One of the chief considerations in the psychological tangle from which I have never freed myself is undoubtedly the fact that I have never done anything worthwhile. Never a day but what I have said [is], "Tomorrow I will write the Fine Thing - then I will write to him again."

Writing from Kildermorie in November 1920, he says:

I have turned to you in every need with utter confidence. I have loved you above all men and women.. Do you think I want money or position or reputation ? No. Do you think that it matters to my wife, for instance ? I may dedicate my poems to her but do you think she reads them ? And if she did do you think she would understand them, or me ? No ! I need not write. I can dream my books and enjoy them in my head. But I try to write incessantly and cannot help doing so because your commendation of my work is my only desire.

Ogilvie thus becomes a guide, a sort of Father-Confessor for the struggling artist. It is this which gives the letters their crucial importance.

MacDiarmid often sent Ogilvie MSS asking for his comments. In December 1920 he writes:

I shall certainly forego the keenest delight life can have in store for me if I do not achieve, in time, such a reputation as will enable you to put all you have thought and dreamt of me into black and white.

"C.M. Grieve: The Man and His Work" by Geo. Ogilvie will certainly be a book worthy living the most difficult of lives for.

Their relationship (the importance of which has not been noted hitherto) was, to judge from the letters, stormy but consistent. And for MacDiarmid, whose continual suffering from anxiety and whose general mental health was far from good throughout these early years (especially following his first bout of cerebral malaria in 1916), Ogilvie was often the saving figure of the scenario. In September 1921 he writes:

..when I get more depressed than usual I even get defiantly proud of the fact that I am an author with a public of one, out Landoring Landor..

A month later:

Your letter was a Godsend. It is weak of me but I do get atrociously depressed..

The content of these letters (and their sometimes tortured style) thus

provides a unique insight into MacDiarmid's life and thought, into his creative urge as yet far from satisfactorily expressed in attempted poems and prose-pieces.

Early Political Involvement

Writing under the pseudonym of "Arthur Leslie" in what Duncan Glen has accurately described as an "explanatory and not egoistic essay" ⁽³⁾ published in 1960, MacDiarmid relates his earliest political involvement thus:

He joined the I.L.P. when he was 16 [i.e. 1908], and a little later, the Edinburgh University Fabian Society and took an active part in the formation of the University Socialist Federation. He began open-air speaking, too, in his teens, under the tutelage of "Jimmy Buchanan", an Edinburgh Corporation scavenger who was one of the stalwarts and pioneers of Socialism in Edinburgh. (4)

In an earlier essay entitled "Edinburgh", published in Scottish Scene (1934), he also makes reference to Buchanan, "under whom I learned the gentle art of "tub-thumping" and first graduated as a speaker at the Mound", ⁽⁵⁾ although, surprisingly, he makes no reference to the Irish revolutionary, James Connolly, who was born in Edinburgh and worked for the Corporation in the same capacity as Jimmy Buchanan. Writing as "Leslie", however, MacDiarmid does point out that ^{himself} he served on a Fabian Research Committee on Agriculture and that the fruits of his research formed part of the volume The Rural Problem which the Committee published in 1913.

Although Fabianism is a far cry from the Marxism MacDiarmid came later to embrace, it is important to note this early involvement in Socialist politics. Again, although the I.L.P. (Independent Labour Party) cannot be said to reflect in full MacDiarmid's Nationalism, there was nevertheless a tradition of Home Rule aspirations among such Scottish Socialists.

In the early 'Twenties MacDiarmid was the local Secretary in Montrose for the Scottish Home Rule Association, an all-party organisation founded in 1886, which received support from such figures as Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald. Hardie, with the help of others, including Cunninghame Graham, founded the Scottish Labour Party in 1888, which, in 1894, was to become the Scottish Council of the new I.L.P. Several Home Rule campaigns, and proposed Bills, emanated from these quarters during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries - as well as from the Liberal Party. In 1918 the Labour Party called for Irish Home Rule and for devolved legislative assemblies for Scotland, England and Wales. The principle of Federation was endorsed by Sidney Webb, the leading Fabian of the day.

Eschewing, for the time being, theoretical aspects of the matter, there is historically, as all of this suggests, less inconsistency than has often been believed in MacDiarmid's espousal of Socialism and Nationalism. Moreover, his later advocacy of John MacLean's Republican Socialism can be seen historically as an extension of this tradition in Scottish politics. As James Hunter has pointed out,

John MacLean had more in common with Connolly than with Pearse, while for Erskine [of Mar] the reverse was the case - yet the divergence between Gaelic nationalist and socialist did not stop Connolly and Pearse from fighting and dying for the same cause, Irish Independence, just as it did not stop Erskine and MacLean, on this side of the water, from supporting each other's demands for the creation of a Scottish state. Between Gael and radical, therefore, there was no great mutual antipathy.. Both Connolly and MacLean - the two most outstanding Marxist revolutionaries so far produced in these islands.. devoted no small part of their considerable abilities to attempts to reconcile socialism with the nationalisms of their respective countries. In Ireland the links between nationalism and radicalism stem from the events of 1798; and in Scotland.. the connection is at least as well established. (6)

As a member of the Edinburgh University Fabian Society, MacDiarmid would in all probability have attended the talks given during October 1910 by Mrs. Sidney Webb, "Philosophy of Fabianism"; Mr. Sidney Webb, "Ethics of Propaganda"; and George Bernard Shaw, "University

Socialism".⁽⁷⁾ But his first real immersion in class-warfare and his first genuine contact - as an activist - with establishment brutality was to come when he went to Wales to work on the South Wales Miners' Federation newspaper, The Monmouthshire Labour News. "Arthur Leslie" paints a rather idyllic picture of these days:

Living in Ebbw Vale he used to walk over to Merthyr-Tydvil to see Keir Hardie and was a contributor to Hardie's paper The Merthyr Pioneer. Other friends of MacDiarmid's at that time included Vernon Hartshorn, Tom Mann, Victor Grayson, Frank Hodges, and Denis Hird, first Principal of Ruskin College. ⁽⁸⁾

But to judge from his letters to Ogilvie other matters dominated his mind and time than simply claiming kenspeckle friends. In November 1911 he writes:

I have already been instrumental in forming four new branches of the I.L.P. down here. In Tredegar a policeman took my name and address on the grounds that it was illegal to speak off the top of a soap-box.

I asked him if a match-box was within the meaning of the act and he put something else down in his note-book: what I do not know.

However, as a branch of 25 members was the outcome, I can afford to be generous.

Thus, at the age of 19, MacDiarmid is already organising, speaking, and writing Socialist propaganda and literature. He goes on:

Did you see any account of the recent pogroms in Burgued, Tredegar, Rhyimey, Ebbw Vale and Cwm? They gave me my first taste of war corresponding: and I narrowly escaped being bludgeoned more than once. I heard the Riot Act read thrice in one night (in different forms, of course) and saw seventeen baton charges.. was the only reporter present at the meeting of the rioters.. my editor thought fit to warn me that in all probability I would be arrested for aiding and abetting.

These experiences seem to have had a deep effect on the writer at the time and it is unlikely that he would forget such images of police brutality and harassment - whether or not we take "seventeen baton charges" as meticulous detail or as an exaggerated account. In the same letter he notes:

It's like living on the top of a volcano down here. You never know what's going to happen next. I have had three triple murders this last fortnight: and have two strikes

in hand now. Tomorrow there is County Court in Tredegar - over 400 cases filed, nearly all connected with mining compensation etc.

There can be little doubt that these times sharpened MacDiarmid's political consciousness, as well as his social conscience, and helped provide an experiential background against which he could test his later attraction to Marxism and Leninism. Indeed, even at this early stage - and these are his formative years intellectually - there is a tendency to radicalise. Writing from Macedonia five years later he recalls:

South Wales - working for Miners' Federation - delightfully immersed in labour movement, until perception into spiritual sides of question got beyond ILP stage - then found myself in an atmosphere suddenly transfused with hostility - youth and natural tactlessness accentuated difficulty - would I had been born jesuitical - as it was shipwrecked on hidden rocks of implacable liberalism and non-conformity suddenly in bright seas of labourist activity.

As the phrase "implacable liberalism" suggests, the I.L.P. was not, for MacDiarmid, as "Independent" as its title proclaimed. In other words, as the following escapade illustrates, he thought that the proletarian ('revolutionary' is probably too strong a word) aspirations of the party were being quashed by elements of Liberalism or Reformism. The letter continues:

Contrived to have published in sacrosanct columns extremist articles galling to diplomatists like Tom Richards M.P., and other Miners' Leaders on editorial committee. Was horribly unrepentant and truculent withal. Openly construed their statesmanship as a species of hypocrisy attributable to the partial development of too generous ideals in unsuitable natures. Re-organisation of paper afforded convenient opportunity of dispensing with my services.

From there he returns to live for a short time with his mother (his father having died in 1911) in Langholm. After the excitement and energetic commitment of Wales this seems to have been a period of reflection and re-adjustment. It was around this time, as the same letter (August 1916) relates, definite Nationalist sentiments emerge which..

..caused me to write quite a body (some thirty poems in all)

of Anti-English verse, not dissimilar to certain products of Irish revival. More important is the way in which my attention for the first time was turned to Scottish Nationalism and national problems..

Thus, according to his own account, MacDiarmid feels attracted to Scottish Nationalism by about the age of twenty, long before any concept of a Scottish Renaissance occurs, and long before he embraces Scots as a serious medium for poetic expression. Nevertheless, it is significant that the conscious growth of Nationalist sentiment is accompanied by a considerable output of verse. For it is a fact that in viewing his overtly political poetry, that inspired by, or expressing Nationalism tends to dominate until at least the Drunk Man (1926), when - with the sole exception of "The Dead Liebknecht" published in Penny Wheep the same year - the first openly Socialist allegory "Ballad of the General Strike" appears.

There is a paradox here in that MacDiarmid was an active Socialist about ten years (c.1910 - c.1920) before flinging himself body and soul into the Nationalist movement, and yet it was his attraction to Nationalism which proved, for the artist in him, to be the more immediately fecund.

How then do we explain this hiatus between early Socialist commitment and later Socialist verse? To begin with, it could be said that the young journalist was only cutting his teeth in those early days in Edinburgh and South Wales. Moreover, it may have been that his dismissal from The Monmouthshire Labour News partly disillusioned the young idealist, albeit, as he states in that same letter, "the I.L.P. reclaimed me", when he moved again, this time from Langholm to Clydebank. But perhaps the more fundamental reason was that MacDiarmid's own psychological extremism found little release or inspiration in the Reformist programme of the I.L.P. or in the political philosophy of Fabianism whose explicit purpose was to wean a potentially dangerous (i.e. revolutionary) working class away from the philosophy of Marxism.

Two other factors are also of importance here. Firstly, his war experiences which, although they certainly radicalised his political consciousness in the long term, nevertheless did not induce an immediate expression of that radical temperament. Secondly, with his growing adherence to the Nationalist cause, MacDiarmid was also seduced into a brief flirtation with Catholicism and, concomitantly, political Conservatism.

War Experience

In that same letter of August 1916, from which we have already quoted extensively, MacDiarmid makes it quite clear that he joined the army in July 1915 because of a combination of social pressures and personal reasons that had nothing to do with patriotic feelings:

..it was becoming impossible for a young man physically fit to remain in "civvies". Besides, I was always susceptible to fits of wanderlust - and I had been a Territorial and loved camping out - and Nisbet's death finally settled matters. (N.B. - No "patriotism", no "fight for civilisation".)

By the end of the War this scepticism had deepened into disillusionment.

Writing to Ogilvie in November 1918, shortly after the Armistice, he states:

I myself believe that we have lost this war - in everything but actuality ! When I see scores of sheep go to a slaughter house I do not feel constrained to admire their resignation. Nor do I believe that the majority of soldiers killed were sufficiently actuated by ideals or capable of entertaining ideas to justify such terms as "supreme self-sacrifice, etc."

I have been oppressed by my perception of the widespread automatism - fortuity - of these great movements and holocausts.. I more and more incline to the belief that human intelligence is a mere by-product of little account - that the purpose and destiny of the human race is something quite apart from it - that religion, civilisation and so forth are mere "trimmings", irrelevant to the central issues.

MacDiarmid's pessimism, as this letter indicates, gave way at times to a severe cynicism which appears, intermittently, throughout his poetry - a poetry which has always been noted for its characteristic optimism in contrast to that of contemporaries like T.S. Eliot. MacDiarmid was

characteristically an optimistic writer, but he carried from the War seeds of bitterness which were eventually to flower into some of his most savage poetry of social comment.

This flowering was to come later, notably after the poet had embraced Marxism. But it is not simply a case of Dialectical Materialism freeing his mind (as he himself might have declared) from the rut of mechanistic or fatalistic beliefs which certainly colour his thoughts and feelings in the above letter. MacDiarmid was, in fact, far too close to events to write about them at the time, despite the fact that these events definitely radicalised his political outlook.

In one of his earliest prose-pieces, "Four Years' Harvest", published in Annals of the Five Senses in 1923, but definitely written much earlier as publication was delayed for two years, the subject-mind of this psychological study (ultimately himself) was conscious, we are told,

..of the bewildering hopelessness of trying to sort out his impressions [of the War] and come to any considered conclusion..

Moreover,

Malloch and he were agreed that the real literature of the war could not possibly be written for a few years - possibly for a good few years - if ever. (9)

To add to this, as MacDiarmid makes clear in a letter to Ogilvie in April 1918, censorship, for the time being, must prevail:

You refer to my letters showing a "serene detachment from the War" - but please remember the strictness of the censorship. However loyal I may be to certain ideals bound up in the Allied cause I was never to say the least of it an Anglophile - and when I am free of his majesty's [sic] uniform again I shall have a very great deal to say and to write that I have not nearly enough desire for premature and secret martyrdom to say or write until then.

Thus, the most accurate description of MacDiarmid's state of mind at this juncture is probably that given in "Four Years' Harvest":

A sensitive man who had suffered was a man, whether he had endured the monotonous epic of an infantry private or the continual spectacle of pain in a Casualty

Clearing Station, who returned not altogether sane. He had endured so much either in his own or the rent flesh of others that he brought back to civilisation an ardour of revolt, a sharp bitterness, made up partly of hatred and partly of pity.. Old ideas, old standards were inevitably judged with an acrid bitterness which sought to destroy and to cast into oblivion the eldest and most respected of human institutions - anything if war might be made impossible. He came back with an idée fixe - never again must men be made to suffer as in these years of war.. (10)

At this time, the poet in him had not yet found voice. It was to be another decade before MacDiarmid began to give expression to his deepest feelings and his bitterness over the War. In short, it was not until MacDiarmid had declared himself a Communist that he gave full vent to his emotional reaction to his war experience in direct terms - in poems like "At the Cenotaph", "In the Children's Hospital", "In the Slaughterhouse" and "Reflections in an Ironworks" (Second Hymn to Lenin and Other Poems 1935). And poems such as these are patently produced by the same sensibility as is evident in "Four Years' Harvest" and the Ogilvie correspondence.

Indirectly, MacDiarmid was giving expression to his war experience throughout the poetry of the 'Twenties. Occasional passages, for example, in the Drunk Man, such as his meditation on the "Platonic Wheel", reveal an underlying concern with a mechanistic or fatalistic philosophy recalling his "perception of the widespread automatism - fortuity - of these great movement and holocausts". Such passages in the Drunk Man and To Circumjack Cencrastus (1930) are, however, effectively counterbalanced throughout this period by the optimistic celebration of biological individualism, the nature of which we shall examine in subsequent chapters.

If the War served to confirm in MacDiarmid the need for some form of Socialism, it also helped to radicalise his Nationalism. For, as with many of his contemporaries, thoughts of "little Belgium" led ultimately to thoughts of "little Scotland".

But, over and above this, the artist had not yet won free, and the political thinker was as yet unclear as to fundamentals, although he had returned from the war, bringing back to civilisation "an ardour of revolt" that was to remain with him for the rest of his life. As for many of his contemporaries, the First World War marked nothing less than a watershed for Western civilisation. As the poet put it, in "Talking with Five Thousand People in Edinburgh":

All who should help to open the way for true expression
- The teachers, the ministers, the writers - are living like maggots
On dead words in an advanced state of decomposition,
Big words that died over twenty years ago
- For most of the important words were killed in the First World War -

Nationalism and Catholicism

The first stirrings of Nationalism in MacDiarmid seem to have coincided with an interest in Catholicism. This interest derives primarily from two sources: the fashion for Catholic revivalism in Western Europe in the first two decades of this century; and the general interest being shown in the Irish Literary Revival which coincided with a resurgence of Irish Nationalism. It is important to our study not simply because it led MacDiarmid into a brief period of Conservatism, which itself helped create the gap between the earlier Socialist activism and the later Socialist writings, but also because of the use MacDiarmid was able to make of it in his more mature years.

Even at its height, as MacDiarmid makes clear in that long confessional letter of August 1916, his concern with Catholicism is carefully qualified:

Of my progress through the pit of atheism to Roman Catholicism (adherent not member of the Church of Rome - I doubt my faiths and doubt my doubts of my faiths too subtly to take the final step but at this house by the wayside am content meanwhile) I have said nothing - but the course is familiar.

As the adoption of Biblical terminology suggests, the language-register

seems foreign to the writer and his admission of contentment does not rhyme with the desperate personality everywhere evident in the Ogilvie correspondence. MacDiarmid is adumbrating a cliché, and is at least half-aware that he is doing so. There is an uncharacteristic submissiveness in his statement. He has not arrived anywhere: he has simply stopped moving. Coinciding with his journey through atheism to Catholicism, he says,

..is that other from Labourism through Anarchy to a form of Toryism.

Perhaps the interest in Catholicism instilled in him for the time being an attraction to High Church Toryism, and perhaps both were partly a reaction to the War. But what seems initially to have stirred MacDiarmid in this direction was his concern for a Scottish Literary Revival, notions of which begin to surface intermittently up to and during the First World War.

Among his earliest attempts at poetry, we recall, were some thirty pieces of Anti-English verse not dissimilar, he claims, to certain products of the Irish Revival. MacDiarmid certainly thought, for a short period around 1916, that some form of a Literary Revival was possible in Scotland similar to that in (Catholic) Ireland, contingent upon Scotland reclaiming something of her Catholic past. In his letter of August 1916, MacDiarmid draws up a list of proposed essays, entitled "Scots Church Essays", which he intends writing. Among the titles we have:

"The Calibre of Modern Scottish Priests."

"Neo-Catholicism's debt to Sir Walter Scott.."

"The Indisseverable Association (i.e. of Catholicism in Scotland..)"

Among his notes to the titles, he describes Catholicism as "the religion which makes the true atmosphere of Scottish tradition". It is not personal piety but a growing interest in a National School of writing which leads him into (and out of) his Catholic pretensions. Indeed, in that same letter he writes:

I shall come back and start a new Neo-Catholic

movement. I shall enter heart and body and soul into a new Scots Nationalist propaganda.

Neo-Catholicism strikes the young MacDiarmid as a possible way forward, as a necessary complement to Scottish Nationalism. Years later, in Albyn or Scotland and The Future (1927), he was to claim Neo-Catholicism as one of the motive-forces behind the Renaissance:

Its inception synchronised with the end of the War, and in retrospect it will be seen to have had a genesis in kin with other post-war phenomena of recrudescing nationalism all over Europe and to have shared to the full in the wave of Catholic revivalism which accompanied them. (11)

MacDiarmid's retrospective account is exaggerated, although he did publish "five sonnets illustrative of neo-Catholic tendencies in contemporary Scottish literature", including his own "The Litany of the Blessed Virgin", in The Scottish Chapbook for October 1922. (12) But this collection was clearly intended as part of a propaganda exercise: to show that Scotland was not missing out on what seemed an important facet of contemporary European literature. If Neo-Catholicism was going to be a force to be reckoned with in literature, then Scotland would not be shown to be lacking.

MacDiarmid's aim was never to Catholicise Scotland in any institutional or dogmatic sense, but to have it "liberated from its Genevan prison-house" (13) by stirring it at its roots:

From the Renaissance point of view the growth of Catholicism, and the influx of the Irish, are alike welcome, as undoing those accompaniments of the Reformation which have lain like a blight on Scottish arts and affairs.. It is necessary to go back behind Burns to Dunbar and the Old Makars - great Catholic poets using the Vernacular, not for the pedestrian things to which it has latterly been confined, but for all "the brave translunary things of great art".. There has been no religious poetry - expression of "divine philosophy" - in Scotland since the Reformation. As a consequence Scotland is singularly destitute of aesthetic consciousness. The line of hope lies partially in re-Catholicisation, partially in the exhaustion of Protestantism. (14)

It is interesting to note MacDiarmid's early flirtation with Catholicism as it coloured his attitude to the Reformation, to the links between Celtic Ireland and Scotland, and to what constituted "Celtic" or "Scottish" psychology, points with which we shall deal in our next chapter. His

flirtation, in fact, is an early illustration of his long abiding concern with mysticism and the religious consciousness from which he was never to free himself entirely, even after he had declared himself to be an out-and-out Materialist. It is, in other words, indicative of that tension between Idealism and Materialism which was to become so marked in his poetry.

MacDiarmid was of course brought up in the ways of the Kirk and was, as Wright's Illustrated Biography informs us, teaching Sunday School at the tender age of thirteen, "and was awarded many certificates for Bible knowledge".⁽¹⁵⁾ One of his first articles, published in The New Age in 1911 and entitled "The Young Astrology", argues that man's "moral and intellectual character is profoundly affected by the positions of the heavenly bodies at the time of birth", an argument that he declares is "wholly empirical".⁽¹⁶⁾ In a letter of October 1911, he informs Ogilvie that he wishes to publish "a little booklet on Theology".

But his attraction to Catholicism seems no more than a young poet's attempt to find a framework within the Western-Christian tradition suitable to his imaginative and expressive needs. But he took ultimately only what was assimilable to his own rebellious psychology, a pattern that will repeat itself with as much regard to Solovievian mysticism as to Dialectical Materialism itself.

If, as I have suggested, the lukewarm Reformism of the Fabians and the I.L.P. failed to inspire MacDiarmid's psychological extremism, his absolutism, this left the young poet still floundering. On the other hand, he knew himself well enough not to go overboard for the absolutist dogma of the Church of Rome. But rather than, as he claims, having been content to wait at the house by the wayside, MacDiarmid was in fact indulging in that peculiar mental juggling - being where extremes meet - which has baffled so many of his critics, admirers and detractors alike.

Among the mental portraits of himself which make up

the prose-pieces of Annals of the Five Senses (1923), there is one of a certain "Fred" who is the Secretary of the St. Ninian's Church Literary and Debating Society:

I had at that time no knowledge of his other and quite irreconcilable activities. I did not know that he was known in other circles as a philosophic anarchist; nor that he was the author of the powerful Neo-Catholic articles which created such a sensation in the autumn of 1909 and won so many converts for Rome. Nor had I the slightest suspicion of his dipsomaniacal tendencies nor of his countervailing eroticism. (17)

Catholicism did not set the heather alight for MacDiarmid any more than did Fabianism or the I.L.P., and there is a substantial degree of wishful thinking about the authorship of those "powerful" articles. But no single dogma or philosophy ever held MacDiarmid in anything like entirety, although often the more possessed they were of grandeur and extremism the more time he had for them. What we have here is an embryonic illustration of MacDiarmid's need for extreme correlatives to release and inspire the writer in him.

It is often thought that MacDiarmid indulged in extremes for their own sake, that he made a cult of self-contradiction. That, in fact, is rarely the case. It is a common notion about MacDiarmid that overlooks a great deal that is vital to any adequate appreciation of the man and his work. For it glosses over, even totally ignores, the desperate struggle MacDiarmid had to write, and it fails to take account of the compromises which are as much a part of his poetry as the contradictions. In other words, in order to come to a genuine understanding of the nature and character of MacDiarmid's political aesthetic, a more profound and sensitive appreciation of his mental juggling, his psychological extremism, is necessary.

Psychological Extremism

For the poet, these early years were the years of unrecognition and ceaseless effort. They were also years marked by ill-health, both mental and physical. His contraction of cerebral malaria in 1916, the effects of which were to recur several times over the next five years, is well known. But our attention should also be drawn to the fact that long before his first attack of malaria MacDiarmid underwent intellectual and emotional disturbances of a neurotic type caused, primarily, by his inability to unload himself of his deeply felt creative burden.

In the earliest of the Ogilvie letters (early or mid-November 1911), MacDiarmid writes of "the hurricane of mental and moral anarchy which has tossed me hither-and-thither these last twelve months". In late November he again alludes to his uncontrollable intellect:

I wish some device could be patented whereby my flying thoughts could be photographed: That might give me a chance to express my present mental stage with some accuracy.

The relation between this psychological chaos and the need to give form and shape to his flying thoughts becomes clearer in subsequent letters. In the letter of August 1916, written just after his first bout of cerebral malaria, MacDiarmid makes the connection quite straightforwardly:

If I could make a peace between my contending spirits - cease to think new thoughts, dream new dreams, live so unceasingly and at such a rate.. if, as I was saying before.. I could get a sufficient breathing space, then I think I could take stock and write myself forever out of the tangle.

In September of that year he repeats the same formula:

One of the chief considerations in the psychological tangle from which I have never freed myself is undoubtedly the fact that I have never done anything worthwhile. Never a day but what I have said [is], "Tomorrow I will write the Fine Thing - then I will write to him again."

In December 1917, having been laid low by "another of the endemic diseases of this unnatural country" (Salonika), he writes:

In a Balkan Who's Who I could safely put down my recreation as "pathological equilibrism".

In other words, the mental spate continues unabated and, for the purposes of creative expression, uncontrolled. Nevertheless, during the war years he manages to read widely and his letters buzz with the titles of half-written, or suggested, articles and stories. But by February 1918 the tangle still remains ravelled:

There are thousands of such entries now in these suggestion books of mine, each indicating some line of creative endeavour, or journalistic intention. Will I ever be free to develop them? Looking over them I can only ejaculate Eureka, Zeugma, Catachresis and all abominable things. I feel like a buried city.

In April 1918 he writes that he is determined he "will not be snowed under in any mental sense." By November 1918 he is in a malaria concentration camp in France. It is then that he writes of his oppressive perception of the automatism or fortuity of great movements and holocausts. In reference to that letter, he notes in another of December 1918:

I was certainly in a dreadful condition of mind when I wrote last. No fit of "blues" approaching that in intensity has ever visited me before - nor have I often lost my deliberate pose of depersonalisation so completely. My state amounted to cerebral neuritis almost.

He then makes a most revealing comment:

I regained myself by using my natural safety-valve and the result which I am busily licking into shape is a sheaf of studies similar in angle of approach to "Cerebral" but dealing with diverse psychological crises and restrictions.

The comment is interesting not only in its dating of "Cerebral", but in its implication that "Cerebral" and similar prose-pieces (those in Annals of the Five Senses) were consciously therapeutic in origin - and so, for our purposes, psychologically revealing.

A comparison between the personal outpourings of these

letters and the "deliberate pose of depersonalisation" manifest in the Annals of the Five Senses not only emphasises the large autobiographical element in the book but also helps explain the absence of overtly political writing during the early years while yet revealing psychological tendencies which MacDiarmid was later to consciously politicise.

In a letter of November 1920, MacDiarmid talks of "Cerebral and Other Stories", a preliminary title for Annals, which he describes as studies in "mystical psycho-analysis". The subject under analysis is ultimately himself. Annals constitutes a 'depersonalised' evocation of various aspects of his "psychological tangle". What matters, and seems to matter desperately, to MacDiarmid is the objectifying (or depersonalisation) of his own psychological minutiae. As he asks in a letter of March 1919:

Will I never overcome that mastering horror of rational sequence.. ?

The mental chaos that concerns MacDiarmid throughout his correspondence with his literary mentor, George Ogilvie, becomes in "Cerebral" - "un chaos decoratif" on the left side of the head of a literary-journalist who, incidentally, smokes a pipe, has a lover called Peggy, and is writing an article on "The Scottish Element in Ibsen".⁽¹⁸⁾ The mental juggling in "Cerebral", however, is more creative than neurotic. While "every nerve was athrill with the goodness and bravery of life", his flying thoughts are given shape and direction with a hint of "an essential and most excellent harmony".⁽¹⁹⁾ But there is no final crystallisation of the mind's movement. Rather, "the countless impressions" continually "suffered a 'sea-change' into something entirely and most inconsequently different.." ⁽²⁰⁾

MacDiarmid is seeking to express a state of mind which, to judge from the letters, he has experienced from as far back as 1910. In "Cafe Scene", he sets out to examine the neurotic aspect of his introverted speculations. The subject-mind of this study feels the world as a vortex of uncontrollable sense-impressions which ultimately threatens

his own personality with dissolution, and he asks his morbid fancy:

Why the devil must his brain go on tweaking out logical processes to impossible lengths ? (21)

The inability to give form and symbolic expression to his myriad sense-impressions thus threatens a total disintegration of the subject-personality:

He took once more (quaintly conscious of courageousness and even a little amused by his hasty search for symbols and figures of speech sufficiently enormous) a grip of himself, discerning in every mode of his bodily and mental functioning a diathesis of sheer unreason.. Every cell of his body, and his brain seemed, separately, and conjointly, poised on the very edge of an unknown that was both ludicrous and fatal.. (22)

This echoes "Cerebral" where, we are told, "many an excursion.. took him well over the recognised boundaries of sanity", and the depersonalised subject comes to ask: "Was thought then, as we knew it, a disease ?" (23)

The psychological studies in Annals, thus, represent attempts to clear the "buried city", a process which the writer must undertake before he can win free into any political arena and embrace it creatively. In these various studies, it is not the contents of the mind that are significant, but the (relentless and, seemingly, endless) workings of the mind, the thought processes so vividly evoked by the complex - at times tortuous - syntax: the piling of subordinate clauses, of parentheses within parentheses, a style which recurs when he attempts similar descriptions in his letters to Ogilvie. (24) In other words, Annals itself illustrates the enormous self-absorption of the young writer and his attempts to come to terms with the creative process.

This self-absorption alternates between at least two notable extremes which not only give psychological colouring to many of the 'contradictions' in his political aesthetic, but which also help explain the - sometimes desperate - psychological motivation behind them. The two extremes are those of solipsism and aboulia.

The subject-mind of Annals, as of the early correspondence, shows a constitutional predisposition, borne out in the early poetry, towards solipsism: the feeling or belief that the self is the only

knowable or existent thing. With MacDiarmid this is primarily emotional rather than rational. That is, it is more a psychological tendency than a philosophical conclusion. In a letter of November 2nd. 1920, MacDiarmid reveals that his psychological solipsism derives, in part at least, from moments of creative intensity:

I am mobilised to the last fraction.. My "temptation" lies simply in the fact that when I reach a certain pitch everything outside me ceases to exist.

Referring to his own mental "chaos" in a letter written ten days later, MacDiarmid talks of ^{how} this chaos draws into itself "my external elements".

His meaning is unclear, but it is implied that at such moments of anxiety, or emotional intensity, other personalities (in this case, Ogilvie) are in some way assimilated so as to become "external elements" of his own personality, of his own creative vortex. In An Appreciation of George Ogilvie, recorded in 1967, it is significant that MacDiarmid refers to Ogilvie, even at that late date, as

..always a living presence in my mind, functioning as a sort of intellectual and aesthetic conscience. (25)

That MacDiarmid was well aware of this characteristic in himself is revealed in his letter of August 1916:

You mention Nisbet. What Nisbet was to me.. I cannot define - infinitely more than a brother, a very spiritual familiar - one of the many contrasting personalities in me was essentially Nisbet, thinking in me with his brain, working in me with his splendid sensuous vitality, reflecting upon the other personalities, part and parcel of the debating society which is my mental life.

This real-life Nisbet, whose death (as the same letter records) partly prompted MacDiarmid to join the army, cannot be unrelated to the Nisbet of "An Interlude in Post War Glasgow" who appears in the first two issues of The Scottish Chapbook (August & September 1922). MacDiarmid's 'fictional' Nisbet is a highbrow, would-be poet still seeking the means of expression: in short, a type of the subject-mind of Annals. Thus, we have a man known personally to MacDiarmid, a man whose personality he seems to some extent to have absorbed, who is then presented in a

fictional dialogue as the representative of MacDiarmid's state of mind, as well as of his views on art and society. This in itself encapsulates MacDiarmid's psychological solipsism.

This same impulse is apparent throughout the prose-pieces in Annals. In "Cerebral", for example, we find that the mind has a chameleon-like quality: an ability to merge or integrate physical surroundings with its own mental activities:

Prim little gardens ran out of the left side of his head right into and through the discoloured and ink-spotted wall-paper.. and through the wall. (26)

The Chinese Republic and the Duma (the 'parliament' of Czarist Russia) meet in this expanded cranium and each "speaker" becomes one of the mind's "own personalities". (27) MacDiarmid is presenting here a depersonalised evocation of his own mental processes, although the solipsism is tempered through conscious application in the writing: through controlled expression. But throughout these studies, the solipsism not only characterises the subject-mind; it would seem also to be the source of its vitality and ubiquity, while the value of external phenomena is shown typically to depend upon the perceiving mind.

The characteristic formula for this mental activity is for the perceiving mind to soak in external stimuli, physical or intellectual, to take it for its own and give it out as such. It could be argued that here we have the root of MacDiarmid's predisposition for 'found poetry' which was to cause such controversy in his literary career. (28) Certainly this psychological solipsism underlies his elitism and the sense of omniscience which attends his many ex cathedra statements to the point where, at times, it may even be justly described as a sufficient cause of his Romantic Egoism.

In Annals, even when the dangers of introspection are realised, as in "The Never-Yet -Explored", the value of external phenomena is still shown to depend upon the perceiving mind:

Her physical-intellectual being was the sensorium of Nature, but it was also one thing among natural things

whose number was legion. It was the mirror in which she viewed the world, but it was also part of the world, the part most necessary for her to know and work upon, and its value to her depended upon her knowledge of its natural distortions and how to test and correct them. (29)

Thus, the subject-mind always retains at least a certain ubiquity. Compare

"Cerebral":

..he was enabled, indefinably but quite definitely, to trace the thin line of his own mentality through all the incalculable fabric of the thought of humanity. This gave him latitude and longitude on the oceans of speculation. (30)

The cool rational tone of the analysis acts, in effect, as a smokescreen deflecting the reader from the enormity of the suggestion that the mind (ultimately MacDiarmid's own) has absorbed so much of what humanity has thought as to be able to claim a thoroughly objective view not only of self but also of "the incalculable fabric of the thought of humanity". The correlatives, the latitude and the longitude, are necessarily extreme, and the paradox of attempting to calculate the incalculable was to remain with MacDiarmid throughout his work. "Pathological equilibrium" is a description which heavily understates the mental processes which infuse his Romantic Egoism.

What is apparent from the letters and the early prose-pieces is also reflected in the early poetry. In much of the poetry, for example, not only is the universe dependent on the poet's subjective vision, Godhead also retains its value only in relation to the perceiving mind:

And God Himsel' sall only be
As far's a man can tell,
In this or ony ither life
A way o' lookin' at himsel'.

("Ballad of the Five Senses")

The assumption of omniscient kinship with God is typical and reappears in many of the early poems; for instance, "A Moment in Eternity":

I shone within my thoughts
As God within us shines..

And the wind ceased
And like a light I stood,
A flame of glorious and complex resolve,
Within God's heart. (31)

This note of 'divine solipsism' is struck many times in the early poetry. It may be taken as the imaginative basis of MacDiarmid's God-building with which we shall deal in full in our fourth chapter.

In a more earthly poem, "The Universal Man", the voice is familiar in its solipsism -

All ecstasies and agonies
Within me meet

and related ubiquity -

Still in a thousand shapes with Time
I keep my tryst. (32)

The voice assumes the diverse aspects both of male and female and of myth and history. It is the solipsism, then, that produces in the poetry that characteristic note of Romantic Egoism which is central to the more mature political aesthetic and which, in turn, underlies the concept of the Representative Personality.

Thus, in A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle (1926), we are told that

Scotland, responsive to my thoughts,
Lichts mile by mile, as my ain nerves,.

This self-identification with Scotland permeates MacDiarmid's Nationalist rationale and it receives its first major poetic treatment in the epic

Drunk Man:

The Munelicht is my knowledge o' mysel',
Mysel' the thistle in the munelicht seen,.

His declared intention is to personify Scotland as the thistle also represents "my nation's saul". The question, significantly, is not whether or not he is capable of such an act, but whether or not Scotland can match the deed and be uplifted by his spirit:

Is Scotland big enough to be
A symbol o' that force in me,
In wha's divine inebriety
A sicht abune contempt I'll see ?

For a' that's Scottish is in me,.

As in Annals, where external phenomena take their value from the perceiving mind and, as in the early poems, where the concept of Godhead acquires its character and value from the poet's Romantic Egoism, so in A Drunk Man all

that is of value in Scotland, all that is truly Scottish in character, is embodied in the Representative Personality. In other words, having at last won free from his "buried city", the Drunk Man illustrates the first overt politicisation of his own psychology. The mental processes which MacDiarmid was exploring in Annals, he is now exploiting in terms which are typical of his mature work - typical of his political aesthetic. To personify Scotland, thus making it subservient to his creative drive, represents a further depersonalisation of his psychological solipsism. His own retrospective judgement of this is given in Lucky Poet (1943):

I always like to feel.. that my principal personal characteristics exhibit clearly the great historical directives of my people..

My ambition was to be the creator of a new people, a real bard who 'sang' things till they became, yet, as an individual, the incarnation of an immemorial culture. (33)

What we have here, then, is the psychological basis of the strong current of Nationalism which permeates the poetry, and of MacDiarmid's theory of "Scottish Psychology" which forms an intellectual counterpart to his creative writing. What MacDiarmid said of his Socialism is equally applicable to his Nationalism: both were "an artist's organised approach to the interdependencies of life". (34)

But, in order to don the mantle of Bard, in order to recreate his nation, MacDiarmid had firstly to construe it along psychologically assimilable lines: the process of selection and rejection that is apparent, for example, in A Drunk Man where the rejection of Burnsomania, of Scottish Calvinism and, pari passu, Philistinism is paramount. It might be thought that only if the assimilation genuinely reflects "Scottish Psychology" (as MacDiarmid had no doubt it did) is it justified. But that is to divorce theory from practice, for what matters ultimately is the undoubted quality of the poetry produced.

It is as well to mark here with regard to future chapters concerning the matter of God-building and the Messianic quality of

MacDiarmid's Nationalism how pervasive elements of his solipsism actually are in the poetry. For example, his infamous couplet in To Circumjack Gencrastus (1930) - "Better a'e gowden lyric / Than a social problem solved" - cannot be unrelated to those moments of creative intensity when the poetic craft becomes all-important and all else "ceases to exist". The solipsism does assume God-like proportions throughout his work, as here in Gencrastus:

Man's the reality that mak's
A' things possible, even himsel'.

It could also be argued that the sheer mental energy that conditions his solipsism is the very thing which allows him to (seemingly) make light of certain issues, like his 'defence' of the Cheka in "First Hymn to Lenin" (1931), to the abhorrence of some readers. On the other hand, it is this very tendency that not only underlies and characterises the Bardic qualities of some of his greatest poetry, but it also allows him to indulge in a Romantic omniscience through which he draws out intuitions of beauty and majesty from conditions of ugliness, poverty, and despair - as, for instance, the poem "In The Slums of Glasgow":

I am filled forever with a glorious awareness
Of the inner radiance, the mystery of the hidden light in these dens,
I see it glimmering like a great white-sailed ship
Bearing into Scotland from Eternity's immense,
Or like a wild swan resting a moment in mid-flood.
It has the air of a winged victory, in suspense
By its own volition in its imperious way.
As if the heavens opened I gather its stupendous sense.

In this poem, the "wave of omnipotence" is a potential common to all humanity. But perhaps the most outrageous illustration of his politicisation of this tendency occurs, like the previous poem, in Second Hymn to Lenin and Other Poems (1935): the closing couplet of "At the Cenotaph":

Keep going to your wars, you fools, as of yore;
I'm the civilisation you're fighting for.

Whatever one makes of its individual variations, the major contribution this solipsism made to MacDiarmid's political aesthetic was undoubtedly

as a mainspring - if not the mainspring - of his Romantic Egoism: that which conditioned his desire to be Representative Personality. In "Scotland" (Lucky Poet 1943) he described his poetry as "a statue carved out in a whole country's marble", declaring that

...I have gathered unto myself
All the loose ends of Scotland,
And by naming them and accepting them,
Loving them and identifying myself with them,
Attempt to express the whole.

The extent of his achievement will ultimately be judged by posterity alone.

However, MacDiarmid's solipsistic intensity was, to say the least, only half of his struggle for expression, and its significance can only be properly evaluated in relation to its 'complementary opposite': aboulia, a disease of the will.

The inability to write the "Fine Thing" often plagued the young poet to the point where he would often seem to collapse inwardly. It certainly accounts for the many time-gaps in his correspondence with Ogilvie. More than once does he apologise for not having written, giving as his reason the failure to write himself out of his "psychological tangle". In one such apology, in an undated letter written around the summer of 1921, he comments:

This intermittent aboulia which renders me impotent to maintain regular relations with people has been extraordinarily well-developed this time. However I objected strongly to passing out into the void again.

This aboulia, part of the "psychological tangle", is a characteristic of which he has been long aware. The feeling is rather neatly conveyed in an early poem published in Annals, "Spanish Girl":

.. Ah no -
I am a void
Impossibly employed.
Vaguely I know and do not know.

But, given the solipsistic tendency and the concomitant determination to personify "Scottish Psychology", the aboulia, once externalised or depersonalised, comes to represent negative forces at work in and

against the putative "Scottish Psychology": the disease that is in the plant itself. In December 1921, for instance, he writes to Ogilvie:

I have been conducting a further stage of my guerrilla warfare with the Vernacular Circle of the London Burns Club.. The dispute arose out of a paper [J.M.Bulloch] gave on "The delight of the diminutive in Doric".. I have replied.. that "progress in sexual ethics is at length removing the 'specific aboulia' so long responsible for the prevalence of the diminutive in Scotland".

Writing in Scottish Home Rule, in November 1922, he thus argues that

Scottish literature is suffering from what is known in Freudian terminology as a "specific aboulia"; and it is difficult in one short paper to uncoil all the subtle self-deceptions and unconscious suppressions and corresponding compensations which conceal the core of an aboulia. (35)

In a 1925 essay on F.G. Scott, MacDiarmid suggests that the same disease afflicts Scottish musicians and composers:

Scotland is their "blind spot", as it were; and this is due to their cultural and political preconceptions, suggestions superimposed to the frustration of their natural powers - but it should be at variance with their artistic instincts. That it is not, consciously at all events - and that they should be driven to "compensate" themselves for this radical "want" after the fashion in which an inferiority complex inevitably operates - amounts to a "specific aboulia". (36)

Each type of artist in Scotland must, in MacDiarmid's book, counteract the loss of National will in his own particular area. With regard to writing in Scots, he notes in an early Scottish Chapbook:

As keen students of the Vernacular will appreciate, he was making scores of little experiments in Doric composition and style even as he spoke - subtle adaptations of ancient figures of speech to modern requirements, finding vernacular equivalents for Freudian terminology.. If any Doric enthusiasts think this is easy enough let them try to translate a paragraph or two treating of introverts, extroverts, complexes and specific aboulias into "gude braid Scots" - and if they do not think this necessary let them cease to talk of reviving the Doric. Such a revival depends upon the Doric being brought abreast of modern civilisation in every respect and detail. There is no other way.. (37)

The term, originating in personal experience, thus becomes a symbol for a cultural-political disease relating to the lack of independent standards

in Scottish life and art and the lack of will to change this. In short, it symbolises for MacDiarmid a lack of Nationalist consciousness and political motivation. The term also finds its way into the poetry -

A Drunk Man:

This Freudian complex has somehow slunken
Frae Scotland's soul - the Scots aboulia -
Whilst a' its terra nullius is betrunken.

So, in the act of overcoming (or having overcome) his own aboulia, MacDiarmid, as the self-appointed representative of his people, will predicate it of those who do not manifest Nietzschean 'will to power'.

Indeed, the whole question of this aboulia cannot be divorced from MacDiarmid's deep fascination with Nietzsche (with which we shall deal in our next chapter), and with the concepts of personal will-power and political will-power which are themselves significant motifs in his political aesthetic - whether in the sense of becoming oneself (the 'moral' of A Drunk Man) or of prosecuting "a great upwelling of the incalculable".

As late as 1959, in Burns Today and Tomorrow, MacDiarmid argues that significant poetry demands a "conjunction of daemonic will with poetic genius".⁽³⁸⁾ There were of course political pitfalls in this cult of will which in retrospect, and perhaps with one eye on aberrations in his own political journalism, MacDiarmid realised. In 1976 he writes:

..whatever may be said of Knox's relentless will,
we have surely seen enough of athletes of the will
in recent years - Hitler, Mussolini, Franco - to
have any regard now for that quality. (39)

Yet MacDiarmid did have great regard for that quality which, properly interpreted, relates only in the passing to Fascism. For it is his fascination with human will-power that underlies the God-building mentality of much of his writing, as it did with writers like Maxim Gorky and Anatole Lunacharsky who, like MacDiarmid, wrote in a tradition - which we shall examine in some detail - aptly termed "Nietzschean-Marxist".⁽⁴⁰⁾

MacDiarmid, in fact, even went as far as writing a poem entitled "The Nature of Will" which appeared in Lucky Poet (1943), and

from which the following lines are taken:

But will is merely the interior side of our actions.
It is as strong and constant whatever we do.
For it is nothing but the deed considered in its origin.
What we do, we will. The doing is the will.

In an article for the Scottish Educational Journal in the 'Twenties, MacDiarmid quotes, with approval, the following words from Croce:

Inspiration is not peculiar to the artist. It comes to all of us, whatever our walk in life. And it is not a substitute for will, but depends on will. It is a sort of grace from on high that descends upon those who allure it, inviting it by daily effort, preparing themselves to welcome it, and sustaining it, when it has come, by new efforts. (41)

These quotations serve to underline how far MacDiarmid went, with a notable consistency, in depersonalising and politicising his own psychology in his creative and critical writings. Moreover, the whole idea of the Scottish Renaissance, which he initially and largely propagated by himself, was, as he saw it, a concerted attempt to offset the "Scots aboulia" by determined effort:

I feel we who are interested in Scotland, Scots and the Renaissance idea must all now redouble our efforts.
We can make it - if we will. (42)

Primarily, this aboulia coexists or alternates with the solipsistic urge of intense mental energy. It may not be thought that 'solipsism' and 'aboulia' are necessarily opposites, far less complementary opposites. But, as I have defined them in relation to MacDiarmid, in at least one sense they are. For, from the beginning aboulia is related to the inability to write the "Fine Thing" and, retrospectively, is predicated of Scotland's inability to produce significant literature and, in general, to lift herself from the rut MacDiarmid sees her to be in. MacDiarmid's solipsism, on the other hand, is essentially apparent when he feels himself to be at the height of his creative powers.

It might be oversimplistic to say that one is the product of the other, though both take root in the same personality

and are apparent in the same poetic persona. But it may be that the solipsism, relating as it does to periods of creative intensity and being a "temptation" of which he was aware, is to some extent a result of his reaction to his own "intermittent aboulia". However, although in terms of his own psychology the solipsism may be a compensation for his intermittent aboulia, nevertheless in the literature they appear as complementary to one another.

In "Four Years' Harvest", for example, the solipsism is apparent in the subject-mind's belief that "his own thought was part of the consciousness which sustained the world". But, for the Salonikan soldiers in general, "praying one instant for additional skull space to cope with the onrush of novel and exciting impressions" gives way the next to "an abject sterility of mind".⁽⁴³⁾ In "Cerebral" the subject-mind has notably a "keen curiosity" as to the "causation" of "mental occurrences", concluding that there is "no centre of motivation" to this "spring slavery".⁽⁴⁴⁾ In "Cafe Scene" the neurosis associated with the aboulia is such that the individual is so oppressed by sense-data that a further, and seemingly endless, minimising of his will-power occurs:

..an extraordinary sense of intolerable belittlement
assailed him.. so congesting his organs that he felt
he was fighting for breath. It was as if a dwarfing
process had set in. ⁽⁴⁵⁾

In all of these studies in "mystical psycho-analysis" a depersonalised evocation of aboulia occurs with as much frequency as that of solipsism, relating always to the same character or group of characters. They are, in other words, complementary facets of the writer's psychological extremism.

MacDiarmid's "psychological tangle" thus receives its first extended treatment in Annals of the Five Senses, and in treating the various aspects of that tangle of "flying thoughts" he displays characteristics which were to have a crucial bearing on the nature of his later work. "The work of a young writer", as W.H. Auden put it,

..is sometimes a therapeutic act. He finds himself obsessed by certain ways of feeling and thinking of which his instinct tells him he must be rid before he can discover his authentic interests and sympathies, and the only way by which he can be rid of them forever is by surrendering to them. (46)

It is in the process of coming to terms with his own psychological obsessions ("ways of feeling and thinking") that MacDiarmid reveals what were to be certain major features of his political aesthetic. Concomitantly, an awareness of this process prevents criticism from positing the unwarranted charge that MacDiarmid betrayed his Muse to Marxism, or lost his 'lyric impulse' or whatever. For, taking account of the young poet's psychological extremism and the influences and experiences of his youth and early adulthood, one begins to see that the development of his political aesthetic is as organic as it is unbroken. To quote once more from Auden:

Time passes. Having gotten the poison out of his system, the writer turns to his true interests which are not, and never were, those of his early admirers, who now pursue him with cries of "Traitor!" (47)

In the primary bid to free himself from his "buried city" the poetry is, with MacDiarmid, necessarily politicised. MacDiarmid, as we have seen, always was a political animal. The artist cannot be divorced from the political thinker. In his struggle for expression an alliance, so to speak, between the artist and the political thinker was as necessary as it was inevitable - if he was to succeed. That the struggle was a desperate one for MacDiarmid is reflected throughout his work. But there never were two MacDiarmids: the apolitical lyricist and the political propagandist.

Part of the reason for that misunderstanding, besides being based on an inadequate appreciation of MacDiarmid's life and work, lies in the (equally inadequate) tenets of 'literary appreciation' which dominate - through the policies of Publishing Houses, the Media (where they bother at all), the Universities and the Schools - the British mentality or, more accurately, the mentality of the British intelligentsia.

As Edwin Morgan has described this state of affairs,

The West, at some point between 1910 and 1920.. concentrated its attention on being interesting, rather than inspiring or relevant or useful, and aided and abetted by modern criticism it erected an impressively sophisticated but increasingly unnecessary construct - meaningful perhaps within its own verbal boundaries and mental assumptions but meaningless in relation to life itself.. John Peale Bishop spoke for the Western view when he wrote:

Present evils are for men of action
Art has the irremediable ones.

Most of our poets from Eliot to Larkin would agree with this statement and their writing illustrates it. To the non-bourgeois part of the world, however, there is no greater aesthetic heresy. (48)

MacDiarmid's political aesthetic does not adhere to the Eliot-Larkin tradition and it cannot be judged by its standards. (And, I would argue, the same applies to the majority of modern Scottish poets with, perhaps, the exception of Edwin Muir). A criticism schooled in that tradition almost inevitably misunderstands MacDiarmid and is forced to drive its own ideological wedge (the very existence of which it rarely recognises or admits to) between the writing and the political engagement which inspires, characterises and often directs it. In other words, if MacDiarmid was a great writer, he was so not in spite of himself but because he fought to know himself and came to know himself écrivain engagé.

The question of the cultural and philosophical role of the British Intelligentsia in relation to MacDiarmid's political aesthetic is a complex matter with which we shall deal in fuller terms in our third chapter. But it should be noted here that in terms of 'mental geography' MacDiarmid patently belongs to the "non-bourgeois part of the world" and something of the nature and importance of his Russo-Scottish parallelism (to which we shall also return) may be seen in Morgan's comments on, generally, non-bourgeois and, specifically, Russian poetry:

It is a poetry with a sense of history, and it is suffused

- ironic lesson to the West - with an awareness of the individual's place in history.. without the one big thing that the Soviet artist does have - interest, care, and positive confidence in and for man and society - there is too little to build on, and the arts become a sort of fascinating marginal fantasy, where talent and effort (and money) are devoted to convincing a sceptical world that the materials used are more interesting than the mind that shapes them or the end it shapes them to. (49)

In order, thus, to right the imbalance of much of the previous criticism of MacDiarmid it is necessary not only to draw attention to the implicit assumptions and unwritten prejudices of the tradition in which that criticism has been written; it is also necessary to investigate more thoroughly than has been done hitherto the intellect which shaped the poetry and reveal not only the psychological, but also the philosophical and intellectual influences which conditioned the nature and stature of the end-product. Having mapped some of the major features of MacDiarmid's internal and external biography during his formative years as poet and thinker (those of late adolescence and early adulthood), the breadth of this study extends in order to characterise at least something of the intellectual milieu in which he thought and wrote. Our next chapter deals with MacDiarmid's theory of National Psychology and his treatment of the theory that the function of art is the extension of consciousness, both of which - related to his Nationalism and his Communism - are central to his political aesthetic. Indeed, it would not be an overstatement to say that together they form the intellectual basis of that aesthetic. Subsequent chapters will pursue these two themes in philosophical, cultural and political-historical terms.

Finally, although it would be an over-simplification to say that MacDiarmid, in the primary bid to free himself from his "buried city", politicised his poetry because as self-appointed Bard or Representative Personality he visited his own psychology (as he understood it) on his contemporaries, it should be borne in mind that MacDiarmid's writing is suffused with an ubiquitarian mentality. Derived, initially, from his psychological solipsism, that

ubiquitarian mentality - which is the driving force behind his greatest work - relates not to the omnipresence of any Godhead but to the infinite potential that MacDiarmid felt was every person's birthright. In his work MacDiarmid was attempting a poetic dramatisation of that potential which, properly termed, was the contradictory philosophy known as 'God-building'.

This involved MacDiarmid in intellectual controversies which, by and large, the insular British intelligentsia (with a few notable exceptions with whom we shall deal) have eschewed or ducked out of. Thus, a great amount of the territory covered in the later chapters will be foreign to the reader schooled in the Eliot-Larkin tradition and so, in attempting to establish the milieu in which MacDiarmid wrote, I shall have to furnish the reader with a certain amount of detail which, in more propitious circumstances, could perhaps have been taken for granted.

However, it is sufficient to note for the immediate purposes of our following chapter that the ubiquitous mentality of MacDiarmid's poetry (and related prose) is one of its definitive characteristics that, deriving from his own psychology, is vitally related to the Bardic qualities of his verse:

A Scottish poet maun assume
The burden o' his people's doom,
And dee to brak' their livin' tomb.

These words (from A Drunk Man) express the same emotional dictates as underlie

All ecstasies and agonies
Within me meet.

Thus, when MacDiarmid really begins to 'find himself', not only does he (rightly) rationalise and politicise his innate sense of elitism (his Romantic Egoism), he also extends this through the imaginative concept of the 'Representative Personality' into a Messianic role. It was this response to psychological, intellectual and cultural-political concerns that was to energise and shape the political

aesthetic of Hugh MacDiarmid as it developed in the 'Twenties and
'Thirties.

- 1 Lucky Poet (University of California 1972, 1st. pub. 1943) p.231.
- 2 The Ogilvie correspondence is held by the National Library of Scotland; NLS Acc. 4540. All letters quoted in this chapter are, with one exception footnoted separately, from this collection. The letters are dated in the text.
- 3 Duncan Glen The Literary Masks of Hugh MacDiarmid (Glasgow 1964) pp.8-9.
- 4 "Arthur Leslie" The Politics and Poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid (Glasgow 1960) p.9.
- 5 Hugh MacDiarmid and Lewis Grassie Gibbon Scottish Scene or The Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn (Bath 1974, 1st. pub. 1934)
- 6 James Hunter "The Gaelic connection: the Highlands, Ireland and nationalism, 1873-1922" The Scottish Historical Review vols. 53-4 (1974-5) p.198.
- 7 See Syllabus - Autumn Term 1910, Edinburgh University Fabian Society National Library of Scotland.
- 8 "Leslie" op. cit. p.9.
- 9 Annals of the Five Senses (Montrose 1923) p.65.
- 10 Ibid pp.88-9.
- 11 Albyn or Scotland and the Future (London 1927) p.6.
- 12 The Scottish Chapbook (ed. C.M. Grieve) I, 3, (October 1922) pp.74-6.
- 13 Albyn op. cit. p.15.
- 14 Ibid pp.11-30.
- 15 Gordon Wright MacDiarmid: An Illustrated Biography (Edinburgh 1977) p.24.
- 16 The New Age 20th. July 1911 p.274. MacDiarmid's connection with "The New Age Group" and its influence upon him is discussed in Chapters Four and Five.
- 17 Annals op. cit. p.187 n.
- 18 Ibid p.3.
- 19 Ibid p.10.
- 20 Ibid pp.12-13.
- 21 Ibid p.40.
- 22 Ibid p.42.
- 23 Ibid pp.19, 22.
- 24 Cf. Roderick B. Watson: "...by far the most striking thing about these stories is the relentless focus on the mental processes of the characters. Furthermore, the processes described do not vary very

- much from character to character or even from story to story. In the end, of course, we begin to suspect that the real protagonist is the author himself.. it is clear that the focus is not so much on what is being experienced as on how it is experienced." "Water Music' and the Stream of Consciousness" Scottish Literary Journal 5, 2, (December 1978) pp.7-9.
- 25 An Appreciation of George Ogilvie (recorded on tape at Brownsbank 12/6/1967) NLS Dep. 283(ii) n.p.
- 26 Annals op. cit. p.3..
- 27 Ibid p.12.
- 28 This predisposition is usually associated with the later poetry, but it is interesting to note that in a letter of September 1921 MacDiarmid tells Ogilvie that he has used "a little bit of one of your letters to me in a now lost poem "Four Years' Harvest" ". The same sensibility is apparent in the Foreword to Annals where the writers admits to using "a 'strong solution of books' - and not only of books but of magazines and newspaper articles and even of speeches".
- 29 Annals op. cit. pp.154-55.
- 30 Ibid p.19.
- 31 Another typical example is the following which I mention here because it is from a poem entitled "What Will God Do ?" that does not appear in The Complete Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid. The poem, which appears in The Scottish Nation I, 1, (8th. May 1923) p.13; under the pseudonym 'Isobel Guthrie' is a translation of Rilke's "What Will You Do God ?". (That is the title given it by Deutsch & Yarmolinsky from whose Contemporary German Poetry (1923) it has undoubtedly been cribbed - 'Guthrie' quotes Babette Deutsch on p.11 of the same issue). In MacDiarmid's version the significant lines read:
I am His consciousness, and make
All that he knows His Own Self by.
(In Deutsch and Yarmolinsky's version the poetic voice is God's purpose - "I am your craft ". With MacDiarmid the poetic voice becomes God's consciousness and self-knowledge).
- 32 This rather enigmatic poem dedicated (without permission one presumes) to Lady Astor, who was the first woman M.P. (elected to represent Plymouth), appears in MS in a letter to Ogilvie on Sept. 26th. 1921. In the MS version the words "Centurion" and "Cyrenean" are in exactly the reverse position of the text as it stands in the Complete Poems and in The New Age for Oct. 16th. 1924. Moreover, the reference in the MS and the New Age version is rightly to "Plymouth" and not "Portsmouth".(which is how it appears in the Complete Poems).
- 33 Lucky Poet op. cit. pp.36, 81.
- 34 Ibid p.241 n.1.
- 35 Scottish Home Rule 3, 5, (Nov. 1922).
- 36 "Francis George Scott" Scottish Educational Journal 11th. Sept. 1925, Contemporary Scottish Studies (Edinburgh 1976) p.33.
- 37 The Scottish Chapbook 1, 3, (Oct. 1922) p.69. MacDiarmid's analysis

remained consistent in its use of this concept. In Scottish Scene (op. cit. p.81) he writes: "This absence of real and responsible personality gives a feeling of trying to fight malaria with a bayonet. Criticism has no effective target. It is said that one cannot indict a whole nation: in Scotland the trouble is that one cannot do anything else - except perhaps, call the offending nation England instead of Scotland itself".

- 38 Burns Today and Tomorrow (Edinburgh 1959) p.30.
- 39 MacDiarmid, MacLean & Ross John Knox (Edinburgh 1976) p.85.
- 40 See below, Chapter Four.
- 41 Quoted Contemporary Scottish Studies (London 1926) pp.116-17.
- 42 Letter to William Soutar Dec. 13th. 1935, NLS MS8528 f. 162.
- 43 Annals op. cit. pp.69, 72-3.
- 44 Ibid p.18.
- 45 Ibid p.41.
- 46 W.H. Auden The Dyer's Hand and other essays (London 1975, 1st. pub. 1963) p.19.
- 47 Ibid.
- 48 Edwin Morgan Sovpoems (~~Winnipeg~~ n.d.) pp.3-4.
- 49 Ibid pp.4-6.

CHAPTER TWO

National Psychology
and the
Extension of Consciousness

Introduction

MacDiarmid's interest in psychology and cerebration (the recording of his own psychologising and cerebration in Annals and the Ogilvie correspondence) was, as we have seen, carried over into his poetry and criticism. While it would be simplistic to reduce his concept of "Scottish psychology" to the mere externalisation of his own mentality, nevertheless the primacy of his solipsistic urge cannot be denied. The case for, and the character of, the "Scottish psychology" rests to a considerable extent on MacDiarmid's 'vision' of himself as a - if not the - Representative Personality of his people.

MacDiarmid's Nationalism is at bottom psychological. He believes that what differentiates the Scotsman from other peoples is his characteristic psychological make-up, both racial and environmental. His concern is based primarily on his regard for the psychology of creativity and his belief that different peoples are possessed of quite distinct creative geniuses. It is the purpose of the individual artist to embody or express that inherent genius:

However much Tchaikovski and Saint-Saens owed to their natural powers, they owed more to nationality and early training. The technicalities of music, like the technicalities of painting, are international; the creative urge and inspiring idiom are fundamentally racial. (1)

Thus the more successful the artist is the more his work will embody features representative of his people's creative genius. So MacDiarmid will argue along psychological lines with respect not only to literature and art, but also with respect to the case for the establishment of a separate Scottish State:

I do not believe that a nation can be regenerated by arguments based on statistics or improved business techniques. The true saying is that without a vision the people perish. I underline the word vision.. I am not denying the importance of practical affairs. But all the Scottish issues one can think of - emigration, rural depopulation, housing, and all the rest - cannot add up to Scottish nationalism. (2)

Political Nationalism is therefore necessary, according to MacDiarmid's analysis, because the imposition of a foreign culture (that of England) thwarts and may eventually destroy the native culture.

National Psychology was for MacDiarmid a fait accompli, part of the natural evolution of the human race. It was thus the artist's role not only (to use Mallarmé's famous dictum) "donner un sens plus pur aux mots de la tribu", but to develop and defend the indigenous culture. MacDiarmid does not at any time object to a free internationalism. Arguably, he is the most internationalist poet the British Isles have produced in this century. What he does object to is cultural imperialism which, emanating chiefly from London, parades falsely as internationalism. The failure to distinguish between cosmopolitanism and internationalism proper is a failure that cannot honestly be visited on MacDiarmid.

MacDiarmid's conception of Scottish psychology is then vitally related to his political aesthetic and poetic practice. Indeed, the thoughts and passions of the Drunk Man may be taken as configurations of what that psychology might entail in its extremism and anarchism as might the image-clusters associated with the sea-serpent and the thistle itself. It is my intention to examine now in some detail MacDiarmid's 'theory' of Scottish psychology and to show how consistent he in fact was in his use of it.

MacDiarmid, naturally, was not alone in his attempts to exploit contemporary theories or discoveries of psychology. As a relatively new discipline psychology was very much in vogue among writers and intellectuals in the early part of this century. Matters of racial psychology and of subconscious or unconscious motivation are central, for example, to the work of D.H. Lawrence. Again, the year 1922 saw the publication of Joyce's "stream of consciousness" novel Ulysses. Joyce was of course an author whose genius MacDiarmid never tired of acclaiming. His own Annals of the Five Senses (1923) approaches the Joycean style though it is never wholly subsumed in the "stream of consciousness" method,

there always being an omniscient eye guiding us through the subjective experiences and responses of the characters. (3)

A major source of information on such matters was A.R. Orage's weekly The New Age to which MacDiarmid was introduced in 1908 by Ogilvie and to which he became a regular contributor in the mid 'twenties. In the pre-war years, as Wallace Martin points out in The New Age Under Orage,

..psycho-analysis was the topic most frequently discussed in articles on cultural subjects.. At that time, however, only two of Freud's books had been published in England. By 1918, there was a substantial body of literature on psycho-analysis available in English.. [Orage] recommended works by Freud, Jung, and Ernest Jones to the readers of his literary column. Three analysts, Dr. James Young, Dr. Maurice Nicoll, and Dr. J.A.M. Alcock, contributed to the magazine, Alcock appearing nearly every week between 1920 and 1922. (4)

And as Martin also notes, James Bridie "cited The New Age as the main source of his knowledge of psycho-analysis" in his book One Way of Living. (5) With regard to notions of racial or national psychology, it is interesting that Alcock discusses in some detail such matters and declares, for instance, that the "Irish, Welsh and Highland Scotch" belong to the category of "obvious extrovert" and the English to that of "obvious introvert". (6) Though they may now seem both simplistic and unfashionable, such distinctions were given serious consideration at the time and they abound in MacDiarmid's writings on the subject. There is, in retrospect, a certain naivety about the way in which such ideas were received and it is, thus, important that MacDiarmid is not judged out of context. For many of the claims made on behalf of the 'new science' of psychology at this time were definitely over-enthusiastic and, on occasion, extravagant in the extreme. In a New Age article of 1921, Edwin Muir, for example, informs us that "psycho-analysis is an agent of culture; in other words, it will change our conceptions". (7)

The New Age was a mediator of many ideas which influenced MacDiarmid as this and subsequent chapters will illustrate. Concerning

the question of "Scottish psychology" (the Messianic qualities of which we shall deal with later in this study) two notable influences were Friedrich Nietzsche and Oswald Spengler. Although Orage's weekly may not have introduced MacDiarmid to their ideas it certainly reinforced their effect upon him, especially in the case of Nietzsche.

Scottish Psychology: Nietzsche and Spengler

In a recent article, Walter Perrie writes:

In the years immediately following the Great War Nietzsche was much in vogue among non-Marxist intellectuals. His Complete Works had only recently become available in English translation in the Levy edition which appeared between 1909 and 1913; much of the work of translation being done in Edinburgh. Nietzsche's wholesale rejection of traditional bourgeois values; orthodox Christianity, patriotism and all the ideological trappings of State and Establishment, appealed powerfully to a generation which had just witnessed the ruin of Europe. His deification of the role of the artist, a view particularly pronounced in Zarathustra, attracted numerous literary and artistic disciples including Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, A.R. Orage and Middleton Murry. Murry and Orage between them edited the most influential literary journals of the day; Orage on The New Age and Murry on The Adelphi and The Athenaeum. These journals were used as propaganda vehicles on behalf of a cluster of writers which included Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, Nietzsche, Dostoievsky and the still highly controversial figures of Freud and Jung. (8)

MacDiarmid was undoubtedly attracted by Nietzsche's "deification of the role of the artist". Nietzsche's influence on European intellectuals in the early twentieth century was both profound and diverse. Moreover, it was not restricted simply to "non-Marxist intellectuals" but affected even the Bolshevik Party itself, a matter we shall discuss in detail in our fourth chapter. The cult of Nietzsche did, as Perrie states, reach its height in the years immediately following the First World War. It was, in fact, the Polish-German's boast that "I shall be understood after the next European War". (9) But Nietzsche's influence was pervasive

even before then. In a letter of February 1918 MacDiarmid writes to Ogilvie that he wishes to make him "an effective master of Nietzschean methods", which implies an earlier familiarity with Nietzsche's work.

Oscar Levy, as Perrie points out, had edited Nietzsche's Complete Works before the War. Indeed, in one of his earliest books, The Revival of Aristocracy (1906), there is a chapter on Nietzsche (who had died in 1900). But the main source of influence was The New Age which published regular articles and reviews about Nietzsche in the years before and after the War. During the War things German were less popular. The following is a comprehensive list of articles on or about Nietzsche which appeared in The New Age between the years 1908 and 1924, the size of which itself shows how profound and widespread was the interest in Nietzsche among intellectuals during this period. And it would, I think, be safe to assume that MacDiarmid read many, if not most, of these articles.

- 1 1908
 "Ibsen, Nietzsche and Kierkegaard"
 (2 parts, 19th. & 26th. Sept.) by Dr. Angelo Rappoport.
- 2 1909
 "Genius or Superman ?"
 (2 parts, 20th. & 27th. May) by Karl Hecht. (tr. J.M. Kennedy).
- 3 "Nietzsche the Olympian"
 (30th. Dec.) by Judah P. Benjamin.
- 4 1910
 "Nietzsche and Wagner"
 (14th. April) by Francis Grierson.
- 5 "A Spoke in Shaw's Wheel" (contrasting Shaw's "Superman" with Nietzsche's)
 (7th. July) by Oscar Levy.
- 6 1911
 "Nietzsche and Woman"
 (9th. March) by V.W. Eyre.
- 7 "THE YOUNG ASTROLOGY" (July 20th.) C. M. GRIEVE - FIRST APPEARANCE.
 "Introduction to Nietzsche's Dawn of Day"
 (12th. Oct.) by J.M. Kennedy.
- 8 1912
 "Kant and Nietzsche"
 (29th. Feb.) by A. Messer (tr. P.V. Cohn).
- 9 "The Nietzsche Movement in England"
 (3 parts, 19th. Dec. to Jan. 2nd. 1913) by Oscar Levy.
- 10 1913
 "Selections from the Letters of Nietzsche and August Strindberg"
 (10th. April) tr. Paul Selver.

- 1913 ctd.
- 11 "A French View of Nietzsche"
(10th. July) by Remy de Gourmont (tr. P.V. Cohn).
- 1914
- 12 "The Zarathustra Jubilee"
(22nd. Jan.) by Richard Oehler.
- 13 "The Gospel of St. Bridges" (a defence of Nietzsche)
(24th. Sept.) by Oscar Levy.
- 14 "Nietzsche and the Jews"
(2 parts, 17th. & 24th. Dec.) by Oscar Levy.
- 1915
- 15 "Nietzsche or Carlyle?"
(18th. March) by 'G.D.'
- 16 "Treitschke and Nietzsche"
(14th. Oct.) by Henri Albert (tr. P.V. Cohn).
- 1916
NIL
- 1917
NIL
- 1918
- 17 "Nietzsche in France and America"
(14th. Nov.) by 'Zarathustran'.
- 1919
NIL
- 1920
- 18 "The Moral Immoralists"
(1st. Jan.) by Janko Lavrin.
- 19 "New Values"
(5th. Feb.) by 'Edward Moore' (Edwin Muir).
- 20 "Socrates and Nietzsche"
(25th. March) by George Pitt-Rivers.
- 21 "We Nietzscheans"
(2 parts, 5th. & 12th. Aug.) by Oscar Levy.
- 1921-22
- 22 "Nietzsche Revisited"
(10 parts, 10th. Nov. 1921 to 13th. July 1922) by Janko Lavrin.
- 1923
NIL
- 1924
- 23 (April 3rd.) GRIEVE'S RE-APPEARANCE; NOW ON REGULAR BASIS.
"The Spiritual Basis of Fascism" (i.e. in Nietzscheanism)
(23rd. Oct.) by Oscar Levy.

The extent of this coverage may be further gauged if we take account of the serialisation of some of these pieces, giving us in all the equivalent of thirty-eight full-length articles, to which we could add some eight significant reviews including that of Levy's Complete Works.

MacDiarmid, then, was probably very familiar with various aspects of Nietzschean philosophy. Orage, himself an early member of the

I.L.P., had (according to Wallace Martin) been introduced to the works of Nietzsche by Holbrook Jackson in 1901, and he wrote two books on the subject which MacDiarmid might well have read also - Friedrich Nietzsche: the Dionysian Spirit of the Age (1906), and Nietzsche in Outline and Aphorism (1907).⁽¹⁰⁾

MacDiarmid's initial knowledge of Oswald Spengler is more problematic. Judging from his references to Spengler in The Scottish Chapbook, which occur as early as September 1922, he had more than a passing acquaintance with the man's work before Edwin Muir's extensive review of the German edition (Der Untergang des Abendlandes 2 vols. 1919 & 1922) in The New Age for May 10th. 1923. A review of the English edition of Volume One (1926) occurs in September 1926. It may be that MacDiarmid gained his knowledge from another journal or from (as is not unlikely) conversations with Muir himself. Unlike Muir, MacDiarmid had no extensive command of the German language.

Spengler was not only an influence in himself. He was also a mediator of Nietzschean ideas. As he said: "Goethe gave me method, Nietzsche the questioning faculty".⁽¹¹⁾ In a critical study of Spengler (1952) H.S. Hughes describes the general outlines of Spengler's methodology thus:

Spengler called his method "morphological". That is, it represented an application to history of the biologist's concept of living forms. Each culture, in this view, was an organism, which like any other living thing went through a regular and predictable course of birth, growth, maturity, and decay.. This biological metaphor provided the conceptual frame giving unity and coherence to the rest..⁽¹²⁾

By examining the cycle of past cultures, Spengler, who regarded his methodology as quite empirical, felt empowered to predict the future course of history.

Adopting the Nietzschean concepts of "culture" and "civilisation", Spengler saw the former as a period of creative activity within any given society, its spring, summer, and autumn, when the "soul" of the countryside dominates. The latter (which for Western

society begins in the nineteenth century), Spengler regarded as a time of theorising and material comfort; the given society's winter, with the "intellect" of the city dominating.

Thus, The Decline of the West argued that Western society had little or no creativity left and that its political life was based on the triumph of money. Socialism, which (like democracy) was for Nietzsche merely a development of the herd-value which he attributed to Christianity, was for Spengler no more than a philosophy of resignation. And as Nietzsche forecast that "There will be wars such as there have never been on earth before",⁽¹³⁾ so Spengler predicted a rising of "Blood" (pride and instinct) against the domination of money and intellect which would produce two centuries of war between imperialistic Caesars, one winning outright.

Although no democrat, Nietzsche regarded Socialism and Democracy as means of consolidating mediocrity and herd-values without which no 'higher' culture could come into being. Once consolidated, he predicted the coming of the New Barbarians who would break mass domination and render possible the development of new genius, a thought which may be at the back of MacDiarmid's mind when he addresses Lenin as "Barbarian saviour o' civilisation" in "Second Hymn to Lenin" (1932). For Nietzsche and, to a considerable extent, for MacDiarmid, culture finds its raison d'être in the production (or evolution) of artistic genius.

But MacDiarmid's artistic genius (signified in potential at least by himself as Representative Personality) is not content, like Nietzsche's Dionysian strong man, simply to accept with iron endurance the recurring historical process (i.e. Nietzsche's doctrine of Eternal Recurrence). MacDiarmid rarely talks of Dionysian attitudes. What appeals to him is Spengler's development of Nietzsche's Dionysian man: Faustian man.

Faustian man strives constantly for the infinite, the unattainable, the ideal represented by the moon in A Drunk Man. Recalling

Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil (1886), MacDiarmid writes:

The munelicht is the freedom that I'd ha'e
But for this cursèd Conscience thou hast set in me.

It is morality, the knowledge o' Guid and Ill,
Fear, shame, pity, like a will and wilyart growth,
That kills a' else wi'in its reach and craves
Nae less at last than a' the warld to gi'e it scouth.

This Faustian longing for the infinite was, for MacDiarmid, inherent in the 'true' Scottish psychology, and although the thistle here represents the 'false', Christian or bourgeois morality that has been inflicted upon that psychology, the moon has the power to reveal the true nature of the thistle, the submerged psychology of the Scottish race:

I never saw afore a thistle quite
Sae intimately, or at sic an 'oor.
There's something in the fickle licht that gi'es
A different life to't and an unco poo'er.

Thus, rather than embodying nothing more than a Nietzschean determinism, the Drunk Man, who is himself a character representative of Scottish psychology, embodies the desire for the infinite and confidently declares:

The thistle yet'll unite
Man and the Infinite !

In discussing Spengler's ideas in The Scottish Chapbook for March 1923, MacDiarmid draws the distinction between Spengler's Apollonian man (i.e. Classical man, the term was Nietzsche's) and Faustian or modern man, declaring:

The Apollonian type is dogmatic, unquestioning, instinctive, having no conception of infinity - in short, your average Englishman or German - and the Faustian mind, on the contrary, is dominated by the conception of infinity, of the unattainable, and hence is ever questioning, never satisfied, rationalistic in religion and politics, romantic in art and literature - a perfect expression of the Scottish race. (14)

MacDiarmid is not merely claiming that Scots are different from Englishmen or Germans. For, by categorising the latter as Apollonian, he is in fact arguing that their particular genius is no longer vital: it belongs (the terms are Spengler's) to a "civilisation" on the point of "exhaustion".

In an earlier Chapbook (September 1922), the fictitious "Nisbet"

adopts this Spenglerian point of view:

All forms of literary and artistic expressions, equally with other phenomena of intellectual and spiritual activity, have reached in our Western civilisation the point beyond which they can go no further. Western Europe, with America, has exhausted her energies, as Greece, Rome, Assyria, Babylon.. exhausted their energies before her. She can add nothing more to the sum of vitally new human knowledge, of fresh and adequate channels of self-expression. We must wait.. the new beginning which will come from a civilisation other than ours. (15)

"Nisbet's" list of exhausted civilisations needs only Egypt to complete Spengler's catalogue as, indeed, the annexing of America to Europe is also typical of Spengler. There is here no special case for Scotland. The country of the new dawn is unknown.

In the following Chapbook (October 1922), however, MacDiarmid claims that the Scots language "contains lapsed or unrealised [i.e. unexhausted] qualities which correspond to "unconscious" elements of distinctively Scottish psychology".⁽¹⁶⁾ Then, in the March 1923 issue, where he makes the distinction between the Apollonian and the Faustian types, he describes the Scots language as an "inexhaustible quarry of subtle and significant sound".⁽¹⁷⁾ Thus, Scots has (MacDiarmid is implying) "cultural" possibilities. Scots, in other words, because it has "lapsed" or remained "unrealised", is unaffected by the winter of Western civilisation, and the "distinctively Scottish psychology" with which it corresponds may be excluded from the decay of a civilisation in which it has never fulfilled itself. What will decay, MacDiarmid argues, is the false image of Scottish psychology which has been imposed by Anglicising influences - the image of the "canny" Scot:

The canny Scot tradition has been "fulfilled" in the Spenglerian sense; and the future depends upon the freeing and development of that opposite tendency in our consciousness which runs counter to the conventional conceptions of what is Scottish. In other words, the slogan of a Scottish literary revival must be the Nietzschean "Become what you are". (18)

To overthrow false conceptions of Scottish psychology and to become what

you are is part of the 'moral' of A Drunk Man:

The vandal Scot ! Frae Brankstone's deidly barrow
I struggle yet to free a'e winsome marrow,
To show what Scotland micht ha'e hed instead
O' this preposterous Presbyterian breed.

(Gin Glesca folk are tired o' Hengler,
And still need breid and circuses, there's Spengler,
Or gin ye s'ud need mair than ane to teach ye,
Then learn frae Dostoevski and frae Nietzsche.

And let the lesson be - to be yersel's,
Ye needna fash gin it's to be ocht else.
To be yersel's - and to mak' that worth bein',
Nae harder job to mortals has been gi'en..)

In one of MacDiarmid's first attempts at a long poem in Scots, of which there were two overlapping sections published, "Braid Scots: An Inventory and Appraisalment" and "Gairmscoile", the poet celebrates the qualities of the Scots language "which correspond to "unconscious" elements of distinctively Scottish psychology". This unfinished poem is important because it may be taken, in many ways, as a "Prelude" to A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle. I shall attend specifically to "Gairmscoile" as it appears in Penny Wheep (1926), opening sections of which overlap with "Braid Scots" as it appeared in The Scottish Chapbook (November-December 1923).

The poem opens by imaging the "Skrymmorie monsters" that lurk "Deep i' the herts o' a' men". These monsters, as with the bestiary imagery of A Drunk Man, the Sea-Serpent, White Whale etc., are symbols of the racial unconscious:

And whasae hears them roarin', evermair
Is yin wi' a' that gangs to mak' or mar
The spirit o' the race,..

Although they may strike horror in the human breast,

Yet wha has heard the beasts' wild matin'-call
To ither music syne can gi'e nae ear.
The nameless lo'enotes haud him in a thrall.
Forgot are guid and ill, and joy and fear.

These monsters who take us beyond good and evil represent the submerged Scottish psychology. They are

The beasts in wha's wild cries a' Scotland's destiny thrills.

With his typical vis comica, MacDiarmid presents the monsters as beasts

akin to the Nietzschean New Barbarians whose very appearance threatens the "canny" mentality of the Scot which, as part of Spengler's dying "civilisation", has been fulfilled:

...On the rungunshoch sides o' hills forgotten
Life hears beasts rowtin' that it deemed extinct,
And, sudden, on the hapless cities linked
In canny civilisation's canty dance
Poor herds o' heich-skeich monsters, misbegotten,
...Streets clear afore the scarmoch advance:
Frae every winnock skimmerin' een keek oot
To see what sic camstearie cast-offs are about.

But these "Poor herds o' heich-skeich monsters" do not bring terror to those keeking out their windows. On the contrary,

...Lo! what bricht flames o' beauty are lit at
The unco' een o' lives that Life thocht deid
Till winnock efter winnock kindles wi' a sense
O' gain and glee..

For these monsters who have been taken as "cast-offs" by the "canny" or (in Spengler's sense) "civilised" Scots are keys which can unlock the true psychology of the Scot:

...And there's forgotten shibboleths o' the Scots
Ha'e keys to senses lockit to us yet
- Coorse words that shamle thro' oor minds like stots,
Synne turn on's muckle een wi' doonsin' emerauds lit.

As "Coorse words" ironically implies, these monsters, symbols of the racial unconscious, of the true Scottish psychology, are inherent in the Scots language and will be revitalised through the poetic use of that language. "Cast-offs ?" the poet asks, and in a footnote to the Chapbook version he writes:

See Spengler's "Downfall of the Western World" [sic].
Scots has run underground but will again come to the
surface. It is in a state of suspended animation with
an unexhausted evolutionary momentum. (19)

The poem is not only a statement of faith. It is also an attack on the cosmopolitanism and false internationalism which characterises a decaying Western civilisation in its linguistic as well as its political pre-suppositions:

Hee-Haw! Click-Clack! And Cock-a-doodle-do!
- Wull Gabriel in Esperanto cry
Or a' the warld's undeemis jargons try ?
It's soon', no' sense, that faddoms the herts o' men,

And by my sangs the rouch auld Scots I ken
E'en herts that ha'e nae Scots'll dirf right thro'
As nocht else could - for here's a language rings
Wi' datchie sesames, and names for nameless things.

What MacDiarmid, adopting and adapting Spengler's thesis, applies to Scots, he applies also to Gaelic. In an article of September 1926, he writes:

The Gaeltacht is the ultimate provenance or deriving-ground of the unexhausted evolutionary momentum, one of whose manifestations is, in some of its deepest bearing at all events, the Scottish Renaissance movement. (20)

The two come together in his Renaissance tract, Albyn or Scotland and the Future (1927):

At first blush there may seem little enough connection between such phenomena as the Clyde Rebels, the Scottish Home Rule Movement, the "Irish Invasion" of Scotland, and the campaign to resuscitate Braid Scots and Gaelic. But, adopting the Spenglerian philosophy, the Renaissance movement regards itself as an effort in every aspect of the national life to supplant the elements at present predominant by the other elements they have suppressed, and thus reverse the existing order. Or, in terms of psychology, the effort is to relieve the inhibitions imposed by English and Anglo-Scottish influences and to inhibit in turn those factors of Scottish psychology which rendered it amenable to the post-Union state of affairs. (21)

The use of Spenglerian terms of reference is almost as common with MacDiarmid as his use of psychological diction. In an article for The Radio Times in 1930 he says of Burns' work that it "is part of a stream of tendency which has practically exhausted itself and is now the subject of a widespread reaction".⁽²²⁾ In David Hume: Scotland's Greatest Son (1961), he states:

Neither Scott nor Burns were seminal, their work has no unexhausted evolutionary momentum. (23)

MacDiarmid's criticism of Burns is an important point to which we shall return. In general, however, MacDiarmid - using Spengler's model - argued that Scotland, the real Scotland based on an adequate appreciation of Scottish psychology, was exempt from the doom Spengler anticipates for Western society. In Contemporary Scottish Studies (1926), he asks:

May it not be in Scotland that the next great Culture will arise?" (24)

The idea was one that was to remain with him:

India had that great opportunity centuries ago
And India lost it - and became a vast morass,
Where no water wins free; a monstrous jungle
Of useless movement; a babel
Of stupid voices, drowning the still small voice.
It is our turn now; the call is to the Celt.

("The Glass of Pure Water")

The notion, at first sight, seems simply a MacDiarmid idiosyncrasy. But Spengler did provide the poet with a model: Russia. For Spengler, Russia was a nation of the future with a different destiny from that of Western civilisation. It may be that Spengler's exception of Russia inspired MacDiarmid's ideas about a "Russo-Scottish parallelism". It cannot but have reinforced them. There were, however, a great many other influences upon that particular area of MacDiarmid's political aesthetic with which we shall deal in detail in our final chapter.

So then, Nietzsche and Spengler were two important conditioning influences upon MacDiarmid with specific reference to his concept of Scottish psychology and the role that Scotland might play in world culture. Nietzsche's influence was pervasive in other aspects of MacDiarmid's writings as well, notably concerning the God-building mentality of much of MacDiarmid's poetry. This we shall attend to in detail in our penultimate chapter. But, it is as well to note here that MacDiarmid's evolutionism, with its attendant irrationalism and impossibilism, owes a great deal to Nietzsche, both directly and through other writers influenced by Nietzsche. It owes little or nothing to Darwin's theory of natural selection. Nietzsche:

The influence of "external circumstances" is absurdly overrated by Darwin. The essential factor in the vital process is precisely the tremendous power to shape which uses and exploits the environment. (25)

This essential factor, Nietzsche called the Will to Power:

This world is the Will to Power - and nothing else!
And you yourselves too are this Will to Power - and
nothing else! (26)

The thought must have appealed to MacDiarmid's solipsistic tendency. It is certainly something akin to this Will to Power that the Drunk Man

perceives in the thistle's vitality ("Nerves in stounds o' delight, /
Muscles in pride o' power,") and claims for his own:

Lay haud o' my hert and feel
Fountains ootloupin' the starns
Or see the Universe reel
Set gaen' by my eident harns,
Or test the strength o' my spauld
The wecht o' a' thing to hauld !

The Representative Personality ultimately embodies the attributes of the symbol of his nation, the symbol of the true Scottish psychology.

The Celtic Mentality and the Canny Scot

As poet, critic, and propagandist MacDiarmid sought to liberate the Scottish psyche, as he understood it, part of which intention necessitated, as he put it in Lucky Poet (1943), the exploration of "the mystery of Scotland's self-suppression". (27) In the same book, his autobiography, he also makes it quite clear that his Nationalism stems from an appreciation of his own psychology as being representative:

It is this profound Celtic pattern of my mentality - this Scotist spirit - that leads me at this great crisis in our history to advocate the following way-out; inter alia, the way of Scottish separatism against British Imperialism, English Ascendancy and centralisation in London. (28)

This in itself encapsulates the psychological basis (the declared Celtic mentality) of his Nationalism. One of the earliest examples of this (typical) argument occurs in the first issue of The Scottish Nation (May 8th. 1923). In attacking the "Harry Lauderdisation" of Scotland, MacDiarmid argues that the "Canny Scot" image

..was never more than an English invention designed, through incessant and ubiquitous reiteration, to "suggest" to the Scottish people that they really were of a nature amenable to English wishes and thus to further the inherent tendency of the Union which is the complete assimilation of Scottish nationality to English.

Taken out of context, MacDiarmid's argument may seem a rather

simplistic deduction derived from an implied conspiracy theory. In a recent historical study, however, James D. Young argues that the 'myth' of "Canny Scotland" was deliberately foisted on a potentially rebellious working class by a provincial elite determined to condition that class into a meeker subservience and assimilate it to a "British" norm. Moreover, argues Young,

The continuous internal shift of population into the towns and cities between 1900 and 1914 was paralleled by the intensification of the myth of the Anglo-Scottish elite that the 'canny Scot' only began to acquire civilised characteristics after he came under the influence of the more culturally advanced English in 1688. This image of the 'canny Scot' functioned as a perceptual prison in which even militant socialists could not break out of the illusions about the Scottish labour movement's cultural dependence on the English..

The Scottish socialists' cultural dependency on the metropolitan socialists, together with their uncritical acceptance of the myths of the Anglo-Scottish bourgeois elite, now pushed them to the right of British working-class politics. Moreover, as they failed to develop their earlier critique of Scottish capitalism, ethnic splits were deepened and the myth of the 'canny Scot' impinged on the consciousness of working people to a much greater extent than ever before. (29)

It is, therefore, very significant to note (whether or not one agrees with the politics of Young's analysis) that the 'myth' of "Canny Scotland" was often the target of John MacLean's political flyting. MacDiarmid, who regarded MacLean as nothing short of a hero, was thus (whether he was fully aware of it or not) a major inheritor of MacLean's iconoclasm. MacDiarmid's poetical and propagandist treatment of MacLean is an important matter to which we shall return. But, in an attempt to place MacDiarmid's attacks on the "Canny Scot" in historical perspective, it is worth bearing in mind these literary-political connections. And, despite the perhaps over-optimistic nature of Young's generalisations, there is something to be said for the argument that

..by creating the stimulus for the Scottish literary renaissance, the First World War gave the Scots their first real opportunity to lift themselves out of the eighteenth century rut in which they were still stuck in 1914. For while Clydeside became the synonym for 'revolutionary agitation' during the war, the myth of

the 'canny Scot' was shattered by the spontaneous mass militancy and anti-militarism of the Scottish working class. (30)

The relationship of the "Canny Scot", and of what Young calls "the Anglo-Scottish elite", to England and English culture (part of "the mystery of Scotland's self-suppression") was often grist for MacDiarmid's poetic mill, especially in A Drunk Man. It is often dealt with, as in the following stanzas from A Drunk Man, in terms of symbols: notably those of the thistle and the rose. Here, MacDiarmid is arguing that, due to the obsequiousness of the "Canny Scot" mentality, Scottish culture has betrayed its own "genius" (its own racial psychology) to that of England. The result is that Scotland is left "fallow", with no representative literature except that of the sweet, sentimental and canny image of Scotland propounded by the Kailyarders. The submerged, or suppressed, Scottish psychology, the "roots" of the thistle, could grow and flower, however, if separated from the rose:

I micht ha'e been contentit wi' the Rose
Gin I'd had ony reason to suppose
That what the English dae can e'er mak' guid
For what Scots dinna - and first and foremaist should.

I micht ha'e been contentit - gin the feck
O' my ain folk grovelled wi' less respec',
But their obsequious devotion
Made it for me a criminal emotion.

I micht ha'e been contentit - ere I saw
That there were fields on which it couldna draw,
(While stranger roots ran under't) and a'e threid
O't drew frae Scotland a' that it could need,

And left the maist o' Scotland fallow
(Save for the patch on which the kail-blades wallow),
And saw hoo ither countries' genius drew
Elements like mine that in a rose ne'er grew....

Gin the threid haud'n us to the rose were snapt,
There's no' a'e petal o't that 'ud be clapt.
A' Scotland gi'es gangs but to jags or stalk,
The bloom is English - and 'ud ken nae lack!...

The polarisation of the Anglo-Scot, or "Canny Scot", and the subterranean Celtic mentality is characteristic. The stock-characters satirised in A Drunk Man, Harry Lauder, the Anglo "wild fowl Scots" speakers, the "Shades o' the manse", the provincial "Cruivie" etc., belong to the

former category. The open nature, native loquacity, and the familiarity with the beautiful and the base, the holy and the profane, of the Drunk Man himself, and the irrationalism, impossibilism, and desire for the infinite associated with the thistle, the serpent, the white whale, and all the Ygdrasilic images of evolution belong with the character of the true Scot - are manifest in the real "Scottish psychology".

The Scottish character, as MacDiarmid sees it, is typically extremist and anarchic. In the first issue of The Scottish Nation (May 8th. 1923), quoting from three historians, Buckle, Laing and Brodie, he argues that the Scots were never loyal to any conception of monarchy, Stewart or otherwise, were never "canny"; quoting Buckle as to the Highlanders hating "all government and all order".⁽³¹⁾ It is significant that MacDiarmid's most famous poetic statement embodies this extremism:

I'll ha'e nae hauf-way hoose, but aye be whaur
Extremes meet - it's the only way I ken
To dodge the curst conceit o' bein' richt
That damns the vast majority o' men.

For the Representative Personality naturally assimilates all the attributes of the National Psychology. The pattern repeats itself time and again, in the prose as well as the poetry. In Scottish Eccentrics (1936), for example, David Hume is described as

..characteristic of his people in his experimentalism, his freedom from dogmatic assumptions. They have no use for any a priori; they are ready, it is the first law of their nature, to go from nowhere to anywhere at a moment's notice.. (32)

So, in Lucky Poet (1943), MacDiarmid says of himself:

If there was ever a man who was ready, intellectually or physically, to start from any point to any other at a moment's notice, that man am I. I am emancipated - free - to an extraordinary degree.. (33)

Scottish Eccentrics merits deeper attention here as it may be taken as an attempt, through historical example, to illustrate the "uncanny", anarchic quality of the true Scottish character:

The persistence of the wayward, antinomian Scottish type - versatile, erudite, filled with wanderlust spiritual and physical, indifferent to or incapable of mere worldly prudence - from the earliest times to the present is easy of innumerable illustration. (34)

Pursuing the notion of antinomianism, MacDiarmid declares later in Scottish Eccentrics that "Moral anarchy" has much to do with the Scottish character which, again, is "brilliantly improvisatory" and is marked by "schismatic passions" and an "almost insane individualism". (35) That is 1936. In 1955, in an essay to mark the seventy-fifth birthday of F.G. Scott, the same pattern of Celtic mentality emerges:

As Logan points out in The Scottish Gael the pre-Union Scots were, like the Russians great talkers, and all-night "cracks" were nothing out of the common. The later reputation of the Scots for being dour, taciturn, and limited in conversation to a few Ayes and Umphs is purely a post-Union product, as is the loss of the old gaiety and abandon and the development in lieu thereof of our appalling modern dullness and social gaucherie. (36)

This notion of the 'inarticulate Scot' is one that has exercised a great many minds in recent years. It was for MacDiarmid one of the negative results stemming from the 1707 Union and the concomitant acceleration of anglicisation. MacDiarmid argues that the psychology of the Renaissance movement (the psychology of the Representative Personality) rhymes with the pre-Union nature of the Scot and, thus, the Renaissance (which politically demands complete separation from England) is Scotland's best - if not only - chance of recovering and redeveloping her true identity. So MacDiarmid's psycho-political thesis concentrated to a considerable extent, especially in the 'twenties, on linguistic issues.

Scots and English: Linguistic Psychology

In order to go forward, the Renaissance movement had to recapture something of the pre-Union Scot, stir up the "men o' Crowdieknowe". For MacDiarmid, once he had discovered his own creative abilities with Scots, this necessitated the 'resurrection' of Lowland

The true line is.. a synthetic Scots gathering together and reintegrating all the disjecta membra of the Doric and endeavouring to realise its latent potentialities along lines in harmony at once with distinctive Scots psychology and contemporary cultural functions and requirements.. The only thing we lack in Scotland.. is a sufficiently intense spirit of nationalism. (40)

But, from the artist's point of view, it is not simply that Scots is a more suitable medium to express native psychology. For there is a qualitative difference between the languages, MacDiarmid argues. Unlike English, Scots..

..has a higher percentage of words (most of which have no, or no exact, equivalents in English) of the sharpest psycho-physical significance.. (41)

With his focus still characteristically on the psychology of creativity, MacDiarmid remained convinced of his argument long after he stopped writing in Scots. In Burns Today and Tomorrow (1959) he writes:

Creative work proceeds from below the threshold of consciousness and the reason why Scots is no less important but more important to us today than ever, is that it covers, as English does not, the whole field of our sub-conscious. (42)

In one of his earliest articles, "Braid Scots and the Sense of Smell" (The Scottish Nation May 15th. 1923), MacDiarmid goes out of his way to emphasise that it is these psychological considerations which are important and not academic arguments about the relation of Scots to English:

Words are a product of physical functioning and not mere intellectual devices. Braid Scots may only be a dialect of English. That does not matter. The pathological and psychological consequences of the fact that such a variation exists are relevant; philological considerations are not. The main question is - can we produce physical-spiritual effects by employing Braid Scots which we cannot encompass through standard English? The answer is the affirmative. (43)

Arguments like this are relevant to MacDiarmid's own poetic practice, as when, for instance, he states (in "Gairmscoile") that "It's soon', no' sense, that faddoms the herts o' men" and tells us, "here's a

language rings / Wi' datchie sesamies, and names for nameless things".

Similarly significant is his statement in the opening stanzas of

A Drunk Man:

(To prove my saul is Scots 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..)

In To Circumjack Cencrastus (1930), we are told:

Speakin' o' Scotland in English words
As it were Beethoven chirpt by birds;
Or as if a Board school teacher
Tried to teach Rimbaud and Nietzsche.

But although MacDiarmid's theoretical arguments about using Scots remained consistent throughout his life his own Scots writing began to diminish, a fact he comments on (as if he were arguing with himself) several times in Cencrastus:

Curse on my dooble life and dooble tongue,
- Guid Scots wi' English a' hamstrung..

A' this is juist provisional and'll hae
A tea-change into something rich and Scots
When I wha needs use English a' the day
Win back to the true language o' my thochts..

- A routh o' entertainment dowed, that only needs
Yokin' again to Scots, to loup to life;
But still twixt it and me, a smeekit glass,
Hings this hauf-English, winna let me pass,
And mak's my harns wi' reelin' shadows rife,
Faur ayont which, unkent, lie kinds o' fun
That kent 'ud mak' a' ither humours dun.

Despite the fact that MacDiarmid was turning more towards English for his own creative purposes in the early 'thirties, his psycho-linguistic thesis remained constant. In At the Sign of the Thistle (1934), he writes:

It is insufficiently realised that the very nature of the English language is directly and incurably anti-Scottish. It has enhanced its vocabulary by tremendous borrowings from practically every other language in the world - but not from Gaelic. The genius of the two tongues is utterly incompatible. English has not even borrowed to any extent from Braid Scots, though Braid Scots has hundreds of admirably expressive words for which English has no equivalent. Why has it all along eschewed Scots in this way? It means that it has similarly eschewed those qualities of the Scottish spirit which made the words in question. English ascension necessitates the suppression of these elements. It depends upon the stultification of all that is most

vividly and vitally Scottish. It must be remembered that even to this day, despite the long period of English ascendancy, the teaching of English in our schools requires the subjection of our children to a prolonged psychological outrage. They have been compelled to learn a language that is not natural to them. They have to learn to twist their thoughts to fit an alien mould of speech. All this has a profound effect in discouraging or extirpating their creative powers. This accounts for the relative poverty of Scottish literature to English. (44)

MacDiarmid's belief in the "qualities of the Scottish spirit" which were embodied in Scots suited not only his Nationalist creed but his 'class position' as well. In his introduction to The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry (1940), he argues,

It is an important point that poetry in Scots has still an access, not only to a cultured section but to the working classes, in Scotland, that no English poetry has ever had or, to all appearances, can ever have. (45)

Thus, he declares in Lucky Poet (1943) that:

..my regression to Scots was, in fact, the counter-process to the usual course.. I.. was determined to strengthen and develop my organic relationship to the Commons of Scotland.. to get deeper and deeper into their innermost promptings, their root-motives. (46)

However, retrospective judgments and propaganda apart, MacDiarmid was aware that his own intuitive approach to Scots writing was largely confined to his own personality. In 1926, he writes to J.K. Annand:

Any success I am having in Scots is due to my development of a flair for discovering the inherent and otherwise unsuspected capabilities of Scots terms for readaptation to vital uses - a knack of hitting upon ways of utilising them which is somehow indefinably but very clearly in accordance with their own nature. (47)

No one could disagree that, at his best, this is exactly what MacDiarmid achieves in many of the early lyrics, through most of A Drunk Man and significant parts of Cenchrastus. But the poet became aware of the limits of propagandising on behalf of literary Scots. He writes to Soutar in 1932:

I do feel, I am afraid, that on the whole I have been in regard to Scots a thoroughly bad influence on you and others and that my own practice in regard to the synthetic barriers is so purely individual and inimitable that it justifies in my case alone - so far - what in

other cases simply clutters up the verse with unvivified and useless words. (48)

However wide, on the other hand, his net is spread, MacDiarmid typically bases his case, and practice, on psychological necessity - whether in reference to Scots or his later idea of a 'World Language':

A Joycean amalgam of Scots, Gaelic, and English, plus Gothic, Sanskrit, Old Norse, seems to me a medium through which a great deal could be done to advance this world-wide experimentation and bring language abreast of modern psychological requirements. (49)

It is not only unfair, it is also untrue, to say that MacDiarmid deserted Scots in favour of Standard English. As the above quotation suggests, and as much of the later poetry illustrates, MacDiarmid's experimentation took him far beyond the backyard of any single language. Moreover, his use of English (in many ways as "individual and inimitable" as his use of Scots) in his later poems; although it may seem on the surface yet another contradiction, is in fact quite consistent with his desire (beginning with Scots in particular) to "bring language abreast of modern psychological requirements". In other words, if MacDiarmid 'deserted' a pure Scots because alone it could not achieve this object, the 'failings' of Scots were at least equally apparent in English which, in itself or by itself, he had increasingly less time for. The poet created a synthetic Scots and a synthetic English - and both have their strengths and failures. Furthermore, this need or desire for synthesis rhymes very much with MacDiarmid's concept of a "Scottish psychology" which is (in his book) both internationally minded and linguistically adept. For at bottom (with one eye on Gregory Smith):

..the essence of the genius of our race is, in our opinion, the reconciliation it effects between the base and the beautiful, recognising that they are complementary and indispensable to each other. (50)

This ability to reconcile and synthesise, to "aye be whaur / Extremes meet", is the hallmark of the Scottish genius, the hallmark of the

Renaissance psychology, the hallmark of the Representative Personality; and the synthetic treatment of language (be that language Scots or English) is underpinned not by contradiction but by a single unifying principle: the function of art as the extension of human consciousness.

Before, however, undertaking an examination of MacDiarmid's notion of the function of art, it is necessary to outline something of his application of the theory of National Psychology with regard to other artists. For, with MacDiarmid, the artist could only successfully extend human consciousness if, in the first place, he or she were true to his or her own psychology. In other words, in order to extend the consciousness of others, or of humanity in general, the artist must (paradoxically) concentrate primarily - if not exclusively - on self. MacDiarmid:

Only those who are further ahead than themselves are of consequence to those who are making artistic progress. Any relationship with others is a waste of time - a betrayal of art..

To halt or turn back in order to help others is to abandon artistic progress and exchange education for art. There is no altruism in art. It is every man for himself. In so far as he advances, the progress of others may be facilitated, but in so far as he is conscious of affording any such facilitation his concentration on purely artistic objectives is diminished. (51)

That is, this "facilitation" (the extension of consciousness) can only be achieved outwith the self in an indirect way and, thus, success will depend upon how representative at the outset any artist's work is. If the given artist (or his work) is truly representative, then, and only then, will he by concentrating on the extension of his own consciousness extend the consciousness of his audience. As MacDiarmid put it in Lucky Poet:

The true poet never merely articulates a preconception of his tribe, but starts rather from an inner fact of his individual consciousness. (52)

We, therefore, cannot properly examine what MacDiarmid means by "the extension of consciousness" until we fully understand how he applies the concept of a representative psychology in terms of nation and class. And it should be noted that these terms are inclusive. It is nation and

class. It is never a question of nation or class. MacDiarmid was not a Trotskyist.

Art and Psychology

The use MacDiarmid made of his belief in a Scottish psychology with regard to Scots and to his own programme and propaganda applies, mutatis mutandis, to his critical writings on music, literature, theatre and the visual arts. A brief résumé of his application of this concept in these fields will serve to underline how central to his aesthetic is that concept. The sad state of affairs concerning the type and level of art criticism in Scotland and the way to remedy it is made clear in The Scottish Nation (22/5/1923):

All the natural perspectives of Scottish literature are arbitrarily manipulated in the light of entirely false interpretations of Scottish character. (53)

In other words, a profound misunderstanding as to the nature of Scottish psychology is responsible for the intolerable lack of standards in Scottish literary and other cultural criticism. The whole thing is seen to have been falsely based.

We shall begin by examining MacDiarmid's own criticism of Burns, but not only because MacDiarmid first gained a certain notoriety from his guerrilla campaign against the cult of Burns in the early 'twenties. What is more important is that Burns had been taken as the representative of Scottish letters par excellence, and implicit in MacDiarmid's criticism of Burns is the question: how far is he really a Representative Personality ?

In The Scottish Nation (15/5/23) MacDiarmid, in attacking the Burnsite mentality for being "politically and socially opposed to all that Burns stood for", argues that Burns' mimicking of the 'genteel' thwarted his genius:

He deliberately suppressed his most powerful impulses. These found partial outlet in his satires and in a

profusion of ribald epigrams and doggerel of various kinds.. He was afraid to let himself go - he had not sufficient confidence in himself. Had he been less imitative, had he given full vent to his natural instincts, his product would never have become acceptable to convention-ridden minds. (54)

Burns, in other words, failed to embody the Nietzschean dictum, "Become what you are ! " He was not true to his own nature. He betrayed his racial psychology. In an article on "The Burns Cult" in 1926, MacDiarmid relates this failing to specifics:

His attitude to women is wholly unreal; his songs to any one of them might as easily have been addressed to any other - or to some abstraction - for all of precise psychology that transpires from them. Like most of his "descriptions of nature" they are hopelessly generalised. And, worst of all, they are not true to himself. - they are a polite fiction. The truer Burns, in his relation to women, is to be seen in The Merry Muses. The rest was playing to the gallery. This accounts for the deadly sameness in all of them; it was mere convention. (55)

Because of his failure to adhere to the inner facts of his own consciousness the poetry becomes lost in abstraction. This "tragedy of Burns" is, however, at least partly due to the fact that

..he was 'a great poet who lived in an age and under circumstances hopelessly uncongenial to the exercise of his art and that, as a consequence, he was prevented from penetrating to an intellectual plane in keeping with his lyrical genius. (56)

That is, social and economic circumstances conspired to prevent Burns from fully extending his own - and, therefore, his contemporaries' and followers' - level of consciousness. The lesson to be learned, MacDiarmid tells us in another article, is that

Practically nothing out of Burns or from the post-Burns period is susceptible of being "worked up" into art-form: for the simple reason that it has not sprung from the well-springs of the Scottish consciousness. (57)

Burns, therefore, cannot be regarded as the Bard of his people. He failed to develop himself into a Representative Personality. As MacDiarmid puts it in an essay of 1959:

Burns was anti-intellectual and apt also to jeer at foreign things and express a sort of xenophobia. In both of these connections he was going counter to two of the strongest drives in our whole national

history - our internationalism and our intellectualism; the two characteristics also in which we are most strongly differentiated from our southern neighbours. (58)

Moreover, what little representative features Burns' work is possessed of belong irrevocably to the past:

Burns wrote of the old rural Scotland which has almost wholly disappeared. The psychology of the people has changed accordingly and the strong rustic humours which fill Burns' songs and poems are nearly unintelligible to the bulk of the population. (59)

In essence, this is not so much a criticism of Burns but of those who, influenced by Burns, remain content merely to mimic the master in anachronistic verse that has little relevance to contemporary psychology. In a 1928 article for the Glasgow Evening Times, MacDiarmid puts it thus:

A great man does not exist to be followed slavishly, and may be more honoured by divergence than by obedience.. (60)

- echoing what he wrote in the Chapbook (anonymously) six years earlier:

..those who regard Burns as the unsurpassable genius of our race implicitly accuse Scotland of national decline. (61)

In the Evening Times, he goes on to accuse the Burnsian mentality of threatening to short-circuit the extension of consciousness by suspending "our intellectual and spiritual evolution.. in a limbo of fatuous amiability". Modern consciousness has outstripped Burns, and the "lip-service to brotherhood" evoked in his name may itself be anachronistic according to MacDiarmid's apocalyptic vision of the period:

..if, at long last, Europe is beginning to repudiate democracy, romantic love, and other basic elements in Burns' creed, that suggests that Burns' work will speedily become more and more old-fashioned and intolerable to modern consciousness. That is as it should be. (62)

MacDiarmid repeats the argument two years later in The Radio Times:

It is not good for any country to be so long and completely dominated by a single writer as Scotland has been dominated by Burns; but the concern of the Burns Movement is to keep Scotland 'thirled' to certain values, entirely unrelated to its greatest or most distinctive periods, or those of any other culture. These values are bound up with

obsolete conditions of rural life, 'romantic love', and the emergence of that spirit of democracy which is today being so comprehensively challenged and overthrown. (63)

What it seems MacDiarmid is referring to here are the twin forces of Bolshevism and Fascism which are taken to be at least symptomatic of the Nietzschean-Spenglerian apocalypse which is itself symptomatic of the mutation of modern consciousness. In the 1928 article he speaks of civilisation being "threatened by its hordes of submen" and, in the 1930 article, he talks of Burns' work as belonging with Spengler's exhausted Western civilisation: "part of a stream of tendency which has practically exhausted itself and is now the subject of a widespread reaction". Thus, at the end of the day, the Burns cult is taken as part of the outmoded vision which underlies the ideology of a now ailing bourgeois democracy. It is not a becoming tendency.

In a counter-argument to Edwin Muir's Scott and Scotland (in Lucky Poet) MacDiarmid turns the tables on one 'traitor' by citing another. Muir, he says,

..assumes that because Burns felt he could not express thought in Scots, which was for him a language for sentiment but not for thought, the Scots language is itself limited in that way. The contrary is the case.. Burns, in fact, betrayed the Scots movement. (64)

So then, as far as MacDiarmid's Renaissance psychology is concerned, Burns is once and for all non récupérable. And, partly because he was not true to his own psychology and partly because that psychology is now outdated anyway, Burns' influence is counter-productive:

Historically, Burns is to be discerned as a safety-valve - a means of "working off" Scottish sentiment amenably to the tendency to progressive Anglicisation which had set in so strongly by his day. (65)

* * *
The Burns Cult has been, and is being, used almost wholly as a psychological "compensation" for a sense of disloyalty to Scotland's - and Scottish literature's - real interests. (66)

Much of what MacDiarmid writes of Burns and of the Burns Cult rings true, although we may not agree with every detail. But what is equally interesting is that we learn as much about MacDiarmid's own political

aesthetic as we do about the nature and significance of Burns' work. And the tenets of MacDiarmid's criticism are as equally apparent in "Your Immortal Memory, Burns !" (Penny Wheep 1926) and the opening section of A Drunk Man as they are in these various articles themselves.

What underlies both is the notion of a Scottish psychology whose rejuvenation (through the Renaissance Movement) is necessary to what the poet calls

..the "becoming" tendencies of Scottish consciousness as a purposive factor in world-culture. (67)

It is with this in mind that MacDiarmid writes of other artists and, as with Burns, his analysis typically centres on two questions:

- (1) How far, as regards their nationality, do they reflect or embody their National Psychology ?
- (2) What do they contribute to the extension of human consciousness ?

Let us begin here with MacDiarmid's "Contemporary Scottish Studies" series as it represents a sustained effort over two years (June 1925 to February 1927) to criticise other Scottish artists from the Renaissance point of view. A comprehensive selection of these articles from The Scottish Educational Journal appeared in book-form in 1926, but the full collection (along with related correspondence) did not appear until 1976.

In an early article, J.M. Barrie is adversely criticised for being antithetical to the whole conception of the liberation of consciousness:

The "bipsychic duality" Barrie has invented for himself, christening one-half Maconochie, only serves to throw into clearer relief the incompatible elements so curiously associated in his life - but however psychologically amusing it may be such a juxtaposition establishes an internal dichotomy which is the antithesis of genius. (68)

In other words, far from being a creative synthesis, the meeting of extremes is here a neurotic opposition which is entirely out of keeping with MacDiarmid's 'archetype' of the Scottish character. Hence, no extension of consciousness is possible. For, although Barrie may have "deftly caught some of the qualities of mythic composition.. his work

lacks the profound unsearchable power of the true myth". In short: "His work is destitute of spiritual purpose" and has "severed any effective connection" it may have had with Scottish literature and is thus "entirely non-Scottish in its evolution and present condition". (69)

In the following article, Neil Munro is characterised as producing escapist literature which is "a sort of antithesis of self-expression". (70) In both these analyses MacDiarmid is concerned with the psychology of creativity and both writers are shown to fall short of Renaissance requirements. What the Scottish novel needs, another article tells us, is to be written in accordance with the National Psychology:

The problem therefore for a would-be novelist of the Scottish Renaissance is to devise a form of the novel that is specifically Scottish - as different in form and method from the English or the French novel as Scots psychology is from English or French - or to devise a specifically Scottish form that will successfully anticipate, so far as Scotland is concerned, the issue of the present widespread search for a substitute for the novel form. The latter, I would submit, is the likelier ambition. (71)

The Scottish novel has, by and large, failed to extend the level of consciousness. This disease, the Scots aboulia, MacDiarmid sees as widespread. The poet, William Jeffrey, suffers from a similar dissociation of sensibility:

His symbols are not moving to the construction of a world of thought or feeling of their own: they are falling like debris of some "monde interieure" which has disintegrated before it could be described in its entirety. (72)

As MacDiarmid put it in Scottish Eccentrics (1936):

This is typical of what has always happened to all Scots in matters of art. At the very point where the impulse should undergo that objectification necessary to art, it is deflected into the banal.. they flare up to great heights and then are suddenly thwarted and beaten down by contrary forces generally of a moral (which, of course, includes immoral) sort. (73)

The analysis is central to MacDiarmid's creative inspiration. Indeed, the whole movement of A Drunk Man may be effectively measured by it. Time and again the Drunk Man exhibits or alludes to the infinite

potential Scotland possesses only to be thwarted at the crucial moment by negative forces. Moreover, we are told:

It is morality, the knowledge o' Guid and Ill,
Fear, shame, pity, like a will and wilyart growth,
That kills a' else wi'in its reach and craves
Nae less at last than a' the warld to gi'e it scouth.

This is the enemy of the antinomian Scottish type, the enemy of self-expression and creativity, the negative that obstructs the extension of consciousness.

What applies to poetry and the novel applies equally to Scottish drama, as the following quotations from the same series of articles amply testify:

The current type of Scots drama, and stage conceptions of Scottish character, like the Scotch comedian in the musichalls, can only be supplanted by an effective use of the vis comica latent in Scottish psychology. (74)

* * *

It is my belief that the time is only now coming when the Scots psychology can express itself in distinctive and dynamic drama - that it contains forces which can only emerge when the factors which have built up European civilisation as it presently exists exhaust themselves and require to be replaced by the very different forces which they have so long inhibited. In other words, a Spenglerian hypothesis seems to me to fit the facts.. (75)

On the positive side, the writers that MacDiarmid greets with admiration are those who have been true to their own psychology and have persevered in extending consciousness. In the second of a three-part article in The New Age on Gertrude Stein, MacDiarmid, who values her work and compares her to Joyce, throws the burden of his admiration on her ability to evoke cerebral effects:

The need to write or to speak, screws people up a bit beyond the level of their ordinary cerebration; both are artificial processes in which they are not "just themselves". Miss Stein is mainly occupied in showing average cerebration as it just is. (76)

In a New English Weekly essay in 1933, MacDiarmid praises "AE" (George Russell) for his psychological penetration:

A.E.'s book, "Song and Its Fountains".. in which he essays to "track song back to its secret fountain in

the psyche", shows a perfect concordance with the findings of science, and I have reason to believe anticipates in many valuable details stages that have not yet been reached in that analysis of the so-called "unconscious self".. (77)

MacDiarmid's most generous praise is, however, reserved for Rainer Maria Rilke whose dictum, "The poet must know everything", he often quoted. In a 1934 article in New Britain, he says:

Rilke is in many superlatively important directions by far "the furthest point yet" of human consciousness and expressive power - a lone scout far away in No Man's Land, whither willy-nilly mankind must follow him, or abandon the extension of human consciousness. (78)

On the other hand, however much MacDiarmid's criticism may be taken as psychologically based, and however much the aim and function of poetry may be a psychological one with him, it should be noted that he had no time for the reductive psycho-analysing of writers or their work. In a satirical New Age article in 1924, MacDiarmid notes that "psychological and pathological criticism must go hand in hand" and proceeds by way of irony to state that:

Literature is largely a resultant of the state of the stomach. The psyche is indeed to a great extent the effect of which the physical condition of its possessor is the cause. Before one can properly appreciate a work of genius one will ultimately have to know exactly what the physical condition of the author at the moment of composition was - whether he sat with his legs crossed (thus compressing his abdomen in a fashion inevitably responsible for otherwise unaccountable intricacies of style) or uncrossed (thus securing that invigorating effect of amplitude..). (79)

In the same journal, three years later, he quite straightforwardly rejects the psycho-analytical approach:

From the psycho-analytical standpoint the absence of any noteworthy complex should be as interesting a matter as the presence of any; and from the purely literary standpoint the presence or absence of either is irrelevant. The literary critic has no business to come to any work parti pris in favour of sanity.

And he uses the Russian Symbolist, Feodor Sologub, to demonstrate what he means:

Sologub's Manichean idealism is another matter, readily separable from the merely pathological. The point of all this mixture of nihilistic conceptions, sensual perversities,

and so forth, is that they issued in a wonderful neo-classicism. (80)

In other words, unlike the "bipsychic duality" of J.M. Barrie which seems more neurotic than creative, Sologub has managed to produce a creative synthesis from the extremes of his own psychology - and that is what matters.

For a writer famed for his self-contradiction and inconsistency MacDiarmid in fact reveals a remarkable consistency with regard to his belief in the aims and nature of art and the psychological basis of his Nationalism and Communism. Examples may be multiplied of the above analyses with regard to music and the visual arts. But rather than open a catalogue, let us conclude this section by quoting from a 1923 article in The Scottish Nation on the composer F.G. Scott. Under the pseudonym of "Isobel Guthrie" the poet writes of his friend:

Like M'Diarmid he is avowedly out to secure a series of distinctive effects, psychologically Scottish, but related equally to the dark abyss and backward of Scottish life and to the quite-as-dark abyss and forward of Scottish destiny. Post-Union Anglo-Scottish sentiment he regards as an artistically-profitless indirection. Both he and M'Diarmid are seeking to demonstrate that what may be called "original" or "primitive" Scottish psychology is not incompatible with the most advanced twentieth century setting. The poetry of the one and the music of the other applies the "dernier cri" in technique and ideation to motifs drawn from hitherto unexplored recesses of our deep-seated inextinguishable racial difference. They are underscoring the fundamental bias of our national culture. Their conceptions of what really constitutes a definite Scottish idiom in Scotland mark the first application to their respective arts of the discoveries of Psycho-Analysis in relation to nationalism. (81)

MacDiarmid's application of the concepts of National Psychology and the extension of consciousness remains consistent throughout not only his literary criticism but throughout his political criticism as well. These concepts are fundamental to his entire aesthetic. In his Renaissance tract, Albyn or Scotland and the Future (1927), the Scottish and English labour movements are differentiated in terms of psychology:

An analysis of the difference in psychology and "direction" between the English and the Scottish Labour and Socialist movements shows.. The English

movement is constitutional and monarchical; the
Scottish revolutionary and republican. (82)

It is by consistently applying the same criteria to political analysis that he applies to literary criticism that MacDiarmid, in his own terms, eschews the theoretical notion of innate antagonism between Nationalism and Socialism. It is here that the example and influence of John MacLean is of paramount importance. With regard to National Psychology and the extension of consciousness, the centrality of MacLean to MacDiarmid's political aesthetic is second only to that of Lenin; and it is on these two concepts that his aesthetic is primarily based.

John MacLean as Representative Personality

Considering the mis-representation of MacLean by the Communist Party of Great Britain through the 'official' biography by Tom Bell (1944) and Willie Gallacher's Revolt on the Clyde (1936), and their deliberate attempts to suggest that MacLean was mentally unstable when he began, in the early twenties, wholeheartedly to pursue the (anti-Comintern) policy of a Scottish Workers' Republic, it is to MacDiarmid's credit that (even when he was a member of the CPGB) he did not try to fudge the National Question. Thus a poet overcomes the rigidity of a party line. But then, MacDiarmid, unlike either Bell or Gallacher, was a committed Nationalist in any case. Moreover, despite attempted character assassination, MacDiarmid had one reliable source of fact and inspiration: Guy Aldred. In The Company I've Kept (1966), MacDiarmid writes:

As Guy Aldred said, it was the policy of the authorities during the First World War to denounce Ramsay MacDonald (destined for the highest political honours) as a dangerous man in order to hide the fact that John MacLean was really the dangerous man. (83)

Aldred ran a small anarchist press, The Bakunin Press, in Glasgow which MacDiarmid valued for "the maintenance of certain kinds of propaganda". (84)

MacDiarmid had definitely met Aldred by at least February 1928.

Aldred produced two pamphlets on MacLean, John MacLean Martyr of the Class Struggle: The Man and his Work (1932) and John MacLean (1940).

It is in the latter pamphlet that Aldred makes the case which MacDiarmid went on to popularise. Was MacDonald an anti-militarist hero? Aldred:

We invite any person who shared this opinion of Ramsay MacDonald to consider what became of the cheap war hooligans, and contrast it against the gilded glory and tawdry fame of MacDonald. They were the cheap economic cannon-fodder, the "unknown warriors", necessary not to the impeding, but to the advancement, of MacDonald. And whilst they advanced MacDonald, John MacLean was being martyred unto death. He was reality challenging.

MacDonald and his friends counted on that advancement. Whilst soldiers bled on the one side, and resisting Socialists were tortured on the other, the politicians, anxious to perpetuate exploitations calculated their mock-warfare to produce the rise of MacDonald, in order to save the system. The denunciation of MacDonald was political play-acting to keep the proletarian children quiet.

Aldred goes on to say of MacLean and MacDonald:

Fundamentally, he was Socialist and not parliamentarian. Fundamentally, MacDonald was parliamentarian and not Socialist. Hence MacDonald's selection.. Neil Jamieson, who led the raid on the MacDonald-Shinwell meeting at the Charing Cross Halls, declared that MacDonald was "a dangerous man and the leader of dangerous people".. What MacDonald actually did was to nullify the power of the war opposition.. it was a ruling-class myth and imposition, to pretend that MacDonald was "a dangerous man". It obscured the fact that John MacLean was the dangerous man. The pretence was the safety-valve against revolutionary explosion. (85)

In The Company I've Kept, MacDiarmid goes on to say: "MacLean is still incomparably dangerous". (86) Aldred's pamphlet is crucial to MacDiarmid's

appreciation and creative exploitation of John MacLean. To begin with, the question of betrayal or 'mis-representation' is used by MacDiarmid to demonstrate how the forces of cultural imperialism can obscure a genuine revolutionary poet. In his introduction to John Singer's

The Fury of Living (which under pseudonym MacDiarmid describes as the "best exposition of his ideas on Communist poetry" (87)) MacDiarmid writes:

Just as, during the last war, the authorities represented Mr. Ramsay MacDonald (destined for the highest political honours) as a dangerous man in order to direct attention from the fact that Mr. John MacLean was really the dangerous man.. so in recent developments of British poetry there has been a great deal of fuss about the leftward tendency of many writers, and the near communism of Auden and others, and the alleged intellectualism and "difficulty" of many of the younger poets associated with these developments. Mr. Singer, for me, is rather more truly "apocalyptic" than many of the younger (and some not so young) practitioners of the art of literary prospecting.

He then goes on to develop the poetical-political comparison:

The parallel here is close between Mr. Singer and these over-publicised and finally insignificant adolescents on the one hand, and Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, Premier, and Mr. John MacLean, prisoner in Barlinnie Jail, on the other; these two about whom Lenin himself discriminated so sharply! Mr. Singer is the poet who above all others in this country really presents those revolutionary developments (dynamic integrity) which have been for reactionary reasons falsely attributed to Auden and his associates. (88)

The "dynamic integrity" of a MacLean is comparable to that of the genuine (revolutionary) poet. Both are genuine in their efforts to extend consciousness while Auden and MacDonald are ultimately reactionary because they represent a false consciousness.

Such poetical-political comparisons are common with MacDiarmid and they are indicative of how profound is the synthesis of poetry and politics in his aesthetic. Lenin, for example, is often compared to or referred to as the consummate poet. In "First Hymn" he is "Descendant o' the unkent Bards". In "The Seamless Garment" the precision of his political vision is seen to resemble the fine poetic craftsmanship of Rilke. In "Second Hymn" poets, we are told, must write:

Nae simple rhymes for silly folk
But the haill art, as Lenin gied
Nae Marx-withoot-tears to workin' men
But the fu' course instead.

And in "Third Hymn" Lenin is the Representative Personality par excellence, "the live heart of all humanity!" So it is the poet's task to reincarnate

that political vision:

Be with me, Lenin, reincarnate in me here,
Fathom and solve as you did Russia erst
This lesser maze, you greatest proletarian seer !

Not only did Aldred's writing deepen MacDiarmid's awareness of the significance and integrity of MacLean, and not only did he give the poet a subject well-suited to his temperament and political outlook, but the first pamphlet, John MacLean Martyr of the Class Struggle (1932), was seminal to MacDiarmid's first poem in honour of MacLean: "John MacLean 1879-1923", one of the poems deleted from Stony Limits (1934) undoubtedly because of its outspoken attack on "the base pretence / Of Justice".

The poem is set in Glasgow where MacLean is in prison. MacLean did spend a year in Barlinnie from autumn 1921 to September 1922, as well as a short spell on remand in Duke Street Prison. But MacLean, in popular consciousness, is more often identified with Peterhead Prison where, along with Perth Prison, he spent his longer periods of incarceration, as in John S. Clarke's broadsheet ballad of 1918, "The Man in Peterhead". That MacDiarmid sets his poem in Glasgow is highly indicative of his reading of Aldred's 1932 pamphlet:

On May Day, 1918, MacLean was confined in Duke Street
Prison, Glasgow, pending his trial. His sojourn there
lends dignity to the dreary walls of that drab Bastille. (89)

Images of dreariness and imprisoning walls recur throughout Aldred's description as they do in MacDiarmid's poem:

All the buildings in Glasgow are grey
With cruelty and meanness of spirit,
But once in a while one greyer than the rest
A song shall merit
Since a miracle of true courage is seen
For a moment its walls between..

Let the light of truth in on the base pretence
Of Justice that sentenced him behind these grey walls.

As in Aldred's account the prisoner lends dignity to the "drab bastille", so in the poem the prisoner's presence merits a song for the building.

Aldred proceeds to say that he himself

..never passes that dreary prison without recalling how
thought and integrity were encastled there once upon a
time and dull hireling officialdom stood on guard and

restless, thoughtless mediocrity paraded its ways of
interest without. (90)

The phrase "thoughtless mediocrity" must have struck a chord with the elitist in MacDiarmid. But rather than join the lament for the victory of "dull hireling officialdom", the poet engages the enemy and brings the fall of the "drab bastille" into the present:

Stand close, stand close, and block out the light
As long as you can, you ministers and lawyers,
Hulking brutes of police, fat bourgeoisie..

Like a lightning-bolt at last the workers' wrath falls
On all such castles of cowards whether they be
Uniformed in ermine, or blue, or khaki.

Aldred ends his emotive description thus:

Within the walls of Duke Street John MacLean spent
his May Day, 1918, a living spirit entombed and in
travail, witnessing for and to the great cause that
the day symbolised. (91)

The "living spirit" becomes in the poem the "unbreakable spirit", and witness is the prisoner who "takes the light with him as he goes below", and Aldred's martyr-for-the-cause is compared to Christ. Moreover, the conspiracy against MacLean which the poem attacks on many fronts is equally apparent in Aldred's pamphlet where time and again he alludes to false witnesses and the legal shortcomings in MacLean's various trials.

In this poem and in all his writings on MacLean, what MacDiarmid is doing is 'mythologising' him, laying claim to him as a political forerunner of the literary Renaissance. In this sense, the politics are secondary, part of the poet's "organised approach to the interdependencies of life". MacDiarmid makes this quite clear in an issue of The Scots Socialist in 1941 and repeats it in The Company I've

Kept:

Whence, finally, came MacLean's great power - what was the secret of his unparalleled influence? Let me put it in more specific terms than the mere statement that it was due to the depth of his Marxian analysis of Scottish conditions. On what material did that analysis work? MacLean in himself united the diverse elements of Scottish life in a unique way - he was of Highland stock, his work lay in the great industrial belt of the

Lowlands, and he married a Border woman. The unification of Scotland - Highland and Lowland, rural and urban - was complete in himself. It was from this that he derived his deep insight and great power. (92)

In The Rousing of the Scottish Working Class, James D. Young interprets this as meaning that MacDiarmid "attributed John MacLean's 'great power' to the unconscious depths of his racial origins". (93) MacDiarmid does not in fact say this. He mentions MacLean's "Highland stock". But then, so does Young:

..ever-conscious of the experience of men and women like his grandparents who had been evicted from the Highlands in the mid-Victorian period by an encroaching capitalist economy, John MacLean thought the Highlanders' plight was central to the struggle for a socialist Scotland. (94)

So also, Nan Milton (John MacLean's daughter) argues in her biography that along with Clydeside "massing together the most advanced sections of the proletariat - the engineers, the dockers, the shipyard workers, and the miners", another reason for its being red

..was its racial composition. A large percentage of the working class was Highland or Irish of the first or second generation, driven to the Clyde by the Clearances and the Famines of the nineteenth century. This was significant because, as Trotsky pointed out in 1925:

..the most radical elements of the contemporary British Labour Movement are mostly of Scotch or Irish race.. (95)

With this in mind, it is interesting to note that one of MacLean's pseudonyms, that under which he wrote his "Scottish Notes" for Justice from 1911 on, was "Gael". He was thus ever conscious of the significance of recent Highland history. Moreover, MacLean's marriage to a Borderer and his work in the industrialised Lowlands have nothing whatever to do with the racial unconscious. What in fact MacDiarmid is arguing is that in MacLean one can detect an almost complete experience of different areas of Scottish life. In other words, he is presenting MacLean as a personification of the total experience of Scotland - in short, a Representative Personality. Thus in "John MacLean 1879-1923" MacLean,

who is compared to Christ, is described as "the true tower" of Scotland, and in "Krassivy, Krassivy" (Lucky Poet 1943) he is "next to Burns" the greatest name Scotland has produced and is as fiery and romantic a figure as Lenin. Moreover, unlike Burns he is

Both beautiful and red..

A description no other Scot has ever deserved.

MacDiarmid's analysis and presentation of MacLean could hardly be described as a classical Marxist one. But as regards his own political aesthetic it is more than fitting. For the rationale of the poet's own writing rests to a considerable extent, as we have seen, upon his own claim to personify Scotland, his own Romantic Egoism.

In order to claim MacLean as integral to the Renaissance, and in order to appropriate and exploit this figurehead, MacDiarmid naturally and quite consistently assimilates MacLean according to the nature of his own political aesthetic. It is not surprising, then, to find MacDiarmid not only regularly quoting Aldred as to MacLean being the "dangerous man", but also (under the pen-name "Arthur Leslie") saying of himself that for years he has

..had to endure the hardship and ignominy of being unemployed for.. he is a "dangerous man" and there is no job for him in Scotland today. (96)

The identification is complete. MacLean fits the pattern of the Celtic Mentality in his fearlessness and profound sense of internationalism. MacDiarmid took no other Scot - not Dunbar, Burns, Cunninghame Grahame or Patrick Geddes - to heart in the manner he did MacLean. The nearest parallel is Lenin. In adumbrating his ideas through his various writings, poetic and otherwise, of a National Psychology and the extension of consciousness, and so working towards a thesis of the historical role of the Scottish people, it was above all to Russia that MacDiarmid looked for a model. It is this which forms the subject of our final chapters.

The idea of a Representative Personality might be thought of as purely a MacDiarmid idiosyncrasy. But, in answer to that,

it could be argued that MacDiarmid was following an already established pattern - in order to challenge it. Harry Lauder, for example, did present himself as typical of Scottish character and culture, and in this respect he was as much the victim as the exploiter of anti-cultural forces. For Lauder's popularity was at least due in part to an image tailored to fit the comic-sentimental picture of Scotland apparent in the many Kailyard novels of the period. Thus, throughout the 'twenties MacDiarmid derided Lauder for typifying the 'Tartan Fool', the Canny Scot playing to the gallery and prostituting his own culture and racial psychology. But in all of this, one might ask, was he not beneath contempt ? Why should someone of the poet's calibre expend precious energy in attacking the man ?

The answer lies in the social and political significance of what Lauder was doing. Although he may have been dismissable from the heights of Parnassus, Lauder's influence on the masses could not be ignored, especially as MacDiarmid was unwilling to play the role of the detached intellectual. So, on these grounds he hounded Lauder. But this is not all. For Aldred's first pamphlet (1932) provided MacDiarmid with more (and perhaps even more serious) cause for lambasting the "Scoatch Comic" as he often referred to him. Aldred:

In April, 1918, when MacLean was arrested, the Postmaster-General was asking branch postmasters, on behalf of the Government that was persecuting MacLean, to exhibit "as prominently as possible" a pictorial representation of Harry Lauder's great atrocity story, with the following letter press explanation:-

"The Germans had captured six men of the Black Watch.

"They stripped them naked, and made them stand at attention through the cold night, and at dawn said, 'You swine ! Get back to your trenches'.

" Then as the helpless, frozen and naked men stumbled over No Man's Land, they were mown down with machine guns."

This effort was headed "Harry Lauder's Story". (97)

That Lauder, on top of all his other sins, allowed his name to be used for such crude and cruel propaganda goaded MacDiarmid further. In 1933,

he wrote "Sir Harry Lauder", from which the following lines are taken:

You've played England's game and held Scotland up
To ridicule wherever you've gone,
Yet it was a different ladder behind the scenes
You crawled to knighthood on....

The workers have not too much fun in their lives
And gladly they paid you well.
You took their cash; and double-crossed them then
And sold them into Hell.

Who told of the Black Watch men kept standing
Naked all night at the salute
By their German captors; then forced to run back
Over No-Man's-Land for the brutes to shoot ?

You did, you liar ! The Order of Knighthood
Is mostly made up of knaves and fools,
But you are the lowest it's come to yet -
The basest of murder's tools.

Moreover, this cannot be unconnected to the words of the MacLean poem:
"Royal honours for murderers and fools !" That this attack on the man
who more than anyone else embodied the notion of the Canny Scot should
occur in connection with John MacLean is more than fitting. For, as we
have already noted, Canny Scotland was often the butt of MacLean's
vituperative tongue.

MacDiarmid certainly knew something of MacLean and of
his significance before the 'thirties. The earliest reference occurs in
a letter to his ex-teacher, George Ogilvie, in August 1916, where
MacDiarmid claims to have met "poor Maxton and MacLean" in pre-war
Glydebank, the epithet "poor" implying that MacDiarmid was aware of the
struggle taking place on Clydeside and the trouble that the protagonists
were in. There is, however, no verification of any meeting between
MacDiarmid and MacLean before the First World War. In answer to a specific
question, MacDiarmid, in later life, said that he had never met MacLean. (98)
Moreover, we recall that the young letter-writer of this period is given
to claiming kenspeckle friends (Keir Hardie being another); although it
is possible that MacDiarmid attended one of MacLean's meetings perhaps in
his capacity as a journalist. However, MacDiarmid's reference to MacLean
occurs in reference to his having rejoined the I.L.P. , a party with

which MacLean had no truck. Nevertheless, even when serving abroad, the poet was aware of political developments back home. In a letter of March 1919, he writes to Ogilvie:

Exciting rumours of industrial happenings are trickling through - I wonder what's what really, and, if there is to be anything really big doing, cannot imagine how I will support existence away here out of it all - at all, at all.

The "industrial happenings" must be a reference to the famous Red Clyde of the period when agitation for a six-hour day, a five-day week, £1 per day, agitation in sympathy with the Miners' Reform Committee and against the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA), reached a climax on the thirty-first of January 1919 with the "Battle of George Square" (Glasgow's "Bloody Friday") under the leadership of such as Gallacher, Kirkwood and Shinwell (MacLean being in England at that specific point), and which brought Glasgow into a state of siege.

What, then, did the "John MacLean line" mean to MacDiarmid? Primarily, it meant the substitution of Workers' Republicanism for bourgeois Nationalism. In The Company I've Kept, MacDiarmid (rightly) accuses Gallacher of distorting history by arguing that MacLean was mentally unstable when he opted for Republicanism and refused to join the CPGB whose formation had been led by Gallacher at Lenin's instigation. MacLean, as is well known, had argued that Lenin was not in full possession of the facts as regards Scottish conditions and although he declared that he wished to make Glasgow a Petrograd, he was equally adamant that Moscow would not dictate to Glasgow. In chiding Gallacher for his deviation, MacDiarmid notes:

Maclean's line was in keeping with Lenin's admonition that a revolution, however extreme, in an outlying colony.. is as nothing in its importance for the working-class movement compared with a relatively mild revolution at the heart of an Empire. (99)

As far as MacDiarmid was concerned, the "MacLean line" not only reconciled the theoretical opposition between Nationalism and Socialism which had dogged the Labour Movement in Scotland, but it also was in keeping with

the (Socialist) concept of the extension of consciousness. In his introduction to John Broom's biography of MacLean (1973), MacDiarmid says:

..by 1936, I had thoroughly realised that we must revert to the John MacLean line, which "will put an end to the sinister association in the Scottish cultural movement of abstract highbrowism and politics which have no concern with the cause of the workers and greatly speed up the proletarianisation of Scottish Arts and Letters, i.e. the beginnings of self-education of the Scottish proletariat in their revolutionary tasks with the aid of their own intelligentsia." (100)

This echoes MacLean's own words:

The millenium, if it is to come, must come from an educated working class. (101)

Thus, for the artist, the "MacLean line" signifies (as MacDiarmid goes on to say) a "complete break" with cultural developments of a bourgeois Nationalist kind. That is, as he puts it in "To the Younger Scottish Writers" (Lucky Poet 1943), the concept of a bourgeois culture class is moribund:

So with our Scottish writers; they are forced
Either to distort the content of Scottish life
In order to make it conform
To some desperate personal wish-fulfilment
Or flee from it entirely - into the past,
Into fantasy, or some other reality-surrogate.
Outside the revolutionary movement there is no place
For any writer worth a moment's thought.
The 'culture class' for which they think they write
Has ceased to exist either as a class
Or as a repository of culture; as the strain
Of economic struggle tightens the so-called
Middle-class vanguard immediately reveals
Its essential moral weakness and above all
Its intellectual poverty thinly coated
By a veneer of artistic sophistication;
No self-respecting man can have anything to say to them.

This is central to what MacDiarmid means when he talks of the "self-education" of the proletariat "with the aid of their own intelligentsia". There is a need for a committed revolutionary intelligentsia but no place for the "abstract highbrowism" of detached intellectualism in the extension of consciousness. This distinction is crucial to any informed appreciation of his work. As he says in one of his most significant

poems (with which we shall deal in detail in the following chapter),

"On A Raised Beach" (Stony Limits 1934):

These bare stones bring me straight back to reality.
I grasp one of them and I have in my grip
The beginning and the end of the world,
My own self, and as before I never saw
The empty hand of my brother man,
The humanity no culture has reached, the mob.
Intelligentsia, our impossible and imperative job !
* * * * *
Detached intellectuals, not one stone will move,
Not the least of them, not a fraction of an inch. It is not
The reality of life that is hard to know.
It is nearest of all and easiest to grasp,
But you must participate in it to proclaim it.

In MacDiarmid's political aesthetic, then, the existence of a revolutionary intelligentsia was necessary to the extension of consciousness. And although he may have distrusted many middle-class writers, like Auden and his associates, who claimed to be Communist, MacDiarmid nevertheless stood out against any narrow minded provincialism in class politics as in national politics. In this, his arguments were in keeping with orthodox Marxist thought which has always eschewed the notion that all bourgeois culture and all bourgeois intellectuals are necessarily counter-revolutionary. The growth of a déclassé intelligentsia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is something that we shall examine in the following chapters with relation to the nature of the extension of consciousness and its philosophic aspects and with relation to the questions of God-building, the East-West synthesis and Proletcultism. Suffice to note for the moment that the "MacLean line" is not opposed to the traditional Marxist argument that

..the bourgeois intellectual - whether as artist, as economist, or as historian - can free himself, through the exercise of his theoretical consciousness, from the shackles of the class to which he would seem to belong by birth and upbringing. The Communist Manifesto is clearly written from the point of view of men who think they have done just that.. The famous last sentence of the Manifesto [Working Men Of All Countries, Unite !] is the more dramatic because here, for the first time, the authors directly address the proletariat instead of the bourgeoisie. (102)

Psycho-Politics and the Extension of Consciousness

As has been noted in the preceding sections of this chapter, MacDiarmid's work presents a fusion of matters artistic with matters political and psychological: a fusion that is a defining characteristic of his aesthetic. Moreover, what binds his artistic consciousness so closely with his political consciousness is his interest in psychology. Roughly speaking, we may equate National Psychology with Nationalism and the liberation of the human psyche, the extension of consciousness, with Socialism or Communism, both of which are united by his abiding concern for the psychology of creativity. But such compartmentalising should not be taken as an abstract schema for that would result in merely mechanical distinctions. For example, the extension of consciousness includes the liberation of the National Psychology and is thus directly related to MacDiarmid's Nationalism; and, on the other hand, the Representative Personality embodies not only the history and conditions of his nation but also the history and conditions of his class, and thus is directly related to his Communism.

In Lucky Poet MacDiarmid wrote: "I drew an assurance that I felt and understood the spirit of Scotland".⁽¹⁰³⁾ In the poem "Conception" he wrote:

So that indeed I could not be myself
Without this strange, mysterious, awful finding
Of my people's very life within my own
- This terrible blinding discovery
Of Scotland in me, and I in Scotland,
Even as a man, loyal to a man's code and outlook,
Discovers within himself woman alive and eloquent,
Pulsing with her own emotion,
Looking out on the world with her own vision.

In A Drunk Man, we are told:

And nae Scot wi' a wumman lies,
But I am he and ken, as 'twere
A stage I've Passed as he maun pass't,
Gin he grows up, his way wi' her !

These Bardic statements refer specifically, but not exclusively to

Scotland and the Scottish people. For example, in the poem following "Conception" in Poems to Paintings by William Johnstone 1933 (1963), MacDiarmid, using the image of a "polyhedron" to represent a multi-faceted and infinitely complex Scotland, typically praises Johnstone for being able to draw out the universal from the particular:

Scotland ! Everything he saw in it
Was a polyhedron he held in his brain,
Every side of it visible at once,
Of knowledge drawn from every field of life.
Polyhedrons everywhere ! He knew
There was a way of combining them he must find yet..
Into one huge incomparable jewel..

("Composition")

(And in the same poem he attacks the false internationalism "Of that made-in-England speciality, the Proletariat," which would deny Scotland nationhood). In A Drunk Man, he is not content to be every Scot but goes on to say:

He's no a man ava',
And lacks a proper pride,
Gin less than a' the world
Can ser' him for a bride!...

In other words, in the poetry itself there is no intellectual compartmentalising: particularism and universalism (two important aspects of which are Nationalism and International Socialism or Communism) are natural complements. With MacDiarmid, the one cannot be had without the other.

As Roderick Watson has pointed out that -

In The Three Conventions Denis Saurat wrote that psychological experience is the basis of metaphysics, and therefore metaphysics is the psychology of the universe. The insights and imagery of MacDiarmid's work suggest that this was certainly so in his case.. (104)

- so we may substitute "politics" for "metaphysics". This intuitive psychology which informs the Representative Personality applies to the whole of MacDiarmid's political aesthetic - to his Communism as well as his Nationalism. Writing as "Arthur Leslie" MacDiarmid, for instance, quotes Trotsky, applying Trotsky's words to himself:

The correspondence between Marx and Engels was for me not a theoretical but a psychological revelation. Toutes proportions gardées, I found proof on every page that I was bound to these two by a direct psychological affinity. Their attitude to men and ideas was mine. I guessed what they did not express, shared their sympathies, was indignant and hated as they did. (105)

Thus, whenever psychological questions are raised the question of politics is never far removed; and whenever political matters are dealt with MacDiarmid's own psychologising (intuitive and theoretical) will, more likely than not, come into play.

In that issue of The Scottish Nation (see above p. 73) where MacDiarmid, under the pseudonym of "Isobel Guthrie", discusses his own and F.G. Scott's work, he goes on to say:

What Stephen Reynolds meant by "psycho-politics" gives a clue to the trend of their work in Scottish music and poetry respectively. They are making the essentials of Scottish racialism subserve their art in a new and far-reaching fashion, stripping Scottish consciousness to its dynamic form. (106)

MacDiarmid's reference to "psycho-politics" is a mistake. What he is referring to is Reynolds' conception of "psycho-economics". But the mistake is a significant one. For the term "psycho-politics" more than aptly describes that unity of psychology and politics inherent in his own aesthetic.

Reynolds, who was not a Socialist, was the author of two novels, A Poor Man's House (1909) and The Holy Mountain (1910), as well as Seems So ! A Working-Class View of Politics (1911) and a series of articles in The Nation (1913-14) entitled "Wealth and Life". (Parts of Seems So ! had previously been serialised in The New Age). In a letter to Lindsay Bashford of The Daily Mail in 1912, Reynolds talks of "my projected book on psycho-economics" and states:

I want to carry the advance made in metaphysics by Bergson into economics and social affairs, restating them, not in terms of money, the countess of life, but in terms of conscious volitional life itself. (107)

The book itself was never finished, but as he later makes clear in the

above letter, the "Wealth and Life" articles were a sustained effort at working out his theory of "psycho-economics". In a letter to Cecil Harmsworth M.P. in 1914, Reynolds notes:

Massingham is closing down my "Wealth and Life" articles in the Nation. Journalistically, they've been a failure: they cut too much across the rut of recent economic thought. Were I not so dead certain they represent (though feebly) an advance on it, I should be very sick. As 'tis, I hug my psycho-economics theory the closer. (108)

What underlies this theory is hinted at in Reynold's introduction to Seems So !:

Perhaps the remarkable growth in self-consciousness which appears to be taking place all around, will shake men's sense of their own rectitude.. The fight lies really, not between conflicting interests, but between different habits of mind. (109)

This is typical of the way Reynolds handles the question of class antagonism. Indeed, his "psycho-economics" theory is little more than an attempt to undermine the concept of class dialectics. In one of his "Wealth and Life" essays, he argues:

Just as it is possible to use up much more wealth without achieving more life.. so it is possible.. to use up less wealth, and still not lower one's standard of life.. The change is psychological, not economic.. Here.. we see why the poor are not unhappy in proportion to their poverty, nor the rich happy in proportion to their wealth. The poor, perforce, know better how to extract life from wealth; they hold closer to those means of life-intensification.. If the rich have the economic advantage, the psycho-economic advantage rests with the poor. (110)

But this psychological compensation for poverty in no way clarifies MacDiarmid's confused reference to Reynolds. What does strike a chord with our study of MacDiarmid is Reynolds' argument that politics is basically a psychological matter:

All political and social questions, all human problems, are at bottom psychological. To ignore the living psychology is like trying to ride a wooden horse to nowhere. (111)

Thus, what MacDiarmid is probably alluding to when he mentions "psycho-politics" is Reynolds' interest in the quality of consciousness and,

specifically, his thesis that the purpose of life itself is the extension of consciousness:

In the last analysis, since life, whether as to its length or its intensity, is apprehended by consciousness and stored up in memory, and consciousness is itself qualitative, it appears at least probable that quantity and quality of life are identical..

Civilisation, then, is the cumulative process whereby man learns with tools to produce wealth more abundantly, for the qualitative as well as the quantitative increase of life, and attains effectively to more life by increasing his consciousness of it. (112)

Thus, MacDiarmid's reference to Reynolds' "psycho-politics" as giving a clue to the trend of his own and F.G. Scott's work implies that the shared trend is the desire to increase our consciousness of life.

Reynolds:

Work has quality as well as quantity, both in its effort and in its result. Consciousness and will are of its essence. It partakes of the creativeness of life. (113)

MacDiarmid, then, seems to have assimilated something of Reynolds' theory - although he was certainly no 'follower'. Moreover, albeit that his reference to "psycho-politics" is not at all explicatory as far as Reynolds' actual theory is concerned, nevertheless that accidental coinage - or neologism - perfectly demonstrates the way in which his own mind was working.

In a recent study, Thistle and Rose: a study of Hugh MacDiarmid's Poetry (1980), Ann Edwards Boutelle cites as the source of MacDiarmid's phrase "the extension of consciousness", P.D. Ouspensky's Tertium Organum (1922) where the phrase is "the expansion of consciousness"⁽¹¹⁴⁾. Ouspensky was a contributor to The New Age and it is more than likely that MacDiarmid had read at least a bit of Ouspensky. But it must be remembered that interest in psychology and the use of psychological terms (as with Reynolds) was very much in vogue among contemporary intellectuals - and not least among The New Age group. For example, Janko Lavrin argues

in an article in The New Age in early 1920 that Nietzsche's influence

..ought to enlarge and deepen our consciousness and with it our fullness of life.. Once the religious attitude towards reality led to art; nowadays the inverted process would be necessary - art ought to lead us to a new religious consciousness which would include our scientific knowledge and at the same time deepen and supersede it.

Thus a true artist - apart from being the representative of an advanced consciousness - could become the greatest spiritual hero and pioneer of modern mankind. (115)

"M.M. Cosmoi" (a New Age contributor some of whose bizarre theories shall be dealt with later in this study) argues in an article in September 1921 that

The problem for humanity today is the raising up of human consciousness as a whole, by means of a transmutation of the human essence, to a plane or height never before attained by humanity at large. (116)

If either of those statements were signed 'Hugh MacDiarmid' it could surprise very few of us, so closely does he echo such sentiments and terminology. But what MacDiarmid means by the extension of consciousness is not what is meant by Nietzsche, Ouspensky, Reynolds, "Cosmoi", although their influence (and that of many more) cannot be denied. Indeed, the remainder of this book will, by and large, be taken up with elucidating what MacDiarmid actually meant (in poetic practice and theory) by the extension of consciousness, and the significance (and non-significance) of various influences, relating this to the Cosmic Egotism of the Representative Personality (i.e. God-building) and the Messianism inherent in all of this.

It would, then, be unwise to posit any single source for MacDiarmid's 'psycho-political' theory or his use of the term "the extension of consciousness". In his introduction to John Singer's collection of poems The Fury of ^{the} Living (1942) which, we recall, he says is the "best exposition" of his ideas on Communist poetry" - MacDiarmid refers to two other books that influenced his ideas in this area: J. Harvey Robinson's The Mind in the Making (1921) and Count

Alfred Korzybski's Science and Sanity (1933). Both books lay heavy emphasis on intelligence and both, especially Robinson, discuss intelligence in relation to contemporary society and the possibility of improvement or reform. "I have no reforms to recommend," says Robinson, "except the liberation of Intelligence, which is the first and most essential one".⁽¹¹⁷⁾ Not only could MacDiarmid have written that himself, but bearing in mind that the object of poetry is the liberation of intelligence (or the extension of consciousness), it is quite in keeping with MacDiarmid's libertarian aesthetic that he write:

Better a'e gowden lyric
Than a social problem solved..

Indeed, put in context these 'infamous' lines from To Circumjack Cencrastus (1930) mean just this: if poetry is an expression of the highest form of consciousness upon which all progress depends, then, is the "gowden lyric" not in the first place preferable as it is from such expressions that the reforms will eventually come? From the artistic-elitist point of view this is exactly what MacDiarmid is saying:

Better a'e gowden lyric
The mob'll never ken
For this in the last resort
Mak's them less apes, mair men,
And leads their leaders albeit
They're owre blin' to see it.

The blindness is regrettable, but it is not of MacDiarmid's making. The elitism is not wilful. It simply reflects class and educational divisions (not necessarily the same thing) in society. Moreover, Robinson was probably one of many writers (including Nietzsche) who helped clear the way for MacDiarmid's oft-repeated exhortations in favour of an artistic elite. Robinson:

The truest and most profound observations on Intelligence have in the past been made by poets and, in recent times, by story-writers. (118)

For the artist succeeds, says Robinson, where the philosophers do not because they

..have almost consistently neglected the actual process of thought and have set the mind off as something apart to be studied by itself. But no such mind, exempt from bodily processes, animal impulses, savage traditions, infantile impressions, conventional reactions, and traditional knowledge, ever existed, even in the case of the most abstract of metaphysicians. (119)

This is exactly the kind of "abstract highbrowism" that MacDiarmid wished to eschew (see above p.84) by reverting to the "John MacLean line". Moreover, the failure of Western Rationalism to deal with the 'whole man' also highlights something of MacDiarmid's attraction to Marxism. MacDiarmid:

For Marx, man is not born with a "soul" or "human personality". He achieves it. Marx's social philosophy is an attempt to discover, and to help to bring into existence the social, cultural, and educational conditions under which all men and women may develop significant human personalities. The belief of religious advocates, eg. Jacques Maritain, in a "personality" which can exist independently of physical, biological, historical and cultural conditions is a consequence of a bad psychology and still worse metaphysics. (120)

The idea of the 'whole man', of the liberation of the human psyche ("conditions under which all men and women may develop significant human personalities"), is the very thing which draws together politics (Marx) and psychology (Robinson). What MacDiarmid sought, above all, in his readings in psychology and politics was material concerning the extension of consciousness. And as Robinson argues that the poet succeeds where the philosopher does not in reflecting the 'whole man', so Marx, as one commentator puts it, "saw in art a sensuous form of consciousness, distinct from abstract thought".⁽¹²¹⁾ Or, as the Drunk Man has it:

I doot I'm geylies mixed, like Life itsel',
But I was never ane that thocht to pit
An ocean in a mutchkin. As the haill's
Mair than the pairt sae I than reason yet..

I'll bury nae heid like an ostrich's,
Nor yet believe my een and naething else.

My senses may advise me, but I'll be
 Mysel' nae maitter what they tell's..

For I've nae faith in ocht I can explain,
 And stert whaur the philosophers leave aff..

In that passage the Drunk Man may be parodying the anti-intellectualism of his fellow-countrymen but the irony of the dramatic persona should not blind us to the fact that what MacDiarmid is rejecting is not 'philosophy' per se, but the extreme rationalism and empiricism of the western tradition. He is not concerned, in these terms, with "the curst conceit o' bein' richt / That damns the vast majority o' men".

As with Nietzsche, Robinson's analysis of the herd-mentality and his belief in a creative elite, receive their echoes with MacDiarmid. Robinson:

The "real" reasons, which explain how it is we happen to hold a particular belief, are chiefly historical. Our most important opinions.. are.. rarely the result of reasoned consideration, but of unthinking absorption from the social environment in which we live.. The "real" reasons for our beliefs, by making clear their origins and history, can do much to dissipate this emotional blockade and rid us of our prejudices and preconceptions.. Few of us are capable of engaging in creative thought, but some of us can at least come to distinguish it from other and inferior kinds of thought and accord to it the esteem that it merits as the greatest treasure of the past and the only hope of the future. (122)

MacDiarmid's life-work may indeed be defined in this respect as an effort to establish for creative thought "the esteem that it merits as the greatest treasure of the past and the only hope of the future".

And he would have certainly agreed with Robinson's statement that

..unless thought be raised to a far higher plane than hitherto, some great setback to civilisation is inevitable. (123)

Another of MacDiarmid's oft-quoted psychological thinkers is Count Alfred Korzybski. In hailing John Singer as a true Communist poet "blessedly free of Left infantilism", MacDiarmid argues that Singer's revolutionary position and his intellectualism display a certain sanity which is itself a challenge to the existing order, for

this is the "position.. established" by Korzybski to which MacDiarmid is alluding. (124) Korzybski:

Our rulers: politicians, 'diplomats', bankers, priests of every description, economists, lawyers, etc., and the majority of teachers remain at present largely or entirely ignorant of modern science, scientific methods, structural linguistic and semantic issues of 1933, and they also lack an essential historical and anthropological background, without which a sane orientation is impossible.. As a result a conflict is created and maintained between the advance of science affecting conditons of actual life and the orientations of our rulers.. Few of us at present realise that, as long as such ignorance of our rulers prevails, no solution of our human problems is possible. (125)

Through his reference to Korzybski, MacDiarmid is identifying the sanity of Korzybski's desired intellectualism with Singer's revolutionary consciousness - a merging of the psychological and the political which, as we have seen, is typical with MacDiarmid. Moreover, it would seem more than a happy accident that Korzybski admits in his book to the influence of Spengler's "unusual scholarship and breadth of vision". (126)

Further to this, the mention of Korzybski's Science and Sanity arises with specific reference to Singer's being free from "Left infantilism". MacDiarmid is here combining two theories: Lenin's and Korzybski's. Lenin wrote "Left-Wing" Communism, an Infantile Disorder in April 1920, an English edition appearing in July that year. The basic argument of the book is that revolutionaries must be prepared to compromise with a bourgeois establishment by partaking in elections and government if the revolutionary movement can gain from it, although they must always combine this with illegal (or 'extra-parliamentary') activities. To refuse to adopt this realistic approach, says Lenin, is to be a Left infantalist - an ineffectual ideological purist. Thus, in certain circumstances, Lenin concludes, "it is obligatory to participate even in a most reactionary parliament". (127)

Now, the term "infantilist", Korzybski points out in his introduction to Science and Sanity,

..is often used in psychiatry. No one who has had any experience with the "mentally" ill, and studied them, can miss the fact that they always exhibit some infantile symptoms.. In the present investigation we have discovered and formulated a definite psychophysiological mechanism which is to be found in all cases of "mental" ills, infantilism, and the so-called "normal" man. The differences between such neural disturbances in different individuals turn out to vary only in degree, and as they resemble the nervous responses of animals, which are necessarily regressive for man, we must conclude that, generally, we do not use our nervous system properly, and that we have not, as yet, entirely emerged from a very primitive semantic stage of development, in spite of our technical achievements. (128)

In Leninist terms the infantilist is the one who refuses to appreciate the actual complexities of the class struggle. In Korzybski's terms the infantilist is the one who remains psychologically undeveloped and is thus childish, especially in expression. In holding back the evolutionary process his nervous responses seem less human, more animal. For MacDiarmid, the repeated role of the artist is the extension of consciousness and since this involves political as well as psychological liberation the two are fused in his aesthetic. That is why Korzybski sits at ease with Lenin in his analysis of Singer's poetry. The infantilists (in both senses) in this case are the supposed revolutionaries: Auden, Spender, MacNeice and Day Lewis. They have no revolutionary consciousness to expand, whereas Singer's "Communism is thought out, fought out, and lived out in personal life". (129)

A major battlefront for Korzybski is the semantic one and, recalling MacDiarmid's attack on "abstract highbrowism" and Robinson's on abstract metaphysics, he is opposed to what he calls mere academic "verbalism". The linguistic front is also the natural domain of the poet, and, in In Memoriam James Joyce (1955), MacDiarmid relates something of his debt to Korzybski:

So we have read Bridgman, Lancelot Hogben, Thurman Arnold,

Jerome Frank, Alfred Korzybski, Ogden and Richards,
 Taking from Korzybski at least a notion
 Of the utility of semantics as an instrument
 For extirpating pernicious thinking and emotional reactions,
 A real understanding of 'the is of identity,'
 And a demand for 'a language whose structure
 Corresponds to physical structure,' ..

Thus, as when in Burns Today and Tomorrow (1959), MacDiarmid states
 the following kind of argument, both Korzybski and Lenin, both psychology
 and politics, play their part:

The curse of Scottish life and literature and the
 other arts has been an appalling infantilism. (130)

To raise thought to a higher plane, to develop consciousness and counter
 infantilism, is the explicit objective of MacDiarmid's work. It was the
 desire for this that he most valued in Marxism and it was this hope which
 led him to declare that Scotland, like Russia, had an historical role
 to play in the liberation of consciousness and the establishment of a
 new world culture:

India had that great opportunity centuries ago
 And India lost it..
 It is our turn now; the call is to the Celt.

This little country can overcome the whole world of wrong
 As the Lacedaemonians the armies of Persia.
 Cornwall - Gaeldom - must stand for the ending
 Of the essential immorality of any man controlling
 Any other - for the ending of all Government
 Since all Government is a monopoly of violence;
 For the striking of this water out of the rock of Capitalism..
 ("The Glass of Pure Water")

Before, however, proceeding to the 'Russian Model' which influenced
 MacDiarmid in so many different ways, it is necessary to examine the
 philosophical implications of what MacDiarmid means by "the extension
 of consciousness" and how his theory fits the facts of his actual poetic
 practice. It is this which forms the basis of our next chapter.

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- 41 "The English Ascendancy in British Literature" (1931) The Uncanny Scot ed. K. Buthlay (London 1968) p. 130.
- 42 Burns Today and Tomorrow (Edinburgh 1959) p. 12.
- 43 The Scottish Nation 1, 2, (15th. May 1923) p. 10.
- 44 At the Sign of the Thistle (London 1934) pp. 190-81. Cf. MacDiarmid: "..although English has drawn its vocabulary from practically all the languages of the world, it has almost wholly eschewed both Gaelic and the Scots Vernacular.. This means, of course, that English is adscripted in ways antipathetic to the genius of Scots, and turns a blind eye to certain fields of consciousness." The Uncanny Scot op. cit. p. 130.
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- 96 "Leslie" op. cit. p. 16.
- 97 Guy Aldred John MacLean Martyr of the Class Struggle op. cit.
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CHAPTER THREE

The Extension of Consciousness:
Idealism and Materialism

Introduction and Theoretical Outline

The extension of consciousness may be fruitfully viewed from the opposite angles of materialism and idealism, two philosophical outlooks that are generally taken to be mutually exclusive and logically incompatible. Both views are apparent in MacDiarmid's mature work and the resultant tension is a defining characteristic of his poetry and world-picture (epistemological and ontological).

In his study, Dialectical Materialism, Maurice Cornforth sets out the three main assertions of idealism as:

1. Idealism asserts that the material world is dependent on the spiritual.
2. Idealism asserts that spirit, or mind, or idea, can and does exist in separation from matter...
3. Idealism asserts that there exists a realm of the mysterious and unknowable, "above", or "beyond", or "behind" what can be ascertained and known by perception, experience and science. (1)

In contradistinction to these three assertions, Cornforth argues from the materialist viewpoint that:

1. Materialism teaches that the world is by its very nature material, that everything which exists comes into being on the basis of material causes, arises and develops in accordance with the laws of motion of matter.
2. Materialism teaches that matter is objective reality existing outside and independent of the mind; and that far from the mental existing in separation from the material, everything mental or spiritual is a product of material processes.
3. Materialism teaches that the world and its laws are knowable, and that while much in the material world may not be known there is no unknowable sphere of reality which lies outside the material world. (2)

With regard to the question of consciousness, Cornforth defines the materialist position as follows:

Mind is a product of the evolutionary development of life. Living bodies which have reached a certain level of development of the nervous system, such as we find in animals, can and do develop forms of consciousness; and in the course of evolution this consciousness eventually reaches the stage of thought, the activity of the human brain. The mental functions, from the lowest to the highest, are functions of the body, functions of matter. Mind is a product of matter at a high level of the organisation of matter.

Once this is admitted, there is an end to the conception of the mind or soul as separable from the body and capable of leaving it and surviving it. A mind without a body is an absurdity. Mind does not exist in abstraction from body.(3)

Extending consciousness, from the idealist viewpoint, thus permits the possibility of a purely spiritual existence: a 'realm of pure thought' or some other non-material level of being that human consciousness can attain or at least strive after. From the materialist viewpoint, all such options can be legitimately reduced to religious superstition. MacDiarmid was well aware of these theoretical distinctions. In a letter to F.G. Scott in October 1941, MacDiarmid, claiming to belong to "the real out-and-out materialists, anti-God, anti-all-supernaturalism", states:

I have held precisely the same position since my early teens; all that has happened since has simply been that my life-experience has confirmed and reconfirmed it... But if your question implies a connection between the changes in my earlier and my present work as a poet and what you suppose to be my abandonment of idealism and religiosity, and my intensified Dialectical Materialism, then you are wrong because so far as my stand is concerned as between Materialism and Idealism, both my earlier poetry and my latest have been produced by a mind entertaining precisely the same ideas. (4)

This consistency that MacDiarmid claims for himself is, to a significant extent, a retrospective rationalisation of deep and abiding ambiguities and contradictions in his work.

In another letter, of the same period, to Scott, MacDiarmid demonstrates that he understands, in theoretical terms at least, that idealism reaches its logical conclusion in religion:

For Marx any introduction of abstractions, whose origin and reference are allegedly transcendental rather than historical, and which are presumably tested by intuition rather than by their functional use in concrete experiential situations is religious. (5)

Moreover, he is openly scornful of the idealist position:

The belief of religious advocates, eg. Jacques Maritain, in a "personality" which can exist independently of physical, biological, historical and cultural conditions is a consequence of a bad psychology and still worse metaphysics. (6)

Eschewing his flirtation with Catholicism, which never really came to anything, it is possible to give MacDiarmid the benefit of the doubt as to his being consciously anti-God and anti-religious by 1941. His growth to poetic maturity did at least coincide with a gradual extirpation of the religious consciousness or superficial religiosity apparent in the early poems like "A Moment in Eternity". But the question of idealism is much more problematic. For, as late as 1975, MacDiarmid states of the supernatural that:

...it's essential for life. Human life itself implies a belief in, a desire to participate in, the transcendental.

It's inherent in us without reference to any religious belief... The transcendental, if I am right, comes out of the seeds of things. It's inherent in the original substance - it's part of the materialism. (7)

The tension that results from his attempt to reconcile idealism with materialism is apparent. He opens with an a priori statement that human life implies a belief in and a desire to take part in what is not realisable in experience. His argument for what might be called 'transcendental materialism' is based upon intuition and innatism, two fundamental assumptions of idealism, and it in no way represents his declared "intensified Dialectical Materialism". For, as Cornforth rightly notes:

The Marxist philosophy is characterised by its absolutely consistent materialism all along the line, by its making no concessions whatever at any point to idealism. (8)

By accepting the innate character of this presupposed belief and desire for the transcendental MacDiarmid is led along the familiar path of Scholasticism even to the use of the term "original substance". The nature of the extension of consciousness, as he argues for it here, is idealist and it contrasts sharply with Marx's argument for the materialist view of consciousness. Marx:

Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life. Those who adopt the first method of approach begin with consciousness, regarded as the living individual; those who adopt the second, which corresponds with real life, begin with the real living individuals themselves, and consider consciousness only as their consciousness. (9)

The fullest account of MacDiarmid's position is given in Lucky Poet:

My philosophy interrogates 'immediate experience'. This I find to be a flux or 'stream of consciousness', whose constant basis is sensation. Distinction, variety, individuality, and definiteness are all the work of thought, and not given to immediate experience. So far, I go with Bergson - and also with Kant. The clearly defined 'perceptual object', which we see, transcends the vague mass of sense-data presented to our visual organs; it is more than these sense-data, or any combination of them, because it is permanent and public to many observers, whereas the sense-data are shifting and private. The object, in short, is the object of thought (i.e. of sensation plus memory and imagination plus conceptual interpretation), and not the object of sensation alone. But I do not follow Bergson in his view that thought falsifies and distorts the object. Nor do I conclude with Kant that space, time, and the categories are necessary forms of human consciousness. Instead, I proceed to inquire into the nature and aims of the thinking process. It is necessary to 'think our way back to thought itself' (Chesterton's phrase) - not in order to deny that anything besides thinking exists, but in order thoroughly to understand what it means to think - hence what it means for thought to have an object such

as common sense assumes it to have, and such as its validity seems to demand. All thought is analytic, a 'breaking up' of the immediate unity of experience; and it has two principle ~~phases~~ analysis of the concrete datum, and universalization of the elements thus analysed out. This latter phase yields judgements that are universal and necessary (and not mere tautologies) and gives rise to deductive inference. Thus the original unity of experience is reconstituted on a higher plane; unity given has become unity understood. Along this path we reach the notion of substance. For substance is precisely an 'intelligible unity', to which the mind penetrates by means of sense-data and the analysis of them. Thought's true and final object is an enduring 'thing', 'more fundamental than sense-data and which embraces and dominates sense-data in a higher unity'. (10)

It is the process of thought, of consciousness, which MacDiarmid sees as being of fundamental import to his philosophy. He notes two "phases". The first is analytical, breaking up sense-data. The second universalises what is learned from the analytical phase. It reconstitutes immediate experience, we are told, so that unity given becomes unity understood. But before this seemingly harmless conclusion is arrived at we are also told that the universalising phase reconstitutes the original unity of experience "on a higher plane". There is no justification in the above passage for such a statement. All that could legitimately be claimed is that the second phase reconstitutes immediate experience on a different plane. The notion of an upward movement to a "higher" plane is slipped in without adequate explanation. It betrays an uncritical impulse towards idealism.

Through this upward movement we come inevitably to the notion of "substance" which is given as the ultimate enduring object of thought. It is interesting to note here that in explicating his 'transcendental materialism' in 1975, MacDiarmid admitted to the "fertile influence" upon him of two idealist philosophers, the 'British Hegelians', Bosanquet and Bradley:

I read them long ago - before I became a convinced Marxist.
They are a very fertile influence, a wonderful breeding
ground for poets - unlike those who opposed them. (11)

Not only does this leave one wondering where Marx comes into the picture, it still leaves MacDiarmid, the "convinced Marxist", straddling the abyss between a materialist and an idealist philosophy. It seems that when MacDiarmid pursues the notion of the extension of consciousness there comes a point where a 'leap of faith' occurs and he - sometimes consciously, sometimes unwittingly - betrays his declared materialist outlook. This, admittedly, has probably more to do with his lack of a thorough grounding in dialectical materialism than it has to do with

any lack of sincerity. However, the point remains that the concept of an enduring substance is a Scholastic vestige which any out-and-out materialist must treat with scorn. The contradiction is a major one which runs throughout the poetry and it is one of the major contradictions which his poetry, in fact, seeks to resolve. In so far as this is true, the antithesis between idealism and materialism forms a creative dialectic which is an important (and, perhaps, philosophically the most important) characteristic of MacDiarmid's poetry.

Idealism, Materialism and Empirio-Criticism

Given that MacDiarmid was born and raised in a 'Christian' country, and that he received a thorough Scottish schooling, being awarded "many certificates for Bible knowledge", it is not surprising that the idealist impulse should be the first to make itself heard in his creative work.⁽¹²⁾ Nor is it surprising that when, in Lucky Poet, he follows Duns Scotus to the point of seeing every body as "having not merely a material form but also a vital form", he admits:

I cannot get rid of a certain participation in - or
interest in and sympathy with - such Scotist ideas. (13)

What would be surprising would be to find MacDiarmid not only a materialist at an early age but one who had worked his materialism through his consciousness to the point of giving it expression in his early poetry. The process was much longer and it involved the poet in challenging his background and environment and the Christian intellectual tradition in which he was raised. The situation was not peculiar to MacDiarmid and his attempts qua artist to synthesise or reconcile idealism and materialism were not unique, as this and the following chapter illustrate. MacDiarmid was not the only Marxist intellectual who regarded communism, as he once put it, "as essentially a spiritual force".⁽¹⁴⁾

Much of the scope and power of MacDiarmid's poetry derives from this conjunction of extremes. An idealist outlook, as a received mode of expression, would seem to be largely accepted in the early English poems, especially the 'visionary' ones like "A Moment in Eternity". Although the Scots poems of Sangschaw and Penny Wheep are more earthly (and earthy), nevertheless, one becomes conscious of an attempt to reconcile this received idealist view of things with a growing sense of commonsense materialism - the latter as yet hardly amounting to a worked out 'philosophy'. A telling instance, for example, is "Ballad of the Five Senses" (Sangschaw 1925).

The poem opens by declaring the beauty of the phenomenal world "That lies forenenst a' men". This beauty seems separate from the world "o' Heaven and Hell" and the private "warl' wi' in mysel'". From the phenomenal (or material) world the poet wishes to rise and:

As God felt whan he made the warl'
I aye socht to feel.

Again:

Wi' body and saul I socht to staun'
As in Eternity.

He then declares that he wishes to be rid of his senses and of thought in order to "face God mysel'" - the notion of 'mind' or 'soul' existing apart from material conditions. What in fact the poet describes, though, is a kind of spiritualisation of his senses:

They were like thochts for which a man
Can fin' nae words to tell
Hoo they compare wi' his ither thochts
E'en to his ain sel's sel.

Through these newly developed media he perceives what is 'above', 'beyond' or 'behind' the phenomenal world: an all-inclusive unity reminiscent perhaps of the Neo-Hegelian 'Absolute':

Water for stone micht weel be ta'en
Or Heaven and Hell seem yin,
A' difference men's minds can mak',
Maun end or ye begin...

This is a given unity which cannot be apprehended by reason. These conglomerate sense-thoughts (the paradox is MacDiarmid's) take a life of their own:

And ilk ane differed frae the neist
As ilk ane did frae me.

Thus, the perceiver, since they are yet his thoughts, becomes simultaneously the perceived. For the object of thought here is thought:

And God Himsel' sall only be
As far's a man can tell,
In this or ony ither life
A way o' lookin' at himsel'.

What we have now is a reductio ad absurdum, a form of solipsism which claims 'divine' overtones.

In order to present this extension of consciousness as part of human evolution while eschewing the materialist-idealist dichotomy, the poet reduces (through his proposed spiritualisation of the senses) everything - internal and external phenomena - to pure sensation or pure experience. It is an attempt to evoke what he describes in "Composition (1934)" as:

The no-meeting...but only change upon the instant

Of spirit and sense; the agile leaping
From the sensual plane to the spiritual,
This straddling of two universes,
This rapidity of movement and back again.

This reduction to pure sensation or pure experience is what is known, in philosophical terms, as empirio-criticism.

Briefly, empirio-criticism originated with Richard Avenarius (1843-96) and Ernst Mach (1838-1916). Avenarius, as Frederick Copleston puts it:

...found the immediate data or elements of experience in sensations. These depend on changes in the central nervous system which are conditioned by the environment acting either as an external stimulus or by way of the process of nutrition. Further, the more the brain develops, the more is it excited by constant elements in the environment. Thus the impression of a familiar world is produced, a world in which one can feel secure. And increase in these feelings of familiarity and security is accompanied by a decrease in the impression of the world as enigmatic, problematic and mysterious. In fine, the unanswerable problems of metaphysics tend to be eliminated. And the theory of pure experience, with its reduction of both the outer and the inner worlds to sensations, excludes those dichotomies between the physical and the psychical, thing and thought, object and subject, which have formed the basis for such rival metaphysical theories as materialism and idealism. (15)

The parallel between this exegesis and the MacDiarmid poem is self-evident. But before pursuing our inquiry any further, it is necessary to ascertain something of the validity of empirio-criticism from a materialist point of view.

The major contributor in this field was Lenin who published Materialism and Empirio-Criticism: Critical Comments on a Reactionary Philosophy in 1908 in answer to Studies in the Philosophy of Marxism (or, as Lenin put it, "Studies Against the Philosophy of Marxism"). The latter book was a symposium by several Russian Marxist intellectuals including Anatole Lunacharsky and A.A. Bogdanov, the founder of the 'prolet-cult' movement. The symposium was heavily influenced by the ideas of Avenarius and Mach.

In his preface, Lenin notes that the assembled intellectuals "are united in their hostility toward dialectical materialism" and yet "claim to be Marxists", and he accuses some of them, notably Lunacharsky, of "downright fideism".⁽¹⁵⁾ Lunacharsky had studied under Avenarius at Zurich University in 1894, and, as Isaac Deutscher states:

That year left ineradicable marks on his outlook. Henceforth his ambition was to reconcile the influences of Marx and Avenarius. He was convinced that Marxism needed to be 'propped up' philosophically and that empirio-criticism

was best-suited to do that... In his treatise on aesthetics [The Experience of Positive Aesthetics], he... tried to combine empirio-criticism with dialectical materialism. (17)

In February 1908, Lenin wrote to Maxim Gorky:

Now the Studies in the Philosophy of Marxism have appeared. I have read all the articles except Suvorov's (I am reading it now), and every article made me furiously indignant. No, no, this is not Marxism! Our empirio-critics, empirio-monists, and empirio-symbolists are floundering in a bog. To try to persuade the reader that "belief" in the reality of the external world is "mysticism" (Bazarov); to confuse in the most disgraceful manner materialism with Kantianism (Bazarov and Bogdanov); to preach a variety of agnosticism (empirio-criticism) and idealism (empirio-monism); to teach the workers "religious atheism" and "worship" of the higher potentialities (Lunacharsky); to declare Engels' teaching on dialectics to be mysticism (Berman); to draw from the stinking well of some French "positivists" or other, of agnostics or metaphysicians, the devil take them, with their "symbolic theory of cognition" (Yushkevich)! No, really, it's too much. To be sure, we ordinary Marxists are not well up in philosophy, but why insult us by serving this stuff up to us as the philosophy of Marxism! I would rather let myself be drawn and quartered than consent to collaborate in an organ or body that preaches such things. (18)

This division of opinion between Lenin and the empirio-critics is an important point to which we shall return with particular reference to the question of "religious atheism" or God-building. But, for the moment, it is essential to note that, as Copleston states, Lenin's argument against empirio-criticism has something to be said for it:

Lenin maintained that the phenomenalism of Mach and Avenarius leads inevitably to idealism and thence to religious belief. For if things are reduced to sensations or sense-data, they must be mind-dependent. And as they can hardly be dependent simply on the individual human mind, they must be referred to a divine mind. (19)

This is exactly the difficulty which "Ballad of the Five Senses" attempts to resolve by evoking a sense of what I have termed 'divine solipsism':

And God Himsel' sall only be
As far's a man can tell,
In this or ony ither life
A way o' lookin' at himsel'.

Copleston concludes:

...unless the reduction of things to sensations is interpreted as equivalent to the statement, with which not even the most resolute realist would quarrel, that physical objects are in principle capable of being sensed if there is any sentient subject at hand, it becomes difficult to avoid some such conclusion as that drawn by Lenin. (20)

From the materialist viewpoint, then, empirio-criticism is an unacceptable compromise which leads inevitably to idealism. Empirio-criticism may be said to form the philosophical basis for MacDiarmid's 'divine solipsism' which is characterised by the drive to image sense-data as spiritualised. This, naturally enough, gives rise to paradox, as in "Au Clair de la Lune" (Sangschaw 1925) where thought has "keethin' sicht o' a' there is" but "bodily sicht o' nocht". In "Ballad of the Five Senses", the poet writes:

O gin ye tine your senses five,
And get ony o' theirs instead,
Ye'll be as far frae what ye are
As the leevin' frae the deid.

The other senses to which he refers are the conglomerate sense-thoughts whose number "Ga'ed 'yont infinity" and this notion leads him to the idealist conclusion that:

...daith may only be
A change o' senses so's a man
Anither warld can see.

This spiritualisation of the senses is part of the proposed development of the "Super-Sense", the result of a synthesis that only poetry can effect, which MacDiarmid describes in The Scottish Chapbook (June 1923):

Poetry will regain its position again only in so far as it achieves the synthesis for which we seek - and towards which Science, in so far as it is also Vision, is consciously bending its utmost energies to-day. The sort of Science which will ultimately achieve this synthesis, however, will be indistinguishable from Poetry. Indeed it may be that Science may be the father Poetry needs for the Super-Sense that is to be. (21)

From the point of view of both 'common-sense' materialism and dialectical materialism this combination of 'visionary' science and poetry is a pseudo-synthesis that merely betrays itself to idealism. This putative "Super-Sense" is never clearly defined. Ultimately, it relates to the 'mysticism' of MacDiarmid's God-building mentality to which we shall return.

The "Super-Sense" would seem to be the intended outcome of the spiritualisation of the senses, the development of what MacDiarmid refers to as "Thocht". He touches upon this in "Au Clair de la Lune" and in the Drunk Man, but the fullest exposition of what he means by "Thocht" is given in Cencrastus (1930); and it should be noted at the outset that the monstrous jumbling and the very length of that poem are due, in no small part, to the poet's inevitable inability to make sense of what is, at bottom, a pseudo-dialectic. The failure to reconcile materialism and idealism in the poetry of the 'twenties was to lead him to attempt yet further approaches, 'resolutions' and expositions in the later poetry.

In Cencrastus, he laments:

O wad that men could think
 No' rationalise instead
 Mere preconceptions till
 Nae real thocht's in their heid...

On one level, this may be read as a laudable declaration in favour of original or creative thought. What he strives for is new "Thocht" on the frontiers of consciousness:

To think nae thocht that's e'er been thocht afore
 And nane, that's no' worth mair than a' that ha'e;

But this is carried to impossible, irrational and, at times, dubious extremes. Early in the poem, for example, he berates Dostoevsky for "preferrin' Christ to truth" while later he makes his own claim of preferring "Thocht" to truth. If "Thocht" is not the eye through which we see truth, says the poet, then:

What Thocht sees is mair important still
 And if Truth's shown to bairns and stupidity
 Taps deeps that pit a' brains beside the mark
 And I maun choose 'twixt Thocht and Truth chaps me
 Thocht a' the time.

This leads him to state that the curly snake whom he is pursuing, attempting to "circumjack" or get round, is "no' Truth in ony case, but Error", and so we are back where we started. That this endless circuitry of argument is vitally related to his not opting outright for an idealist or a materialist ontology is made apparent near the close of the poem where ^{he} tries to reconcile dualism within an all-embracing monism:

Ah, double nature, distinct yet ane,
 Like Life and Thocht. For Nature is
 A moment and a product o' the Mind,
 And no' a Mind that stands abune the warld
 Or yet rins through it like a knotless threid
 But coincides wi't, ane and diverse at aince;
 An eternal solution and eternal problem.

Here MacDiarmid tries to temper his acceptance of the dualism of mind and matter ("double nature") and the idealist concept of nature being "a product o' the Mind" by eschewing the notion of Godhead or Aristotle's 'Unmoved Mover' ("a Mind that stands abune the warld"). But the image of mind coinciding in unity and diversity with the world does not resolve the problem that the world remains, that nature remains, still mind-dependent. MacDiarmid's "eternal problem" is that if nature is mind-dependent, it is either dependent on the individual human mind (solipsism) or it must be referred to a divine mind (religion) and the poet is unwilling to declare for either of these overtly idealist solutions. Thus, the "eternal solution" seems more wishful thinking than anything else.

MacDiarmid's 'divine solipsism' is also characterised by the self-identification of perceiver and perceived. In A Drunk Man, the Cencrastian snake is:

- Thou Samson in a world that has
Nae pillars but your cheengin' shapes...

This self-identification, as was noted in the previous chapter, underlies the claims of the Representative Personality:

Eneuch ! For noc I'm in the mood,
Scotland, responsive to my thoughts,
Lichts mile by mile, as my ain nerves,
Frae Maidenkirk to John o' Groats !

Although, as in Cencrastus, the poet rejects an out-and-out idealism, he cannot evade at least a certain subjectivism:

Oor universe is like an e'e
Turned in, man's benmaist hert to see,
And swamped in subjectivity.

This self-identification is predicated sometimes of Godhead, sometimes of Cencrastus, and sometimes directly of the poetic voice itself. But so often are these identified with each other in any case that it is necessary to see the self-identification as ubiquitous to the poetry.

As the very titles "Ballad of the Five Senses" and Annals of the Five Senses^{indicate} MacDiarmid had as abiding an interest in the nature and quality of sensation and sense-data as did any empirio-critic. We have already discussed in some detail the roots of his 'psychological solipsism' with reference to Annals and the early correspondence. Thus, it is not surprising to find in those self-studies in psychology that make up Annals vivid illustrations of the spiritualisation of sense-data and the reduction of internal and external phenomena to one immediate given unity of impression. In "Cerebral", for example:

Night and day, city and country, sunshine and gaslight
and electric blaze, myriad-faceted existences and his
own extraordinarily vivid pictorial sense of his own
cranial geography and anatomical activities all co-
visible to him, I say, and perfectly composed, without
any conflict or strain.

Thus, similarities with the sense-thoughts of the "Ballad of the Five Senses" become apparent:

Nor were any of the elements permanent or passive.
All of them lived, and each in perfect freedom,
modifying or expanding, easing off or intensifying
continually. They moved freely, each in its own
particular whim, and they moved also with the unity
of one impression. (22)

In the light of this, it is equally unsurprising that the subject-mind (this time from "The Never-Yet-Explored") rejects the realist (or materialist) conclusion that matter is objective reality existing

outside and independent of the mind:

She recognised from the outset that to endeavour to arrive at any systematised conclusion as to the reasons for her attitude was bound to prove futile, reminding herself that we cannot concede even to the brute data of sense that fixity and security which a comfortable realism demands. (23)

So then, in "A Solitary Wing", realism and rationalism are not enough:

He was now quite certain that the imagination had some way of dealing with the truth, which the reason had not, and that commandments delivered when the body is still and the reason silent are the most binding that the souls of men can ever know. (24)

Thus, philosophical consistency is damned, and the desire to be always where extremes meet and to pursue imaginative "Thocht" above all else, becomes paramount:

Live and let live. Think and let think. So his tendency was always to the whole, to the totality, to the general balance of things. Indeed it was his chiefest difficulty ... to exclude, to condemn, to say No. Here, probably, was the secret of the way in which he used to plunge into the full current of the most inconsistent movements, seeking ... to find ground upon which he might stand foresquare. (25)

And here, probably, is the secret of the way in which MacDiarmid used to plunge into the full current of the most incompatible movements: idealism and materialism. For Annals clearly demonstrates that MacDiarmid's empirio-criticism, his continual attempts to circumjack the contradictions inherent in his ontology, derive primarily from his own mental experiences and his resultant intuitions about their significance. The attempt to reconcile these incompatible philosophies is sustained throughout the poetry. In "The Task" (In Memoriam James Joyce 1955), he deals with the unresolved discord quite explicitly: that is, without recourse to symbolism. Realism and idealism he associates with different moods, rather than modes, of thought, and he sees both as having been co-existent throughout his life and work:

For one thing I fancy the manner I have allowed
My natural impulses towards romance and mysticism
To dominate me has led to the formation
Of a curious gap or 'lacuna'
Between the innate and almost savage realism,
Which is a major element in my nature,
And the imaginative, poetical cult
Whereby I have romanticised and idealised my life.
In this realistic mood I recognise
With a grim animal acceptance
That it is indeed likely enough that the 'soul'
Perishes everlastingly with the death of the body,
But what this realistic mood, into which
My mind falls like a plummet
Through the neutral zone of its balanced doubt,
Never for one single beat of time can shake or disturb

Is my certain knowledge,
Derived from the complex vision of everything in me,
That the whole astronomical universe, however illimitable,
Is only one part and parcel of the mystery of Life;
Of this I am as certain as I am certain that I am I.
The astronomical universe is not all there is.

The "imaginative, poetical cult" whereby he "romanticised and idealised" his life is apparent in his fascination with a National Psychology and the concomitant desire to assume the role of Representative Personality. This, he associates with idealism: "romance and mysticism". Whereas his "realistic mood" counterbalances this and accepts personal extinction. His conclusion amounts at least to agnostic idealism.

If one were to treat MacDiarmid as a systematic philosopher, it would have to be said that his "curious gap or 'lacuna'" renders his philosophy inchoate. As it is, the different poetic moods, realist and idealist, can be said to give power and range to his poetry. It is when he attempts to conjoin them that the contradictions and inconsistencies arise and it is the case that, in many instances, the poetry is born out of his struggle to make sense of these opposing ideologies or philosophies.

In The Intelligentsia of Great Britain (1935), D.S. Mirsky, with whose writings MacDiarmid was very familiar and to whom he dedicated the "First Hymn to Lenin" (1931), relates something of the history of empirio-criticism and illustrates its relevance to contemporary social change:

...the romanticisation of the end of the century as one might say met imperialist science half way, and the idealistic reaction ate into science, and the diseased and carrion conditions made its flesh more acceptable to the esthetes. Bergson and Mach began that adaptation of the scientific outlook to the tastes and the needs of the decadent bourgeoisie which has since gone ahead in seven-league boots... The adaptation of the scientific [i.e. materialist] conception of the world to the needs of the bourgeoisie of the period of decline began in Great Britain, as in other countries, back in the last years of the nineteenth century. At that time Great Britain, despite its philosophical frivolity, had produced a machist of European dimensions in K. Pearson. "The philosophy of Pearson," Lenin wrote in Materialism and Empirio-Criticism (p.32).. "excels that of Mach in integrity and thoughtfulness. (26)

Pearson, says Mirsky:

...did not merely reveal the idealistic nature of Mach's philosophy. He also made clear the class nature of that idealism... Pearson represents an early stage of British machism... The second stage is marked by the machism of Bertrand Russell. (27)

Further to this, he notes:

In Bertrand Russell the combination of the theory of knowledge with subjective idealism is particularly clear. Russell is the principal and the most thorough representative of machism in Great Britain. (28)

The development of "English machism" or empirio-criticism, according to Mirsky, went hand-in-glove with the growth of Fabianism. MacDiarmid was as a young man (see above Chapter 1) both an ILP'er and a Fabian.

Mirsky:

In the socialism of the 'eighties, side by side with a proletarian current (itself extremely distorted by the stagnant remains of the preceding liberalist period), there appeared so-called fabian socialism, which subjectively (from its own point of view) was above classes, whereas objectively it was a definitely bourgeois movement - a combination which is characteristic of the intelligentsia... (29)

Quoting Engels as to "Fear of the revolution" being the "fundamental principle" of the Fabians, Mirsky concludes:

When they attacked - with equal bitterness - either antiquated Manchester radicalism or the ecclesiastical oligarchic conservatism of the Tories, the Fabians did this not in the interests of the working class, but in the interests of "society as a whole", which, of course, meant nothing else but the same old capitalism, though of course overhauled and brought up to date. But this very fact the leading group of the intelligentsia of the bourgeoisie of Great Britain, even if only in words, denied its class, was a striking symptom of the crisis which lay ahead, and of the dissatisfaction of British capitalism with its own civilisation. The intelligentsia, with that talk of the interests of "society as a whole", began to lay claim to a special position, independent of any basic classes, which meant steering a tacking course between them. (30)

Thus, the social and political compromise which constituted the Fabian position offers a direct parallel with the philosophical compromise which constituted empirio-criticism. As Fabianism sought to deny the reality of the division of labour, so empirio-criticism sought to eschew the problems of dualism in order to neutralise materialist arguments. Both attitudes were typical of the intelligentsia of the day.

Russell, born twenty years before MacDiarmid, in 1872, at first embraced pluralism (in 1898) and accepted, according to Copleston, "a dualist position". However, by 1918 "the sharpness of Russell's rejection of neutral monism is greatly diminished", and, in The Analysis of Mind (1921), "we find Russell announcing his conversion to neutral monism". But long before this, as Copleston notes, Russell had been "acquainted with William James's theory of neutral monism, according to which the mental and physical are composed of the same material, so to speak, and differ only in arrangement and context... As Russell notes, this was much the same view as that held by Ernst

Mach".⁽³¹⁾ In his Outline of Philosophy (1927), Russell wrote:

Popular metaphysics divides the known world into mind and matter, and a human being into soul and body. Some - the materialists - have said that matter alone is real and mind is an illusion. Many - the idealists in the technical sense, or mentalists, as Dr. Broad more appropriately calls them - have taken the opposite view, that mind alone is real and matter is an illusion. The view which I have suggested is that both mind and matter are structures composed of a more primitive stuff which is neither mental nor material. This view, called 'neutral monism', is suggested in Mach's Analysis of Sensations, developed in William James's Essays in Radical Empiricism, and advocated by John Dewey, as well as by Professor R.B. Perry and other American realists. (32)

Russell's talk of "a more primitive stuff" recalls MacDiarmid's use of the term "original substance", the supposed unity to which the mental and the physical can be reduced. The above passage not only illustrates Russell's position, it also illustrates something of the influence of empirio-criticism among western intellectuals. Bearing in mind the similar influence on contemporary Russian intellectuals, this reinforces the argument that empirio-criticism was, in its various forms, the ideology par excellence of the early twentieth century intelligentsia.

Russell's attack on materialism is an attack on an extreme form of materialism: that matter alone is real and that mind is an illusion. Few materialists, in fact, would go that far. The relevant point is not the illusion of mind but that mind has developed from, and is conditioned by and dependent on, material existence. This is the position which MacDiarmid claims in "Island Funeral" (The Islands of Scotland 1939), a poem in which he attempts to weld the extension of consciousness to a materialist outlook:

Yet if the nature of the mind is determined
By that of the body, as I believe,
It follows that every type of human mind
Has existed an infinite number of times
And will do so. Materialism promises something
Hardly to be distinguished from eternal life.

This notion, though, is possibly an echo from the Nietzschean doctrine of 'eternal recurrence'. In "The Kulturkampf" (A Kist of Whistles 1947), however, MacDiarmid states that the ideal Renaissance writer ('ideal' in the popular sense of the word) straddles the gap between materialism and idealism:

All his works provide the clue
To that kind of consistency in himself
Which he looked for in others.
They show that for him
The most authentic qualities of experience
Were its unpredictability,
Its uniqueness, its individual centres
- Precisely those elements imperfectly recognised

If not denied outright
By the reigning monisms
Of absolute idealism
And mechanical materialism.

It is in this border area, the no-man's-land between rival systems, the points at which - in the poet's terms - philosophical analyses cease to be fruitful, that the domain of poetry begins. This is the meaning of the famous passage in A Drunk Man:

I'll bury nae heid like an ostrich's,
Nor yet believe my een and naething else.
My senses may advise me, but I'll be
Mysel' nae maitter what they tell's....

For I've nae faith in ocht I can explain,
And stert whaur the philosophers leave aff,
Content to glimpse its loops I dinna ettle
To land the sea serpent's sel' wi' ony gaff.

This is also a rejection of monism, a monism being any theory that denies the duality of mind and matter. It is interesting that the "reigning monisms" that MacDiarmid eschews are the extremes of "absolute" idealism and "mechanical" materialism. It would seem to be implied in "The Kulturkampf" that dialectical materialism can be reconciled to dualism. Empirio-criticism is at least implicit.

There is evidence throughout MacDiarmid's poetry of a desire to establish an out-and-out materialist position, but he never finally rids himself of the vestiges of mentalism. In the "Second Hymn to Lenin" (1932), for example, and it is difficult to think of a more ironic location, he writes that "oor new state" in the extension of consciousness will require us to put aside "A' that's material and moral". The "new state" must, therefore, be interpreted as a realm of pure thought or pure spiritual existence. In the "Third Hymn to Lenin" (Three Hymns to Lenin 1957), he declares that "thought is reality - and thought alone!" He notes that thought "must absorb all the material" in order to produce "The mastery by the spirit of all the facts that can be known". This statement David Craig has rightly described as:

...the most arrant idealism - treating the mental processes that depend on material existence as somehow higher than it, more "real". (33)

In his concluding chapter of The Problem of Metaphysics (1974), D.M. Mackinnon, Norris-Hulse Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, writes:

If it is insulting to the atheist to speak of him as unknown to himself a religious man, it is permissible to remember that unlike the positivist he allows himself to be concerned with what is, in the very special sense of demanding an unconditional validity for what he says. Hence, indeed, the violence of

Lenin's polemics against Bogdanov, for the latter's readiness to substitute Ernst Mach's sensationalism for materialism... Lenin's Materialism and Empirio-Criticism... is polemic... Yet it is the sort of work that the philosopher who is concerned with the problem of metaphysics would do well to remember and that not least in the present context as we recall the poetry that MacDiarmid has written in Lenin's honour. (34)

This concern with "what is" on the atheist's part and his demand for "an unconditional validity for what he says", Mackinnon locates in MacDiarmid's long poem "On A Raised Beach" (Stony Limits 1934). He talks of "the grave atheism" expressed in the poem and notes that:

MacDiarmid writes as an atheist and his poem is eloquent testimony that out of an atheist ontology a great poem may spring. (35)

This is an interpretation with which MacDiarmid himself agreed. (36)

In a more recent discussion, however, Ruth McQuillan has argued that Mackinnon's conclusion "makes allowance for not quite all of the ambiguities within the poem". (37) With reference to an unpublished version of the poem, which "for the sake of a hypothesis" she takes to be an earlier version, McQuillan argues:

There is for one thing a stratum of what one must call hope - hope seen in a cosmic and geological context - which is more submerged in the published version. (38)

Quoting the following lines from the published version, McQuillan notes "it is that word "yet" that bears the burden of hope here". (39)

Every stone in the world,
Covers infinite death, beyond the reach
Of the dead it hides; and cannot be hurled
Aside yet to let any of them come forth, as love
Once made a stone move (italics mine)

Although she does not go on to quote the next two lines:

(Though I do not depend on that
My case to prove).

Those two lines are evidence not so much of ambiguity as of uncertainty in MacDiarmid's ontology as it appears in "On A Raised Beach" and although that uncertainty may appear here in specific reference to one or another form of 'resurrection' (a religious doctrine at bottom), it derives ultimately from his attempt to reconcile materialism and idealism. He is still striving to prove his case.

What concerns him in "On A Raised Beach" is not just the question of life beyond, or after, death but, as he puts it in "O Ease My Spirit" (Second Hymn 1935), the "terribly illuminating / Integration of the physical and the spiritual" of which that question is but a part. His "great poem" springs not so much from his "atheist

ontology" as from his attempt to integrate that (materialist) ontology with his intuition of spiritual values: his "aesthetic vision" and "sense of perfect form", as he puts it in the poem. Moreover, it is not necessary to attend to the unpublished version of the poem in order to illustrate this tension.

"On A Raised Beach", forbye linguistic difficulties effectively countered by the use of appropriate dictionaries, must be, conceptually, one of the most difficult poems in the English language. In the poem, MacDiarmid is constantly shifting ground in an attempt to unravel the very thread of "Being". It is his conception of the nature or essence of things, his ontology, that is central. "It is", as he puts it, "reality that is at stake". Here, the extremes are those of "Being and non-being" and they do not so much 'meet' as "Confront each other" for reality:

It is reality that is at stake.
Being and non-being with equal weapons here
Confront each other for it, non-being unseen
But always on the point, it seems, of showing clear,
Though its reserved contagion may breed
This fancy too in my still susceptible head
And then by its own hidden movement lead
Me as by aesthetic vision to the supposed
Point where by death's logic everything is recomposed,
Object and image one, from their severance freed,
As I sometimes, still wrongly, feel 'twixt this storm beach and me.

The tension derives here from the confrontation of his vitalism, his evolutionism, and his "savage realism". That realism accepts - as he puts it later in the poem - that "the meaning of life... is death". That is, that not only is there no 'hereafter' but that life has no significance beyond itself. But against this conclusion his vitalism continues to rebel. The struggle between "Being and non-being" is presented as a war of absolutes. But it is because "non-being" (which equates emotionally and intellectually with his "savage realism") wins no outright victory that he is lead to intuit the possibility, at least, of an 'other' or 'higher' unity 'beyond' or 'behind' death:

...the supposed
Point where by death's logic everything is recomposed,
Object and image one, from their severance freed (italics mine)

On one level this may be read as simply the reconstitution of matter through decay. But it does not take "fancy" or "aesthetic vision" to achieve that kind of understanding, nor is that sort of recomposition "supposed". The recomposition MacDiarmid is supposing (or proposing) is of "Object and image", of the external phenomenon and the internal picture, image, or sense-datum. The supposed recomposition is the

(re-)unification of the external or material with the internal or spiritual. This "Integration of the physical and the spiritual" is not "terribly illuminating" for either the reader or the poet. It is "supposed" in death and "still wrongly" felt in life. It is "wrongly" felt because the "aesthetic vision" does not fit the facts of life as accepted by his "savage realism". This "aesthetic vision" is associated with the "imaginative, poetical cult" whereby he "romanticised and idealised" his life. Such fancies are bred in his "still susceptible head".

Despite his "atheist ontology", MacDiarmid is still "susceptible" to idealist conclusions. The "supposed / Point whereby death's logic everything is recomposed" is but a short step from:

...daith may only be
A change o' senses so's a man
Anither warl' can see. ("Ballad of the Five Senses")

In "On A Raised Beach", the notion of the supposed unity of object and image leads MacDiarmid to demand "Contact with elemental things" and to "go apart" into a "more beautiful and more oppressive world". This "world", he says, "fills me with a sense of perfect form" which he posits as the absolute of existence and creation:

It fills me with a sense of perfect form,
The end seen from the beginning, as in a song.
It is no song that conveys the feeling
That there is no reason why it should ever stop,
But the kindred form I am conscious of here
Is the beginning and end of the world,
The unsearchable masterpiece, the music of the spheres,
Alpha and Omega, the Omnific Word.

This unity is not "supposed" but intuited, and the fact that "Few survive" this experience, as the poet has it, suggests once again that his cosmic egotism is assuming self-identification with the whole of creation and with the all-creating word. Here, the "Omnific Word" is heavy with a metaphysical meaning that it did not possess in Cenchrastus when he wrote:

Time eneuch then to seek the Omnific Word
In Jamieson yet.

In "On A Raised Beach", MacDiarmid is claiming more than an historical world-consciousness. This he has extended to consciousness of a "kindred form" that is "the beginning and end of the world", and that "kindred form" must, by definition, inhere in a timeless realm of consciousness or an eternal realm of the spirit. Thus, we are taken far beyond Mackinnon's argument that:

...it is indeed a poet's sense of substance as a very
condition of objectivity that MacDiarmid conveys...
it is an objectivity which meditation on the ancient

rocks makes it possible for him to lay hold of; he is delivered from a self-regarding anthropocentrism, admitted to a serenely accepted atheism by finding in the relatively changeless rocky environment which he confronts an eloquent reminder of the relativity of human existence, of life itself. It is indeed an ontological relativity that he affirms. On the plane of being there is that which has been before human emergence upon the earth and will survive its disappearance. (40)

That "sense of substance" we could associate with MacDiarmid's "elemental things" and "the kindred form". But it is difficult to see how the "objectivity" of MacDiarmid's "aesthetic vision" can, in reality, be reconciled^{to} an "ontological relativity". Both MacDiarmid and Professor Mackinnon are claiming the best of both "worlds". The poet is certainly attempting some such reconciliation, but the fact remains that one cannot, at one and the same time, lay claim to objectivity and relativism, unless by objectivity one simply means strict adherence to the limitations of a relativist position, and MacDiarmid's "meditation" or "aesthetic vision" lays claim to much more than that. Moreover, anthropocentrism is not totally eschewed, since, as the poet argues, it is necessary to realise that "our function remains / However isolated we seem fundamental to life as theirs" (the stones').

It is interesting to note here that the claim to objectivity is given in Cencrastus in the most absolute terms. MacDiarmid's cosmic egotism, as it is manifest in the following lines, not only images the extension of consciousness in clearly idealist terms, but also lays claim to nothing less than a potential infallibility:

My verse bein' fallible's no' poetry yet
And that is a' that I'm concerned about.
The consciousness that maitter has entrapped
In minerals, plants and beasts is strugglin' yet
In men's minds only, seekin' to win free,
As poets' ideas, in the fecht wi' words,
Forced back upon themsel's and made mair clear,
Owrecome a' thwarts whiles, miracles at last.

It is a necessary condition of the quest for an infallible poetry and the near-omniscience of "the kindred form" that MacDiarmid sees thought, or "ideas", as something distinct from language, or "words". In short, MacDiarmid sees thought (viz. "Thocht") as existing apart from language. Thought, for MacDiarmid, as he was finally to admit in "Third Hymn to Lenin", is purely spiritual. Thought is entrapped in words, consciousness in matter, but it must struggle to win free from words as part of the struggle of consciousness to overcome matter. Thus, in "On A Raised

Beach", the "Omnific Word" is associated with the stones because

These stones have the silence of supreme creative power...
Which alone leads to greatness. (*italics mine*)

The notion that thought is 'above', 'behind' or 'beyond' language leads the poet to reify thought as something distinct and autonomous and thus the "Omnific Word" is possessed of metaphysical attributes rather than linguistic ones. It is the all-creating word of which language, infused with thought, is but a pale imitation. For MacDiarmid, language springs from thought rather than thought from language. In short, he is seeing life as determined by consciousness rather than consciousness by life.

What then is the "poet's sense of substance" that Mackinnon takes to be the "very condition of objectivity that MacDiarmid conveys" ? To begin with, it is based on MacDiarmid's self-identification with the stones which symbolise "The foundation and end of all life", the "beginning and end of the world... Alpha and Omega". It is this super-human objectivity that he strives to imitate through a Nietzschean "manly will" rather than through a Romantic (or religious) "Infinite longing". The process nevertheless involves 'a leap of faith'. Thus, as "these stones have dismissed / All but all of evolution" so the poet claims:

I too lying here have dismissed all else.

And again:

Already I feel all that can perish perishing in me
As so much has perished and all will yet perish in these stones.

Therefore, it is not to the "visible substances" or the "Psychological rhythms and other factors in the case" but to the felt unity of an underlying substance that the stones represent; to which the poet looks:

Varied forms and functions though life may seem to have shown
They all come back to the likeness of stone...

So his "Muse" claims to be at one not simply with human or animal
"Psychological rhythms":

...my Muse is, with this ampler scope,
This more divine rhythm, wholly at one
With the earth, riding the Heavens with it, as the stones do
And all soon must.

The stones, thus represent a metaphysical unity, rather than a materialist unity, which the poet claims to have intuited and/or 'experienced'. Whether or not MacDiarmid can still wish to lay claim to an atheist ontology is a moot point, for the unity subscribed to is patently idealist. Thus, his epistemology, or theory of knowledge, recognises a need for supra-rational objectivity, a near-omniscience or infallibility:

This is the road leading to certainty,
Reasoned planning for the time when reason can no longer avail.

This paradox central to the extension of consciousness is inescapable because the universe functions according to "ordered adjustments / Out of reach of perceptive understanding".

The "poet's sense of substance", then, derives from that intuited empirio-critical given, that unity of impression, that "Integration of the physical and the spiritual" - and we are not a hundred miles from Wordsworth's Prelude:

When from behind that craggy Steep, till then
The bound of the horizon, a huge Cliff,
As if with voluntary power instinct,
Uprear'd its head. I struck, and struck again,
And, growing still in stature, the huge Cliff
Rose up between me and the stars, and still,
With measur'd motion, like a living thing,
Strode after me...

...and after I had seen
That spectacle, for many days, my brain
Work'd with a dim and undetermin'd sense
Of unknown modes of being; in my thoughts
There was a darkness, call it solitude,
Or blank desertion, no familiar shapes
Of hourly objects, images of trees,
Of sea or sky, no colours of green fields;
But huge and mighty Forms that do not live
Like living men mov'd slowly through my mind
By day and were the trouble of my dreams. (Book 1)

MacDiarmid's mimesis may not be as overtly Romantic as Wordsworth's, but his "aesthetic vision" is based on a similar intuition of an underlying unity of impression: "a sense of perfect form". Coupled with this, MacDiarmid's vision demands a Nietzschean will to power:

- Nay, the truth we seek is as free
From all yet thought as a stone from humanity.
Here where there is neither haze nor hesitation
Something at least of the necessary power has entered into me...

My disposition is towards spiritual issues
Made inhumanly clear...
In such a way that it becomes for a moment
Superhumanly, menacingly clear -

This is part of the end-process of MacDiarmid's God-building vitalism with which we shall deal in full in the following chapter. Suffice to note for the moment that the objectivity he strives for in "On A Raised Beach" owes much to Nietzsche's idea of the "Superman".

In Gencrastus (1930), the poet had written:

The day is comin' when ilka stane
'll hae as guid as a human brain
And frae what they are noc men
Develop in proportion then...

In "On A Raised Beach" this evolutionism is not reversed. It is not a question of returning to a subhuman existence. Rather, the stones are symbols of a higher, superhuman, level of consciousness to which man must attain. Thus:

It is a paltry business to try to drag down
 The arduus furor of the stones to the futile imaginings of men
 This vitalism - which exists in contradistinction to his "savage
 realism" - is apparent throughout his work and it is ultimately
 engaged with idealism. In "Mind's End" (The Lucky Bag 1927), for
 instance, he writes:

There's nocht but whiles presents itsel'
 To me as tho' my mind
 Had been, in its development,
 A stage left fer behind.

And it is significant that innatism is accepted from the outset:

The mighty things that kyth in me
 Were born in me nor fed.

It is necessary to his evolutionism.

A man who certainly seems to have influenced MacDiarmid
 with regard to his evolutionism or vitalism is the empirio-critic,
 Alfred North Whitehead, whose Science and the Modern World (1926) he
 often referred to with praise. Whitehead was of the type of empirio-
 critic known as 'Holist'. Holists, as Mirsky describes them;

...admit mechanicism as relatively valid, and from its
 insufficiency, instead of making the deduction that a
 better scientific method is required, they make the
 deduction that there is a limit to the sphere of
 application of scientific method. According to them
 science can know positively only what is abstract,
 whereas what is concrete can be known only by intuition. (41)

There is undoubtedly a resemblance here between this argument and
 MacDiarmid's poetic practice, his belief in Annals that "the imagination
 had some way of dealing with the truth, which the reason had not", his
 abiding intuition of the "Integration of the physical and the spiritual",
 and his notion of "Reasoned planning for the time when reason can no
 longer avail". Whitehead, "one of the leading holists", as Mirsky notes:

...collaborated with Russell in his Principles of
 Mathematics and drew no line between his own views
 and Russell's mechanistic results. Thus science was
 regarded as the proper sphere of mechanicism, and if
 one is to liberate oneself from this it is regarded
 as necessary to reject science altogether and place
 one's faith in direct all-embracing intuition.
 Intuition of this type is proper to poets and mystics...
 By reserving such an eminent position for poets and
 artists holism has had a great influence on the young
 generation of highbrows... which has been observable
 since about the year 1925. (42)

The eminent position reserved for poets and artists would undoubtedly
 have appealed to MacDiarmid's elitism, and there is, as we have seen,
 evidence throughout MacDiarmid's poetry of "faith in direct all-
 embracing intuition". Indeed, the following passage from Science and

the Modern World reads almost like a critique of MacDiarmid:

Faith in reason is the trust that the ultimate natures of things lie together in a harmony which excludes mere arbitrariness. It is the faith that at the base of things we shall not find mere arbitrary mystery. The faith in the order of nature which has made possible the growth of science is a particular example of a deeper faith. This faith cannot be justified by any inductive generalisation. It springs from direct inspection of the nature of things as disclosed in our own immediate present experience. There is no parting from your own shadow. To experience this faith is to know that in being ourselves we are more than ourselves: to know that our experience, dim and fragmentary as it is, yet sounds the utmost depths of reality: to know that detached details merely in order to be themselves demand that they should find themselves in a system of things: to know that this system includes the harmony of logical rationality, and the harmony of aesthetic achievement: to know that, while the harmony of logic lies upon the universe as an iron necessity, the aesthetic harmony stands before it as a living ideal moulding the general flux in its broken progress towards finer, subtler issues. (43)

Whitehead's combination of "logical rationality" and "aesthetic achievement" and his talk of the "deeper faith" that underlies the scientific spirit recalls MacDiarmid's description of science as "Vision" and his looked-for synthesis of science and poetry "for the Super-Sense that is to be". Only, MacDiarmid's faith lies ultimately in imaginative "Thocht" which he sees as more valuable in the extension of consciousness than reason. And it is "Thocht" rather than (or as a 'higher' form of) reason from which his faith in the harmony of things springs. As he puts it "Diamond Body" (A Lap of Honour 1967):

Our mind's already sense that the fabric of nature's laws
Conceals something that lies behind it,
A greater-unity.

MacDiarmid's mind had already 'sensed' this in A Drunk Man, published the same year as Whitehead's Science and the Modern World (1926). Faith in the ultimate harmony of nature is a very strong motif in the poem even though the poet partially eschews anthropocentrism:

Thou art the facts in ilka airt
That breenge into infinity,
Criss-crossed wi' coontless ither facts
Nae man can follow, and o' which
He is himsel' a helpless pairt,
Held in their tangle as he were
A stick-nest in Ygdrasil !...

My sinnens and my veins are but
As muckle o' a single shoot
Wha's fibre? I can ne'er unwaft...
And a' the life o' Earth to be
Can never lift frae underneath
The shank o' which oor destiny's pairt
As heich's to stand forenenst the trunk
Stupendous as a windlestrae !

The important role which Whitehead reserves for the "harmony of aesthetic achievement" that can lead man to "finer, subtler issues" than "logic" alone can do would have struck a chord with MacDiarmid's artistic elitism and it is certainly in keeping with his statement that "I've nae faith in ocht I can explain, / And stert whaur the philosophers leave aff.." Equally appealing would be the emphasis Whitehead puts on literature:

It is in literature that the concrete outlook of humanity receives its expression. Accordingly it is to literature that we must look, particularly in its more concrete forms, namely in poetry and in drama, if we hope to discover the inward thoughts of a generation. (44)

Moreover, something at least approaching Whitehead's theory of "organic mechanism" (an empirio-critical 'resolution' of the problem of dualism) is exemplified in some of the philosophic passages of A Drunk Man. Approaching the problem of dualism, Whitehead begins with a rejection of materialism and mechanistic materialism (though at times he does not seem to recognise the distinction):

The doctrine which I am maintaining is that the whole concept of materialism only applies to very abstract entities, the products of logical discernment. The concrete enduring entities are organisms, so that the plan of the whole influences the very characters of the various subordinate organisms which enter into it. In the case of an animal, the mental states enter into the plan of the total organism and thus modify the plans of the successive subordinate organisms until the smallest organisms, such as electrons, are reached. Thus an electron within a living body is different from an electron outside it, by reason of the plan of the body... this principle of modification is perfectly general throughout nature, and represents no property peculiar to living bodies... this doctrine involves the abandonment of the traditional scientific materialism, and the substitution of an alternative doctrine of organism... I would term the doctrine... the theory of organic mechanism... In this theory, the molecules may blindly run in accordance with the general laws, but the molecules differ in their intrinsic characters according to the general plans of the situations in which they find themselves. (45)

This "organic mechanism" whereby "the molecules may blindly run in accordance with the general laws" is apparent in the following lines in which Blind Proteus symbolises movement in obedience to hidden harmony:

Blin' Proteus wi' leafs or hands
Or flippers ditherin' in the lift...
- Hoo lang maun I gi'e aff your forms
O' plants and beasts and men and Gods
And like a doited Atlas bear

This steeple o' fish, this eemis warld,
 Or, maniac heid wi' snakes for hair,
 A Maenad, ape Aphrodite
 And scunner the Eternal sea ?

It is interesting to note how MacDiarmid identifies with Blind Proteus so that it is he who 'gives off' the seemingly illimitable forms of nature. This self-identity with the whole of creation and its plan involves him in a God-like pose: an example of MacDiarmid's 'transcendentalism' coming out of the 'materialism' - "out of the seeds of things". This notion of the molecules functioning in accordance with general laws is vividly illustrated in the following lines:

I love to muse upon the skill that gangs
 To mak' the simplest thing that Earth displays,
 The eident life that ilka atom thrangs,
 And uses it in the appointit ways,
 And a' the endless brain that nocht escapes
 That myriad moves them to inimitable shapes.

Here is ample evidence of how MacDiarmid's "organic mechanism" leads to idealism. For here is no empty mechanism. Rather, the organised functioning of "ilka atom" according to "appointit ways" suggests to the poet that nature itself is possessed of a 'higher' intelligence: "the endless brain that nocht escapes" which "moves" each atom. He takes the thistle, which grows "exactly as its instinct says", as a micro-cosmic example of this pre-ordained order and, as the term "endless brain" suggests, he is lead to confront the question of "spirit":

But I can form nae notion o' the spirit
 That gars it tak' the difficult shape it does...

The craft that hit upon the reishlin' stalk
 Wi'ts gausty leafs and a' its datchie jags,
 And spired it syne in seely floo'ers to brak
 Like sudden lauchter owre its fousome rags
 Jouks me, sardonic lover, in the routh
 O' contraries that jostle in this dumfoondrin' growth.

Although he cannot form a clear notion of the "spirit" or "craft" that gives this phenomenon life and shape he nevertheless accepts the existence of such a metaphysical force.

For Whitehead, it is not simply science that, as Mirsky points out, is limited in application to the abstract, but philosophy itself. And for Whitehead, as for MacDiarmid, the poet starts where the philosophers leave off. Whitehead:

I hold that philosophy is the critic of abstractions.
 Its function is the double one, first of harmonising
 them by assignning to them their right relative status
 as abstractions, and secondly of completing them by
 direct comparison with more concrete intuitions of the
 universe, and thereby promoting the formation of more
 complete schemes of thought. It is in respect to this
 comparison that the testimony of great poets is of

such importance. Their survival is evidence that they express deep intuitions of mankind penetrating into what is universal in concrete fact. (46)

This acceptance of Romantic Egoism is emphasised by the fact that Whitehead's statement is made with specific reference to Wordsworth and Shelley. Again, by way of comparison, it is interesting to note that Whitehead's stress on intuition colours his thought with a certain subjectivism which he is careful to temper, on his own terms, so as to avoid solipsism:

I am giving the outline of what I consider to be the essentials of an objectivist philosophy adapted to the requirement of science and to the concrete experience of mankind... My point is, that in our sense-experience we know away from and beyond our own personality; whereas the subjectivist holds that in such experience we merely know about our own personality. (47)

This knowing away from and beyond our own personality recalls his statement (see above p.129) that faith in the ultimate harmony of things "is to know that in being ourselves we are more than ourselves" - what MacDiarmid refers to in "Diamond Body" as "the certainty that something lives through me / Rather than I myself live".

This 'knowing away from' involves Whitehead in a necessary reduction of perceiver and perceived which is to be judged not in terms of abstract logic but in terms of "our naive experience". Organic mechanism, in other words, is but another form of empirio-criticism, and one which leads, quite explicitly with Whitehead, to idealism:

You are in a certain place perceiving things. Your perception takes place where you are, and is entirely dependent on how your body is functioning. But this functioning of the body in one place, exhibits for your cognisance an aspect of the distant environment, fading away into the general knowledge that there are things beyond. If this cognisance conveys knowledge of a transcendental world, it must be because the event which is the bodily life unifies in itself aspects of the universe. (48)

This certainly anticipates MacDiarmid's statement that "Human life itself implies a belief in... the transcendental". Whitehead's reduction of perceiver and perceived into what he calls an "event" also anticipates MacDiarmid's putative merging of object and image in "On A Raised Beach" and his claim for "The complete abolition of the original / Undifferentiated state of subject and object" on which his "certainty that something lives through me" is based in "Diamond Body". And it is not surprising that Whitehead turns to Romantic poetry for 'evidence' to sustain his theory:

This is a doctrine extremely consonant with the vivid

expression of personal experience which we find in the nature-poetry of imaginative writers such as Wordsworth or Shelley. The brooding, immediate presences of things are an obsession to Wordsworth. What the theory does do is to edge cognitive away from being the necessary substratum of the unity of experience. That unity is now placed in the unity of an event. Accompanying this unity, there may or there may not be cognition. (49)

Through the introduction of this posited "unity of an event", Whitehead is able to impress that there is no contradiction between the subjectivist idealist basis of his argument and the objectivist conclusion that he seeks to reach. The perceiver, according to the argument, is no longer the centre, nor the cause, of his perception. He is merely an aspect of an "event" whose nature implies the existence of external objects. Moreover, if this "naive experience" which is not dependent on cognition seems to convey "knowledge" of a transcendental world that is because, with faith in all-embracing intuition, there is such a world: "there are things beyond".

Empirio-criticism, thus, naturally lends itself to evolutionism and to an evolutionism which can claim entry into transcendental phases. The underlying belief is that evolution may well be illimitable. Whitehead:

Nature exhibits itself as exemplifying a philosophy of the evolution of organisms subject to determinate conditions... The general aspect of nature is that of evolutionary expansiveness. These unities, which I call events, are the emergence into actuality of something. (50)

These "unities" or "events" are, indeed, curiously similar to the mental experiences described by MacDiarmid in Annals of the Five Senses, and, in Whitehead, MacDiarmid would certainly have found intellectual justification for the use he made of these experiences in his poetry. Thus, for MacDiarmid, poetry necessarily involves this knowing away from and beyond our own personality - or, as he puts it in "The Terrible Crystal" (A Lap of Honour (1967)), our "sensibility":

The poetry I seek must therefore have the power
Of fusing the discordant qualities of experience,
Of mixing moods, and holding together opposites,
And well I know that the various facets
Of sensibility, sensuous, mental, and emotional,
And its alternating moods
Cannot be fully reconciled
Save in an imaginative integrity
That includes, but transcends, sensibility as such.

This is central to the extension of consciousness, to the function of poetry, this idealist notion of "an imaginative integrity / That includes, but transcends, sensibility as such". A fine example of MacDiarmid imaging this process of knowing away from and building

towards

towards this idealist "integrity" is "Diamond Body": The poem opens with a materialist appraisal of consciousness:

What after all do we know of this terrible 'matter'
Save as a name for the unknown and hypothetical cause
Of states of our own consciousness ? There are not two worlds,
A world of nature, and a world of human consciousness,
Standing over against one another, but one world of nature
Whereof human consciousness is an evolution...

But one notices immediately that the question almost begs a solipsist answer. He then proceeds by an argument from design - with reference to a 'Guadapada' but it could just as easily be Paley - to suggest that the world and his body have been produced "for another's use". Having taken up this tack, he then declares that our minds "sense" that the fabric of nature's laws conceals behind nature a "greater-unity" and, then, not just one but "many more". It is now that he introduces the required "imaginative integrity":

Today we are breaking up the chaste
Ever-deceptive phenomena of Nature
And reassembling them according to our will.
We look through matter, and the day is not far distant
When we shall be able to cleave
Through her oscillating mass as if it were air.

This is reminiscent of his argument in Lucky Poet (see above p.109) that "the original unity of experience is reconstituted on a higher plane" through the "'breaking up' of the immediate unity of experience" and the "universalisation of the elements thus analysed out", an argument not entirely dissimilar to Whitehead's. This talk of reassembling natural phenomena and cleaving through mass as if it were air is meant, it seems, literally. If that is so, it is not so much 'arrant' as 'arrogant' idealism. However, interpreted along the lines of his "imaginative integrity" it is but another form of his 'divine solipsism' at work with its concomitant faith in the Nietzschean cult of the "will". And it is through this that he is led to the "certainty" that something lives through him.

MacDiarmid's affinity with Whitehead can be further illustrated by reference to Whitehead's belief that evolution is, in part at least, an aesthetic process:

Remembering the poetic rendering of our concrete experience, we see at once that the element of value, of being valuable... must not be omitted in any account of an event as the most concrete actual something. 'Value' is the word I use for the intrinsic reality of an event. Value is an element which permeates through and through the poetic view of nature... The problem of evolution is the development of enduring harmonies of enduring shapes of value, which merge into higher

attainments of things beyond themselves. Aesthetic attainment is interwoven in the texture of realisation. The endurance of an entity represents the attainment of a limited aesthetic success. (51)

The celebration of the aesthetic pattern of nature is a common motif, as are the "enduring shapes of value" such as the stones are made to represent in "On A Raised Beach", in MacDiarmid's poetry. Whitehead, indeed, provides a pointer to the evolutionary significance that MacDiarmid invests in the stone-symbols of "On A Raised Beach":

Enduring things are... the outcome of a temporal process; whereas eternal things are the elements required for the very being of the process... Only if you take material to be fundamental, this property of endurance is an arbitrary fact at the base of the order of nature; but if you take organism to be fundamental, this property is the result of evolution. (52)

For Whitehead, these enduring things are "structures of activity" just as the stones represent for MacDiarmid "Infinite movement visibly defending itself... At every point of the universal front". And it is because MacDiarmid regards the stones as something at least akin to Whitehead's "structures of activity" that he can see all the varied forms and functions of life coming "back to the likeness of stone" and can state that "these stones are one with the stars".

Whitehead's doctrine of "organic mechanism" is, as he admits himself, incompatible with a materialist ontology. (53)

Moreover, the inevitable outcome of his empirio-criticism is a religious attitude:

The power of God is the worship. He inspires. That religion is strong which in its ritual and its modes of thought evokes an apprehension of the commanding vision. The worship of God is not a rule of safety - it is an adventure of the spirit, a flight after the unattainable. The death of religion comes with the repression of the high hope of adventure. (54)

That MacDiarmid did not pursue empirio-criticism to its religious conclusion suggests that what he wished to extract from writers like Alfred North Whitehead was neither philosophical exactitude nor a sense of religious awe. What attracted him was their attempt to embrace the potential of the human mind, their unwillingness to set (material) limits to the extension of consciousness and their respect for creative ability - forces standing out against what he called in "Song of the Seraphim" (Lucky Poet 1943) a "narrow materiality":

This life we have now outgrown.
It lays the veil of the body over the spirit
And drags everything down to the level
Of a narrow materiality.

But the function of poetry for MacDiarmid (the extension of consciousness) could never finally be extricated from transcendentalism. His evolutionism, as here in Cenchrastus, always tended to go beyond the proper bounds of materialism:

It's no the purpose o' poetry to sing
The beauty o' the dirt frae which we spring
But to cairry us as faur as ever it can
'Yont nature and the Common Man.

The poet attempted to live in the no-man's-land between the warring ideologies of idealism and materialism where there was not so much a meeting of extremes as a tug-of-war. As he put it in A Drunk Man:

The tug-o'-war is in me still,
The dog-hank o' the flesh and soul -

MacDiarmid's poetry is, to a considerable extent and in a very real sense, an attempt to write out that tug-of-war, to circumjack the inconsistencies and contradictions in his own ontological and epistemological perspective. It is an attempt to reconcile - or compromise between - an idealist and a materialist outlook that characterises so much of his poetry rather than any intensification of dialectical materialism. The spectre that haunted MacDiarmid was not the spectre of communism that Marx and Engels declared in The Communist Manifesto (1848) to be haunting Europe, but the spectre of the "terribly illuminating / Integration of the physical and the spiritual" with its intuition of a greater-unity 'beyond'. Of the great pipe-music (in "Lament for the Great Music" Stony Limits 1934) he thus wrote:

Its apprehension an activity of concentrated repose
So still that in it time and space cease to be
And its relations are with itself, not with anything external.

It is the supreme reality (not the Deity of personal theism)
Standing free of all historical events in past or future,
Knowable - but visible to the mind alone;

As with "Lament for the Great Music", much of his poetry can be interpreted as a "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty" with the word 'intellectual' signifying, as it did for Shelley, 'non-material'.

In "Lament for the Great Music", MacDiarmid defines the "duty of the Scottish genius" as expressing this intuited "unity of life" and so leading man "to cosmic consciousness". This process, he says, "must be thought of as a craft / In which the consummation of the idea... Must be the subject of the object - life": in other words, the integration of the physical and the spiritual, the internal and the external, is what characterises this consummation.

The emphasis of MacDiarmid's evolutionism is on self-will and creativity. As Whitehead put it:

The other side of the evolutionary machinery, the neglected side, is expressed by the word creativity. The organisms can create their own environment. (55)

Through his cosmic egotism, MacDiarmid's "Thocht" or "imaginative integrity" takes him far beyond this - into the realms of a 'God-like' or 'divine' solipsism. As his intensified anthropocentrism puts it in Cenrastus:

Man's the reality that mak's
A' things possible, even himsel' !

Entry into such imaginative realms is called for, in his own terms, because his vitalism or evolutionism is not content with less than complete self-identification with the 'life-force' itself. As he images it in A Drunk Man:

A mony-brainchin' candelabra fills
The lift and 's lowin' wi' the stars;
The Octopus Creation is wallopin'
In coontless faddoms o' a nameless sea.

I am the candelabra, and burn
My endless candles to an Unkent God.
I am the mind and meanin' o' the octopus
That throws its empty airms through a' th'Inane.

Psychologically speaking, this self-identification derives from his own mental experiences and his resultant intuitions about their significance. In philosophical terms, this necessitated an empirio-critical outlook giving rise to an imaginative attempt to weld together idealism and materialism: the putative, but philosophically incoherent, doctrine of 'transcendental materialism'. Thus, the tug-of-war between these opposing ideologies is a central concern in his poetic output. The tension is a source of contradiction, inconsistency and confusion. But it is also a source of inspiration and creativity. For, if MacDiarmid's poetry is born out of argument, and a great deal of it is, it is born out of argument not so much with God, or life, but with himself. But beneath all the argument there remains his abiding faith in the power of poetry to bring about the ultimate reconciliation or synthesis of all the contradictions and inconsistencies. As he wrote in A Drunk Man:

And O ! I canna thole
Aye yabblin' o' my soul,
And fain I wad be free
O' my eternal me,
Nor fare mysel' alane
- Withoot that tae be gane,
And this, I ha'e nae doot,
This road'll bring aboot.

This faith that poetry can extend consciousness in the direction of absolute knowledge and self-identity of a 'divine' nature is what is known in proper terms as the contradictory 'philosophy' or doctrine of 'God-building', which is the subject of our next chapter.

There is, however, one final point to be made with regard to MacDiarmid's talk of his "intensified Dialectical Materialism". We have already noted that his poetical practice and theoretical writings often embrace a 'leap of faith' which is evidence of anything but an "intensified" knowledge of dialectical materialism. It was not until he had read Guy Aldred's pamphlet John MacLean Martyr of the Class Struggle (1932), for example, that he showed any full understanding of MacLean's historical significance far less proclaimed "the John MacLean line" as the only way forward for the Scottish working class. It may well be that his theoretical understanding of dialectical materialism derives from this period as well.

In Lucky Poet (1943), he mentions as one of his favourite Russian writers, along with Lenin, Stalin and Shestov, a certain Adoratsky ⁽⁵⁶⁾.

This must be V.V. Adoratsky (1878-1945), eminent marxist historian, Deputy Director of the Institute of Lenin 1928-31, member of the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences from 1932, and Director of the Institute of Marx-Engels-Lenin and of the Institute of Philosophy from 1931 to 1939. It was Adoratsky who helped prepare Lenin's work for publication and who also edited fifteen volumes of the works of Marx and Engels. His Russian works include The Scientific Communism of Karl Marx (1923), The State (1923), Study of the Works of V.I. Lenin (1931) and Marx - the Founder of Scientific Communism (1933). His most important work in English translation, published in 1933, was Dialectical Materialism: the Theoretical Foundation of Marxism-Leninism, and it was from this source that MacDiarmid undoubtedly gleaned the greater part of his belated understanding of the subject, which is why he describes Adoratsky as one of his favourite Russian writers. But MacDiarmid was not, properly speaking, a dialectical materialist in the sense in which Adoratsky would have understood that term. MacDiarmid, as the following chapter illustrates, had more in common with the renegade 'God-builders' of the Bolshevik Party, writers like Gorky and Lunacharsky, than he had with either Adoratsky or Lenin.

- 1 Maurice Cornforth Dialectical Materialism Vol. 1 (London 1968, 1st. pub. 1952) p.24.
- 2 Ibid p. 25.
- 3 Vol. 3 (1969, 1st. pub. 1954) pp. 10-11.
- 4 Edinburgh University Library Gen. 887.
- 5 Ibid. Letter n.d. but certainly written during Second World War.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Metaphysics and Poetry (Hamilton, Scotland 1975) n.p.
- 8 Cornforth op. cit. Vol. 1 p. 25.
- 9 Quoted S.S. Praver Karl Marx and World Literature (O.U.P. 1976) p. 106.
- 10 Lucky Poet (University of California 1972, 1st. pub. 1943) p. 283.
- 11 Metaphysics and Poetry op. cit. n.p.
- 12 Gordon Wright MacDiarmid: an Illustrated Biography (Edinburgh 1977) p. 24.
- 13 Lucky Poet op. cit. p. 310.
- 14 Metaphysics and Poetry op. cit. n.p.
- 15 F.J. Copleston A History of Philosophy Vol. 7, 2 (New York 1975) p. 132.
- 16 V.I. Lenin Materialism and Empirio-Criticism (London 1948) p. 99.
- 17 Isaac Deutscher "Introduction" A.V. Lunacharsky Revolutionary Silhouettes tr. ed. Michael Glenny (London 1967) n.p.
- 18 V.I. Lenin On Literature and Art (Moscow 1967) p. 178.
- 19 Copleston op. cit. p. 133.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 The Scottish Chapbook 1, 11 (June 1923) pp. 301-2.
- 22 Annals of the Five Senses (Montrose 1923) p. 6.
- 23 Ibid p. 161.
- 24 Ibid p. 189.
- 25 Ibid pp. 193-94.
- 26 D.S. Mirsky The Intelligentsia of Great Britain tr. A. Brown (London 1935) pp. 186-88.
- 27 Ibid.
- 28 Ibid pp. 153-54.
- 29 Ibid pp. 16-20.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Copleston op. cit. Vol. 8, 2, pp. 209-10, 325 n.65.
- 32 Bertrand Russell Outline of Philosophy (London 1979, 1st. pub. 1927) p. 235.
- 33 David Craig "MacDiarmid the Marxist Poet" Hugh MacDiarmid: a Festschrift ed. K.D. Duval and Sydney Goodsir Smith (Edinburgh 1962) p. 96.
- 34 D.M. Mackinnon The Problem of Metaphysics (C.U.P. 1974) p. 168.

- 35 Ibid.
- 36 Metaphysics and Poetry op. cit. n.p.
- 37 Ruth McQuillan "Hugh MacDiarmid's "On A Raised Beach"" Akros 12,
34-35 (August 1977) p. 91.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Ibid p. 93.
- 40 Mackinnon op. cit. pp. 166-67.
- 41 Mirsky op. cit. pp. 194-95.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 A.N. Whitehead Science and the Modern World (C.U.P. 1926) pp. 26-27.
- 44 Ibid p. 106.
- 45 Ibid pp. 111-12.
- 46 Ibid p. 122.
- 47 Ibid p. 125.
- 48 Ibid pp. 128-29.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Ibid p. 131.
- 51 Ibid pp. 131-32.
- 52 Ibid pp. 153-54.
- 53 Ibid pp. 151-54.
- 54 Ibid pp. 268-69.
- 55 Ibid p. 158.
- 56 Lucky Poet op. cit. p. 46.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Extension of Consciousness:
God-Seeking and God-Building

Introduction: General Outline of Russian Influences

Most of the material dealt with in this and the following chapter (God-seeking, God-building, Slavophilism and Sophiology) concerns Russian influences on MacDiarmid and involves comparisons with (among others) contemporary Russian writers. In order to help place these influences and comparisons in an apposite cultural milieu it is necessary to outline something of the pervading influence of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Russian culture on contemporary western Europe, notably Britain. Having done so, we are then in a position to understand better why and how Hugh MacDiarmid drew from so many Russian sources for creative, critical and propagandist purposes.

It is important to note, for example, that the mid-nineteenth and late-nineteenth century had seen the flowering of Russian culture under such figures as the poets and novelists, Pushkin (1799-1837), Lermontov (1814-41), Tyutchev (1803-73), Gogol (1809-52), Turgeniev (1818-83), Dostoevsky (1820-81) and Tolstoy (1828-1910); the musicians, Glinka (1804-57), Mussorgsky (1839-81), Tchaikovsky (1840-95) and Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908); and the painter, Ivanov (d.1858). These artists had gained Russia a new acceptance in the West and interest in her art had grown immeasurably by the early twentieth century when the young MacDiarmid takes to his books. During this period a great many books on various aspects of Russian culture began to appear and this interest in Britain in things Russian was undoubtedly further facilitated by political alliance with Tsarist Russia, and a new dimension to this interest was added by the Revolutions of 1917. Thus, when one couples with the figures already mentioned above, names like Chekov, Soloviev, Shestov, Blok, Gorky, Lenin, Trotsky, Lunacharsky and Mayakovsky, one can see that MacDiarmid's fascination with Russian culture was very much in keeping with the fashion of the day.

An important barometer, measuring the extent of Russian influences among British intellectuals of the time, is The New Age which brought together for more than MacDiarmid translations of and articles on Russian writers, as well as those on Nietzsche and the new science of psychology. The following is a comprehensive list of such translations and articles in Orage's weekly paper: from 1908 to 1918:

- 1 1908
 "Immortal Russia"
 (21st. March) by Holbrook Jackson.
- 2 1909
 "Boles"
 (7th. Jan.) Short Story by Maxime Gorky.
- 3 "An Interview with the Tsar"
 (2 parts, 15th. and 22nd. April) Short Story by Gorky.

1910

- 4 "The Sage"
(6th. Jan.) Short Story by Gorky.
- 5 "Letter to the Slav Congress in Sofia"
(11th. Aug.) by Leo Tolstoy.
- 6 "An Interview with an American Milliardaire"
(18th. Aug.) Short Story by Gorky.
- 7 "A Christmas Tree and a Wedding"
(20th. Oct.) Short Story by Dostoevsky.
- 8 "Modern Dramatists VII: Tolstoy and Gorky"
(10th. Nov.) by Ashley Dukes.
- 9 "Modern Dramatists VIII: Anton Tchekhov"
(17th. Nov.) by Ashley Dukes.
- 10 "The 'Kreutzer Sonata'"
(24th. Nov.) A review of Aylmer Maude's Life of Tolstoy, Vol. 2, by
A.E. Randall.
- 11 "The Effective Weapon against Capital Punishment. Leo Tolstoy's
Last Message"
(22nd. Dec.).
- 12 "What is Tolstoy's Religion ?"
(29th. Dec.) by A.E. Randall.

1911

- 13 "Tolstoy's 'What is Art?'"
(19th. Jan.) by A.E. Randall.
- 14 "The Grey"
(2nd. Feb.) Short Story by Gorky.
- 15 "The Businessman"
(8th. June) Short Story by Gorky.
- 16 "THE YOUNG ASTROLOGY" (20th. July) C.M. GRIEVE - FIRST APPEARANCE

1912

- 16 "In Search of Information"
(1st. Feb.) Short Story by Chekov.
- 17 "The Calumny"
(17th. Oct.) Short Story by Chekov.

1913

- 18 "An Acquaintance of Hers"
(12th. June) Short Story by Chekov.

1914

- 19 "Popping the Question"
(16th. April) 'A Farce in One Act' by Chekov.
- 20 "Russia and the British Press"
(30th. July) by R. Reynolds.
- 21 "The 'Darkest Russia' Bogey"
(17th. Sept.) by Geoffrey Dennis.
- 22 "Pan-Slavism and the War"
(24th. Sept.) by Geoffrey Dennis.
- 23 "The Teetotallers"
(26th. Nov.) Short Story by Chekov.
- 24 "The Chameleon"
(31st. Dec.) Short Story by Chekov.
- 25 "The Adventures of a Young Russian"
(31st. Dec.) Short Story by C.E. Bechhofer.

1915

- 26 "Letters from Russia"
(Series of 32 "Letters" from 7th. Jan. to 23rd. Dec.) by C.E.
Bechhofer. Title changes to "Letters About Russia on 11th. Nov.
signifying Bechhofer's return from Russia and freedom from Tsarist
Censor.

- 27 "War and Religion"
(7th. Jan.) by Dmitri Merezhkovski.
- 28 "Russian V German Culture"
(14th. Jan.) by John Butler Burke.
- 29 "The Adventures of a Young Russian"
(14th. Jan.) another Short Story by Bechhofer.
- 30 "Partial Truth about the Slavs"
(28th. Jan.) by Paul Selver.
- 31 "The Russian Policy"
(4th. Feb.) by Marmaduke Pichthall.
- 32 "Classification of the Slavs"
(11th. March) by Selver.
- 33 "Wedding"
(29th. April) One-Act Play by Chekov.
- 34 "A Merry Death"
(25th. Nov.) by Nicholas Evreinof (tr. from Russian by Bechhofer).
- 1916
- 35 3 poems by Soloviev; 2 by Merezhkovski; 2 by Sologub; 1 by Bryusov;
1 by Balmont.
(2nd. March) tr. Selver.
- 36 "Mr. Babble on Russia"
(16th. March) by Selver.
- 37 "The Golden Age"
(20th. April) Short Story by A. Avertchenko, tr. Ida Pearl.
- 38 "Tales of Today XIV: Dostoievsky in Nysa"
(3rd. Aug.) by C.E. Bechhofer.
- 39 "Dostoievsky and Tolstoi"
(16th. Nov.) by A. Volynsky.
- 40 "Mozart and Salieri"
(28th. Dec.) by Pushkin, prose tr. by Bechhofer.
- 1917
- 41 "Carlyle's Russian Revolution"
(29th. March) by S.G. Hobson.
- 42 "In the Barber's Saloon"
(3rd. May) Short Story by Chekov.
- 43 "Rousing the Russians"
(7th. June) by A.E.R.
- 44 "Interviews XIII: Mr. Nicholas Gumileff"
(28th. June) by Bechhofer.
- 45 "The Russian Revolution"
(2nd. Aug.) by A.E.R.
- 46 "Russian Poetry in English Verse"
(30th. Aug.) review by Selver.
- 47 Anon. review of Charles Sarolea's The Russian Revolution and the War
(11th. Oct.).
- 48 Anon. review of A.E. Semeonoff and H.J.W. Tillyard's Russian Poetry Reader
(25th. Oct.).
- 1918
- 50 "Tolstoy's Revolution"
(3rd. Jan.) by Ramiro de Maeztu.
- 51 "Dostoyevsky and Certain of his Problems"
(10 parts, 17th. Jan. to 21st. March) by Janko Lavrin.
- 52 "Dostoyevsky the Manichean"
(4th. April) by Ramiro de Maeztu.
- 53 "The Dostoyevsky Problem"
(11th. April) by Janko Lavrin.
- 54 Anon. review of E.J. Dillon's The Eclipse of Russia
(30th. May).
- 55 A different anon. review of the same.
- 56 Review of Aylmer Maude's Leo Tolstoy
(10th. Oct.) by A.E.R.

- 57 Anon. review of P. Graevenitz's From Autocracy to Bolshevism and S. Farbman's Russia and the Struggle for Peace (14th. Nov.).

This comprehensive, though by no means exhaustive, list conveys something of the interest in Russian culture in early twentieth century Britain especially among the intellectuals of the New Age circle with whom MacDiarmid was associated. Moreover, translations, articles and reviews of this type are common to The New Age well into the 'twenties with Philippe Mairet and Janko Lavrin writing on Soloviev, D. Mitrinovic (M.M. Cosmoi or 'Filioque') writing on Russian messianism and related 'spiritual ideas', P.D. Ouspensky writing a series of "Letters from Russia" and Edwin Muir ('Edward Moore') and MacDiarmid writing on things Russian in articles and reviews. The articles on Russian messianism will be dealt with in the following chapter, but it should be noted that Russian influences were such that we find Muir writing in October 1920 that the centre of literature, which he takes to be France and England, is in decline and that a new centre is arising in Russia. "Only among the Slavs", he writes, "is the desire for the spiritual empire of the world creative; only among them is it expressed in accents profound and moving". (1) Mirsky relates something of the significance of this growing concern with Russia in The Intelligentsia of Great Britain:

The period in which the passion for Russian literature reached its height was the war period. In the years of the 1914-18 war, when the crisis of British capitalism became part of the general crisis of capitalism, and entered a new phase in which for anybody with a ha'p'orth of sensitivity it was a reality that could not be put aside, the intelligentsia of Great Britain felt its kinship with that of Russia, and adopted the Russian name. (2)

In his book, The New Age Under Orage, Wallace Martin records that:

..the readers of The New Age, according to Orage, were 'Matthew Arnold's fourth class, namely, that lies outside the three weltering masses, and is composed of individuals who have overcome their class prejudices'. For lack of an English word to describe them, they were to become known during this period as the 'intelligentsia'.

That the term used to describe the déclassé intellectuals was Russian testifies to the deep and pervading influence of contemporary Russian culture. According to Martin, the word first appeared in The New Age in 1913, one year before its first recorded use in the Oxford English Dictionary, although he notes:

The credit for introducing the word in its Russian form and first applying it to English culture, however, must go to Maurice Baring: 'Russian Intelligentsia', The Eye-Witness, II, (11 Jan. 1912). (3)

The extent of these cultural influences is symbolised, says Mirsky, in the cult of Dostoevsky, a cult in which MacDiarmid was for a while, well and truly submersed.

The pre-war years are marked by a triumphant irruption of Russian literature.. before long the Russian novel was to become a synonym for the psychological novel. Just before the war Tolstoy's War and Peace ousted Tourgeniev, and then, during the war, Tolstoy gave place to Dostoievsky...The cult of Dostoievsky began in Great Britain among the intelligentsia during the war.. Now that the hopes of the 1900's had come down to the catastrophe of the war, the incomparably mystical, exaggeratedly irrational cult of faith in Dostoievsky was just what was needed to replace the rarified naturalistically rationalistic faith of Shaw. (4)

Mirsky's remarks on the chronology and nature of this cult would seem to be borne out by Volynsky in his New Age article on "Dostoievsky and Tolstoi" in November 1916:

The extraordinary interest in Dostoievsky at the present time must be considered as a phenomenon of the utmost significance and importance. We are witnessing the flood-tide of a passionate, unceasing interest in him.. Not Tolstoi, observe, but Dostoievsky is being summoned to complete the destruction of the old intellectual bases and foundations, and out of the ruins new paths of life and art are opening. (5)

This Dostoevskian cult was conjoined, in MacDiarmid's case and in that of the New Age circle in general, with a Nietzschean cult, a conjunction which is important to our understanding of God-building. It is no accident that the two names are coupled in A Drunk Man at the point where MacDiarmid is delivering one of the maxims of the God-building mentality:

...gin ye s'ud need mair than ane to teach ye,
Then learn frae Dostoevski and frae Nietzsche.

And let the lesson - to be yersel's,
Ye needna fash gin it's to be ocht else.
To be yersel's - and to mak' that worth bein',
Nae harder job to mortals has been gi'en.

So then, as this and the following chapter illustrate, MacDiarmid was well versed in Russian literature and ideas which he drew from many books (as we shall see) as well as from periodicals like The New Age. Moreover, MacDiarmid's introspective psychologising (as in Annals of the Five Senses) and his general preoccupation with psychological matters was not only not atypical of intellectuals of the time, but was also, as Mirsky points out, related to the "irrational cult of faith" in Dostoevsky:

The new decadent currents definitely broke with.. victorianism. What is most characteristic of the new decadents is their departure from "plain" ways of thought, from a contented realism, and their adoption of introspection, hamletism, introversion, in short, dabblings in psychology. Throughout the liberal era that interest in the workings of the mind grew in English literature, and went on growing till immediately

after the war it reached its culminating point in the cult of Freud and Dostoevsky. (6)

This adoption of introversion, introspection or "hamletism" is especially apparent in Annals of the Five Senses where several of the subject-minds are troubled, in one way or another, by their "decadence". In "A Solitary Wing", for example, we are told:

It is not healthy to live for ever in a mental cinema, least of all when you have.. seen all the films before, and over-familiarity with the technique of production has bred contempt. (7)

"Introspection", Mrs. Morgan realises in "The Never-Yet-Explored",

..was often, quite rightly, condemned as an unhealthy tendency, for it was very common and very disastrous to study feelings in order to increase their pleasantness. As a consequence language had become quite apathetic, generalised until it was without meaning. (8)

In "Four Years' Harvest", as elsewhere in Annals, a contented realism is eschewed to the point of embracing artistic "decadence":

How should he discipline his sympathies ? How order the jungle of his sensibilities that his spirit might dwell there profitably ? Herrick wrote of Julia's silks, Milton of the activities of Satan, Chardin in a kind of stagnant ecstasy painted a clear black-green bottle and an onion, Goya a bull-fight, and Degas a ballet-dancer adjusting her shoe as if in eternal life.. Perhaps it would be better if he dedicated himself to evolving a fantasia in the shape of a cabbage or a poem in the form of a dog. (9)

That MacDiarmid was aware of decadent elements in his own preoccupations is perhaps most clearly attested to in the "Second Hymn to Lenin" where he wrote:

An unexamined life is no' worth ha'in'.
Yet Burke was richt; owre muckle concern
Wi' Life's foundations is a sure
Sign o' decay..

That concern with life's foundations is apparent throughout MacDiarmid's work. It is perhaps especially apparent, in the poetry, in his treatment of the concept of 'Godhead', a treatment which in itself illustrates the signs of decay in the society and culture of the time which produced the new "intelligentsia".

The Concept of 'Godhead'

"Wae's me that made a God" writes MacDiarmid in "Ballad of the Five Senses". In title and nature the poem recalls his first book, Annals of the Five Senses. For both share a concern with introspective psychologising and a pre-occupation with sense-data and the quality of perception that we associate, in philosophy, with the school of empirio-criticism. Furthermore, the declaration, "Wae's me that made a God", echoes

the tragic consciousness inherent in the cult of the Nietzschean/Dostoevskian God-builders. But before proceeding to an analysis of this cult it is necessary to say something of how the poet reacted to more traditional concepts of Godhead.

In A Drunk Man, MacDiarmid complains that the "thocht o' Christ" is "aye liddenin'" in his head and he describes himself as being "fu' o a sticket God" - "fu'" that is of a failed God, and he is "fu'" both in the sense of being "full of" and "fed up with". For this pre-occupation with Godhead has little to do with Christian piety.

Sometimes, the word 'God' is used merely according to convention as, for instance, in "A Glass of Pure Water", where "truth" is portrayed as shining like the sun, "With a monopoly of movement, and a sound like talking to God". But more often, the word, image or concept of 'God' appears as something apart from the received Christian idea of Godhead as omnipotent and omniscient. Moreover, with the exception of some unconvincing juvenilia where the influence of Catholic liturgy is apparent, God is never presented as an eternal being to be worshipped. The traditional Christian God, in other words, is the "sticket God": a God failed in inspiration and purpose and, hence, unable to genuinely inspire the poet.

Furthermore, there is in MacDiarmid's ontology and eschatology no 'Saviour'. In Sangschaw (1925), the ubiquitous figure of "The Innumerable Christ" is fixed in, as it were, permanent crucifixion and there is no looked-for or wish-fulfilled resurrection:

I' mony an unco warl' the nicht
The lift gaes black as pitch at noon,
An' sideways on their chests the heids
O' endless Christs roll doon.

An' when the earth's as cauld's the mune
An' a' its folk are lang syne deid
On ccountless stars the Babe maun cry
An' the Crucified maun bleed.

"I Heard Christ Sing" presents Judas as equal 'Saviour' of mankind; equal, that is, to any Christ. In the comic "Crowdieknowe" the traditional Day-of-Judgement-theme is reversed and God is warned that the resurrected dead might give him 'what for'. In "God Takes a Rest", the 'creator' decides to restore a full life to humankind by returning back in on himself, back to the source of evolution, imaged as the sea:

I'll row the warl' like a plaid nae mair
For comfort roon' aboot me,
And the lives o' men sall be again
As they were lang, wi'oot me.

For I sall hie me back to the sea
Frae which I brocht life yince,
And lie i' the stound o' its whirlpools, free
Frae a' that's happened since.

And in "The Bonnie Broukit Bairn" the new-born earth, it seems, might well drown a seemingly decadent and positively irrelevant universe in its hopeless but human tears.

In Penny Wheep (1926), in the poem "Sea-Serpent", the life-force, or evolutionary momentum, is not being exploited properly by the 'creator'. God has "forgotten" this "a'efauld form o' the maze" and "neither kens nor cares". But the poet hopes that the serpent (which, as in the Drunk Man (1926) and Cencrastus (1930), represents the life-force) might yet "raise a cry that'll fetch God back / To the hert o' his wark again" and he ends by calling on the serpent to "Loup again in His brain". In other words, he hopes that creative evolution will reinvigorate the sticket God. It is an imaginative thesis in which the poet is playing the idea of creative evolution off against traditional (and in his book inadequate) notions of Godhead. There is no belief in God, explicit or implicit, in the poem and the poet, far from seeking God's help presents God as in need of help. It is God who needs to evolve. Thus, the God of received theology does not meet the poet's psychological or imaginative needs. MacDiarmid, then, "fu' o' a sticket God", chooses to advance his own instead.

The notion of the sticket God was with MacDiarmid from the beginning of his writing career and is associated from the outset, typically by way of contrast, with the notion of creative evolution. There is immediate disillusionment with the traditional picture of an omniscient and omnipotent God. But there is faith in the possibilities of human evolution. That man may, can, and should surpass the level of consciousness normally attributed to Godhead is a theme which develops from the early 'mystical' poems, through the Drunk Man and Cencrastus, into the ('materialist') poems of the 'thirties.

In one of his early poems (although listed under the year 1922 in The Complete Poems it was actually written in 1920), MacDiarmid provides us with a characteristic vision of the sticket God and, with regard to that vision, it is a definitive poem. The poem is "Acme", one of the "Sonnets of the Highland Hills":

Let God remember when the world of men
Is like a dream that He can ne'er recall
The mode or meaning of - when Earth's grey ball
(O Force Creative, fail within Him then !)
Drifts shadowily between succeeding stars
That keep him still omnisciently employed
- A vague reminder from some outer void
Of how His will illuminates and chars,

Studding Oblivion with globes of ash,
World after world !... Let him remember then
How aeons earlier when His heart was rash

He set you rapturous upon a peak,
A glory He shall not achieve again,
- A dream He lost and must forever seek !

Here, the image is of an almost burned-out God whose 'omniscience' is pointless. His will destroys what it creates, "chars" what it "illuminates". Thus, it was a rash act of God to create a world which he must desert or destroy and this being the case the poet's hope is that the creative force (which is imaged as something apart from God) fails within him.

Further to the poem, it is interesting to note that the fourth line originally read, "O Wind of love blow cold upon him then !" In substituting the present line ("O Force Creative, fail within Him then !") for that much weaker address MacDiarmid was consciously motivating the image of the sticket God. For he defends the change by saying that H.G. Wells and many others "have pictured the Lovely God still continuing to discover Himself. If that conception is right - then it follows that there is quite room for little lapses and forgettings as well as developings of new attributes".⁽¹⁰⁾ In other words, he is (politely) ridiculing contemporary attempts to update the Christian God by reference to human psychology and fashionable theories of evolution.

This distinction between the sticket God and creative evolution is characteristic of the more mature poetry where, as we have said, the serpent symbolises the life-force or creative evolution. Perhaps the distinction is most clearly illustrated in Cenocrastus where (in the section "Frae Anither Window in Thrums") he writes:

God the Creator still maun ser'
The mindless fools wha canna...
But to see ev'n him as weel as ony man
Can gin he tries
They maun unbig the warld they're paint o'
And brak' the foond whaur the serpent
As a sacrifice lies,

The immortal serpent wa'd up in life
As God in the thochts o' men.
- Open the grave o' the universe
And it'll loup oot again;
And your een sall be like the Bible syne
Gin its middle was tint
And Genesis and Revelation
Alane left in't..

This, at best, is the God that men
Can humanly ken; and the serpent's
The clearest sense o' the nature o' life
To which they can win
- God whirlin' in Juggernaut while under its wheels
The generations are drawn and vanish
Like rouk in the sun !

The same notion recurs as in "Acme": that God has betrayed the vitality of creation which must now not only fend for itself but whose power is potentially greater than God's, that is, whose power is potentially

illimitable. This notion of illimitable creative evolution is at the root of MacDiarmid's God-building. Thus, some three stanzas before that passage, the poet makes a clear distinction between the sticket God and the Man-God of creative evolution who shall rise above both creation and creator:

The God I speak o's him wha made
The warld and ither warlds that are
As different frae't as Nicht frae Day
Or life frae Death
- The God in whom religions centre,
No' Him that lifts unkennable ayont
Creation and Creator baith !

And it is this same Man-God, the end-process of MacDiarmid's God-building vitalism, whose appearance heralds the close of A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle:

No' Him, unkennable abies to faith
- God whom, gin e'er He saw a man, 'ud be
E'en mair dumfooner'd at the sicht than he
- But Him, whom nocht in man or Deity,
Or Daith or Dreid or Laneliness can touch,
Wha's deed owre often and has seen owre much.

MacDiarmid, then, did not seek to be re-united (in his poetry or his life) with the God of Christian theology or mythology, whether that theology or mythology was western or Orthodox. As he says in "Bombinations of a Chimera" (Penny Wheep 1926):

It's time to try God's way
When we've his poo'er tae.

That being the case, it would be very strange indeed if MacDiarmid were a God-seeker in the proper (or Solovievian) sense of the term. For God-seekers, as opposed to God-builders, necessarily accepted - and worshipped - an omnipotent and omniscient Christian God including Vladimir Soloviev who, it has been argued, was the major influence on the poet in this matter.

The distinction between God-building and God-seeking, between the Man-God and the God-Man, may seem at first sight esoteric. But it is of crucial importance to a proper understanding and appreciation of MacDiarmid's poetics, as, indeed, it is crucial to an informed understanding and appreciation of many European writers including, as we shall see, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Gorky, Lunacharsky and (perhaps surprisingly) even George Bernard Shaw.

God-building and God-seeking

In his book, Dialectical Materialism: a Historical and Systematic Survey of Philosophy in the Soviet Union, Gustav Wetter, a

Catholic writer, makes the distinction between God-seekers and God-builders quite clear. The God-builders (Bogostroiteli) were a "movement, half-philosophical and half literary" who included among their numbers Lunacharsky, Gorky and Bazarov:

These writers attempted to construct a religion without pre-supposing the existence of God. In this respect they differed from the God-seekers / Bogoiskateli /, who.. acknowledged a transcendent deity. The God-builders, on the other hand, did not 'seek' God as an already existing entity, but spoke of 'building' him, of the realisation of deity in the collective achievement of mankind.

These Marxists considered mysticism to be a necessary complement to scientific Marxism.. Lunacharsky shows no aversion, even, to the employment of traditional Christian symbols: for him the forces of production are the Father, the proletariat the Son, and scientific socialism the Holy Ghost.. The temper of Lunacharsky's atheism is no less religious than that of Feuerbach, who puts man in place of God. Man is himself God - here Lunacharsky is merely reiterating Feuerbach. To the God-builders, Marxian socialism represented the fifth great religion to have sprung from Judaism. (11)

MacDiarmid certainly never went as far as constructing his own religion but, like Lunacharsky, he was not averse to using traditional Christian symbols for his own ends. God-building was for MacDiarmid an imaginative thesis through which he was to develop primitive notions of evolutionism. The Man-God was a symbol of the ideal which lay ahead of man. It represented for the poet the ideal level of consciousness which humanity must strive for.

According to George Kline's Religious and Anti-Religious Thought in Russia, it was Maxim Gorky who first coined the term 'God-building':

Gorky's close contact with Lunacharsky dates from 1909-11, when they collaborated in running a Bolshevik party school of Nietzschean leanings, first on Capri, where Gorky had settled in 1906, then at Bologna.. Gorky coined the terms and concepts "God-building" and "God-builder" (bogostroitelstvo and bogostroitel) in deliberate contrast to the terms and concepts "God-seeking" and "God-seeker" (bogoiskatelstvo and bogoiskatel), which were in general use in Russia from about 1903 on. The latter terms characterised religious thinkers who sought a "new religious consciousness", including not only Shestov and Berdyaev but also such thinkers as S.N. Bulgakov, S.L. Frank, and Dimitri Merezhkovski. (12)

To this list of God-seekers must be added Soloviev and the writers influenced by him, notably Alexander Blok, Zinaida Hippus (Merezhkovski's wife), Rozanov, Florenski, Minsky and Filosofov. MacDiarmid certainly read Soloviev (in translation) and imbibed his ideas indirectly through poets like Blok, Merezhkovski, and Hippus. MacDiarmid's poem "The Last Trump" (Sangsshaw) was "Suggested by the Russian of Dimitry Merezhkovsky". He adapted (as is

well-known) Hippius' poem "Psyche" and Blok's "The Lady Unknown" for use in A Drunk Man, using Deutsch and Yarmolinsky's Modern Russian Poetry. But what attracts him here are not notions of God-seeking for the poems contain no such notions. "The Last Trump" is, like "Crowdieknowe", a comic poem about the resurrection of the dead. From Hippius, he takes the image of a serpent-like creature which he adapts from a "loathsome black impurity" to a "whale-white obscenity" in keeping with the bestiary image-cluster of A Drunk Man. What attracts him to Blok's poem is the image of Sophia incarnate, the "Silken Leddy", which Blok had derived from Soloviev. Indeed, as we shall see, it is here that Soloviev's influence on MacDiarmid lies, with the idea of Hagia Sophia, the Wisdom of God, and not with God-seeking.

Gorky first used the terms 'God-building' and 'God-builder' in his novel A Confession (1908) which MacDiarmid, who knew the work of Gorky, had probably read. Kline traces God-building to three major roots:

- (1) nineteenth-century Russian radicalism, (2) Feuerbach's left-Hegelian conversion of theology into philosophical anthropology, and (3) the Nietzschean doctrine of the "overman". (13)

We have already mentioned something of Nietzsche's influence on MacDiarmid, in relation to the question of a "National Psychology", which was both direct and mediated through the work of Oswald Spengler. But, with regard to God-building, Nietzsche was also influential both directly and through others. Perhaps the most important complementary force in this instance was, as we have already noted, Dostoevsky whose name is coupled with Nietzsche's in the Drunk Man. The association occurs also in an earlier poem "Amiel" which appeared in the November 1922 issue of The Scottish Chapbook. The poem is addressed to Amiel on the occasion of his centenary in 1921 and it is a celebration of the Olympian heights to which man can attain:

Ah ! few there be who win to your plateau
Flat though you lie colossal peaks below,
And untraversable save to how few
The way to your horizon whence uprear
The forms of Nietzsche and his Russian peer
Whom scaling not none may the future view.

That "Russian peer", as the footnote makes clear, is Dostoevsky and thus the Olympian heights are those of the "overman" or Man-God.

One of The New Age contributors, Janko Lavrin, who wrote a series of ten articles on Nietzsche for the journal between November 1921 and July 1922, was also the author of many books on Russian literature, including Dostoevsky and his Creation which he dedicated to Orage. That book was published in 1920, but already he had contributed (see above) a series of ten articles on "Dostoevsky and his Problems" to The New Age

in 1918, and between October 1925 and January 1926 (when MacDiarmid was a regular contributor) he was to write a seven-part series entitled "Vladimir Solovyov and the Religious Philosophy of Russia".

Lavrin was one of several writers from whom MacDiarmid could have derived the distinction between the Man-God and the God-Man. In Dostoevsky and his Creation, Lavrin (who regarded himself as a 'Nietzschean') is at pains to explain the difference. There are two ways, he says, of searching after "Absolute Value" -

According to one of them, the Microcosmos recognises itself as a component part of Cosmos, and finds its highest assertion in a perfect harmony between the individual will and the universal will of God and Cosmos. We may call this the mystical path of consciousness, the path of the God-Man.. Adopting the opposite attitude, the Individual strives to become an absolutely autonomous and independent entity.. This path may be called the magical path or the path of the Man-God, as distinct from that of the God-Man. The mystic God-Man enlarges his consciousness to the cosmic consciousness, aiming at cosmic individualism. The magician Man-God, on the other hand, opposes to Cosmos his personal Ego as an equivalent entity and strives for cosmic egotism. The first advances in the direction of his highest spiritual, and the second rather in the direction of his egoistic 'biological' self. (14)

It is evident from those quotations above from A Drunk Man and Cenrastus alone, that the individual as celebrated in MacDiarmid's poetry strives not after "perfect harmony" with the sticket God, but after absolute autonomy -

..Him, whom nocht in man or Deity,
Or Daith or Dreid or Laneliness can touch,
Wha's deed owre often and has seen owre much.

MacDiarmid aims, in Lavrin's appropriate terms, not at "cosmic individualism" but at "cosmic egotism". This evolutionary figure reappears, as we saw, in Cenrastus as "Him that lifts unkennable ayont / Creation and Creator baith". In this instance, the Man-God is clearly related to those 'overmen' mentioned two stanzas before and who are contrasted to the "cleverest" men on earth whom he has already described as faring no better than Sisyphus:

Those nameless wha by ither standards judge
Than knowledge, beauty, length o' beard or aucht
That history uses, and wha winna budge
To humour fame or sense - and are they no'
The mighty masses that we ken nocht o' ?

In relation to the Man-God, with whom he clearly identifies in imaginative, if not literal, terms, MacDiarmid develops his vitalism to the point where he surpasses altogether the Representative Personality of national and class culture and enters the realms of Lavrin's "cosmic egotism". For example, images of this cosmic egotism pervade the Drunk Man, as in the

following extracts:

Lay haud o' my hert and feel
Fountains ootloupin' the starns
Or see the Universe reel
Set gaen' by my eident harns,
Or test the strength o' my spauld
The wecht o' a' thing to hauld !

* * *

Let a' the thistle's growth
Be as a process, then,
My spirit's gane richt through,
And needna threid again,
Tho' in it sall be haud'n
For aye the feck o' men
Wha's queer contortions there
As memories I ken
As memories o' my ain
O' mony an ancient pain.
But sin' wha'll e'er wun free
Maun tak' like coorse to me,
A fillip I wad gi'e
Their eccentricity,
And leave the lave to dree
Their weirdless destiny.

It's no' without regret
That I maun follow yet
The road that led me past
Humanity sae fast,..

* * *

A mony-brainchin' candelabra fills
The lift and's lowin' wi' the stars;
The Octopus Creation is wallopin'
In coontless faddoms o' a nameless sea.

I am the candelabra, and burn
My endless candles to an Unkent God.
I am the mind and meanin' o' the octopus
That throws its empty airms through a' th'Inane.

With regard to MacDiarmid's introspective psychologising this cosmic egotism is related to his psychological solipsism. It is the end-result of his imaginative embodiment of what we have termed his 'divine solipsism'. In philosophical terms, it is made possible by his empirio-critical (and sometimes outright idealist) posturings. One of the most explicit examples of his indulgence in the cult of the Man-God is "Birth of a Genius Among Men" (Second Hymn 1935) which, despite the Neo-Platonic overtones of its final stanza, is perhaps the most literal 'Nietzschean' poem he ever wrote:

An immense vigour awoke in my body.
My breast expanded and overflowed into the night.
I was one with Scotland out there and with all the world
And thoughts of your beauty shone in me like starlight.

You were all female, ripe as a rose for the plucking,
I was all male and no longer resisted my need.
The earth obeyed the rhythm of our panting.
The mountains sighed with us. Infinity was emptied.

To both of us it seemed as if we had never loved before.
A miracle was abroad and I knew that not merely I
Had accomplished the act of love but the whole universe through me,
A great design was fulfilled, another genius nigh.

Yet I lay awake and as the daylight broke
I heard the faint voices of the Ideas discuss
The way in which they could only express themselves yet
In fragmentary and fallacious forms through us.

MacDiarmid may merely be gesturing here as the cliched imagery suggests.
Nevertheless, the direction of his thought is apparent and it is certainly
a long way from the pieties of God-seeking. As Lavrin points out in the
second of his New Age articles on Soloviev:

Nietzsche arrived at the absolute affirmation of the
biological man-God (i.e. superman), and Solovyov at
that of God-man, whose highest expression he saw in
Christ. (15)

Thus, while MacDiarmid was "fu' o' a sticket God", Soloviev's universe
remained Christocentric. God-seeking led Soloviev to belief in Christ
as personal 'Saviour'. Moreover, unlike either Nietzsche or MacDiarmid,
Dostoevsky was to desert the antinomian theses of Notes From Underground
and of Raskolnikov in Crime and Punishment and similarly embrace Christ.
As Lavrin puts it in Dostoevsky and his Creation:

Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, arrived at precisely opposite
conceptions of highest individual self-assertion; for it
is Raskolnikov who presents in many respects the psychological
bankruptcy of the very basis (i.e. the basis of self-will) on
which Nietzsche founded the superman. (16)

"Discovering.. in Man-God but an illusory self-assertion, leading to self-
destruction", Dostoevsky, as Lavrin says, "desperately took refuge in the
God-Man, i.e., in Christ"; and he quotes from Dostoevsky's letter where
he says:

If anyone could prove to me that Christ is outside the
truth, and if the truth really did exclude Christ, I
should prefer to stay with Christ and not with truth. (17)

It is to this statement that MacDiarmid refers in Cencrastus at the very
point when he is attacking the God-Man, Christ, for asking his followers
to put their faith in him:

Come let us face the facts. He should ha' socht
Faith in thensel's like his - no' faith in him.
His words condemned his followers, and himsel',
(Dostoevski ev'n, preferrin' Christ to truth)..

As he says six stanzas later:

It tak's a Dostoevski to believe
And disbelieve a thing at aince..

It is true that some of the writers of the New Age circle did not
distinguish clearly between the Man-God and the God-Man and, like Dmitri
Mitrovic, sought woolly syntheses of the contradictory ideas involved.

Orage himself, in Friedrich Nietzsche: the Dionysian Spirit of the Age (1906) tries to link the superman with the messiah of Christianity:

The Superman and the Messiah are, in fact, very similar, and it is possible that Nietzsche, in this respect, had borrowed his idea from the Polish Messianist, Slowacki. (18)

Nietzsche, who was Polish on his mother's side, more than likely knew at least something of Slowacki (1809-1849) who ranks in Polish literature with Mickiewicz and Krasinski (and whose teacher of English, incidentally, was a certain Mr. MacDonald). But Slowacki was a Catholic deist and visionary. According to one Polish commentator, Wincenty Lutoslawski (in an article published in 1910), Slowacki predicted among other things "the resurrection of Poland, and a great transformation of the Church by a Polish Pope". (19) But, as we have seen, the Nietzschean superman and the cult of the Man-God were in direct opposition to the Solovievian God-Man. In order, however, to pursue this distinction and its significance regarding MacDiarmid, it is necessary to say something now of MacDiarmid's sources of information regarding Vladimir Soloviev. Moreover, this is important not only to the present issue, but also to the questions of Sophiology and Slavophilism which will be dealt with in the following chapter.

Information on Soloviev

In a relatively recent article on MacDiarmid, "Some Hints for Source-hunters" (1978), Kenneth Buthlay states:

There would seem to be a real problem as to how MacDiarmid without reading Russian acquired the particular familiarity with Solovyov's thought that I believe he did acquire by the early Twenties. (20)

Buthlay suggests the main source to be J.N. Duddington's article "The Religious Philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov" published in The Hibbert Journal in April 1917, and MacDiarmid had certainly read this article as Buthlay shows. But he need not have gone to this "Quarterly Review of Religion, Theology, and Philosophy" (as it is subtitled) for his sources. There were, in fact, not a few complementary sources.

In 1915, for instance, there were two translations of Soloviev's War, Progress, and the End of History, one as entitled here, translated by A. Bakshy, and another translation, by Stephen Graham, entitled War and Christianity. In his translator's preface, Bakshy writes:

Through all [Soloviev's] works there runs one cardinal thought: the idea of the evolution of the world which has made humanity a factor in the life of the Deity itself, has imbued it with God's spirit in the form of "God-human-ness", and has destined it for a final union with God. (21)

MacDiarmid certainly knew of Bakshy. He quotes from Bakshy's book The Path of the Modern Russian Stage (1916) in a New Age review of June 25th. 1925.

On the other hand, Graham, in his preface, notes:

In national culture Solovyov owned Dostoieffsky as his prophet. With Dostoieffsky he was one of the great spiritual leaders of the Russian people. He was in all his work and faith opposed to Tolstoy, considering Tolstoyism to be a sort of moral atrophy. (22)

War, Progress, and the End of History, it should be noted, is an attack on Tolstoy's pacifism.

Another possible source is Soloviev's The Justification of the Good, translated in 1918 by Stephen Graham and N.A. Duddington. In the editor's note, Graham informs us of the elementary ideas in Soloviev's philosophy, one of which is -

The evolution of the God-man, not the superman with his greater earth-sense and fierceness, but the God-man with his greater heaven-sense, mystical sense. (23)

If MacDiarmid did not pick up the distinction here, he may have done so from Michel d'Herbigny's Vladimir Soloviev: A Russian Newman (1853-1900) published in 1918. In the introduction to d'Herbigny's book, Father T. Gerrard (a Catholic priest), although he uses the term 'Man-God' improperly, nevertheless shows how Christocentric was Soloviev's thinking:

Soloviev took pains to guard against [pantheism] by declaring that the Man-God was one unique Person. Jesus Christ alone was the Word eternally begotten.

Gerrard informs us that Soloviev was received in to the Roman Catholic Church on February 18th. 1896. He also explains in detail Soloviev's differences with Nietzsche, particularly over -

..the doctrine of the strong man set up by Nietzsche:
"Slaves can adore a God Who makes Himself man and humbles Himself. But the strong adore only their own ascent to the superman, the endless progression of human beauty, human grandeur, and human power."

But, replied Soloviev, that endless progression ends in a corpse. Instead of beauty you have putrefaction. The inexorable fact of death reduces the body's grandeur and power to nothing. Christianity, on the contrary, is not founded upon death, but upon the First-Born from the dead, the real beauty, grandeur and power could only be found in the Absolute Good. (24)

In his efforts to claim Soloviev as the Russian Newman, Gerrard underplays (as does d'Herbigny himself) the gnostic and pagan elements in Soloviev, those which, in fact, attracted MacDiarmid to him. Nevertheless, he does make clear Soloviev's acceptance of the Christian Godhead.

Gerrard's introduction is a reprint of an article which appeared in the Catholic World in June 1917 where, equally, MacDiarmid may have come across it. It should also be noted that there were three

poems by Soloviev published in The New Age (see p.144 above) in 1916, and later New Age sources would be Philippe Mairet's two articles on "Solovyov's 'Justification of the Good'" in December 1924 and January 1925 as well as Lavrin seven-part series on "Vladimir Solovyov and the Religious Philosophy of Russia" which ran from October 1925 to January 1926.

A book which mentions something of Soloviev and a great deal more about Dostoevsky is A. Bruckner's A Literary History of Russia published as early as 1908. The book gives, among other things, a clear description of the Dostoevskian Man-God as represented by the character Kirilov, a "maniac" who "found heaven upon earth" -

He who shall overcome pain and the dread of the phantoms
"Death" and "the beyond" will himself be God. He who dares
to kill himself has learned the secret of the deception,
he is God.

This man-God, an idea quite unknown before Dostoevsky, will lead the world to perfection. Then they will divide the world into two parts, from the Gorilla to the abolition of God, and from the abolition of God "God is and remains dead.. We have killed Him. There was never a greater deed" says Nietzsche) to the remodelling of the earth and man, man will become God and be changed physically ("Must we not ourselves become gods ?" Nietzsche).

That MacDiarmid made a detailed reading of the book is apparent from the following passage which is 'lifted' into the Drunk Man:

What, for instance, remained rooted in [Dostoevsky's] memory out of the whole gigantic city (London) ? The image of the little ragged damsel to whom he gave in charity a silver coin and who thereupon fled like a wild animal before him and men in general to put her treasure in safety; not Westminster Abbey, nor the Fleet, nor England's constitution impressed him so much. Even so it had fared shortly before with Tolstoy, on whom out of the whole life of the West only that well-known scene in Lucerne with the beggar-musician to whom nobody gave anything made an indelible impression; ay, the barbarians have lizards' eyes ! (25)

In A Drunk Man, MacDiarmid addresses Dostoevsky thus:

The secret clyre in Scotland's life
Has brust and reams through me,

A whummlin' sea in which is heard
The clunk o' nameless banes;
A grisly thistle dirlin' shrill
Abune the broken stanes.

Westminster Abbey nor the Fleet,
Nor England's constitution, but
In a' the mighty city there
You mind a'e fleggitt slut,

As Tolstoi o' Lucerne alane
Minded a'e beggar minstrel seen !
The woundit side draws a' the warld.
Barbarians ha'e lizards' een.

The "barbarians" referred to by Bruckner are the two Russian visitors to the West, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, an ironic reference to the half-Asiatic character of Russia. The image (reinforced by Nietzsche's use of the term) was one that was to remain with MacDiarmid. In "Second Hymn to Lenin", Lenin is addressed as "Barbarian saviour o' civilisation", and in "Third Hymn" he is addressed as "lizard eyes" presumably because of his ability to see what others cannot or choose not to see as in Bruckner's description of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. It is also interesting to note that Bruckner quotes from Dostoevsky's famous Pushkin speech (June 8th. 1880), although Buthlay is correct in that MacDiarmid lifted the Russian expressions "Narodbogonosets" and "vse-chelovek" ('God-bearer' and 'The All-Man or Pan-Human') which he uses in A Drunk Man from D.S. Mirsky's Modern Russian Literature (1925).

MacDiarmid, then, certainly read widely in Russian literature and knew his Soloviev as well as his Dostoevsky and Nietzsche. Christianity, said Soloviev, "is the revelation of a perfect God in a perfect man".⁽²⁶⁾ For MacDiarmid, Christianity was the revelation of a sticket God in far from perfect men. *

But MacDiarmid was not the only British writer to be influenced by notions of God-building. George Bernard Shaw, who lectured to the Edinburgh University Fabian Society when the young MacDiarmid was a member, and whom MacDiarmid met through the Scottish PEN Club in 1923, was another. Moreover, it may well be that Shaw reinforced MacDiarmid's God-building mentality.

British God-builders: Shaw and MacDiarmid

In The Intelligentsia of Great Britain (1935), D.S. Mirsky informs us that in Britain:

Pre-war vitalism expressed a belief in the cosmic, objective value of subjective human values - a belief that the "creative evolution" of nature proceeds in the same direction as man's ethical evolution, and leads to the transformation of nature into man and of man into God.

Of George Bernard Shaw he notes:

Shaw's social and ethical rationalism acquired a philosophical argumentation in the form of a complete view of life which on one side approached Rousseau's humanism and on the other Bergson's vitalism. This view of life has been put forward in a series of philosophical plays, from Man and Superman (1904) to St. Joan (1924) and the quite recent philosophical fable The Adventures of the Black Girl in her Search for God (1932), and what

* Another source would be L.M. Lopatin "The Philosophy of Vladimir Soloviev" Mind (Oct. 1916).

it amounts to is a belief in creative evolution, in the course of which human nature gets better and better till some day it will become divine - if you want to see god you must become a god. It does not include a transcendental deity, nor a creator or almighty, but all evolution leads to god in the form of a deified man as the highest stage of the evolutionary path which leads upwards from the lower organisms..

Shaw bases himself on quite a different world view from Russell's, one not of mechanism, but of "god-creating" vitalism. He expressed that vitalism especially logically and thoroughly in his post war plays, Back to Methusalem and St. Joan, and now once more, after a visit to the U.S.S.R. and after a declaration in favour of the land of socialist construction, he has confirmed it in a specially clear cut and unambiguous form in his Adventures of the Black Girl in her Search for God. (27)

Some of the same strands that are brought together in MacDiarmid are, thus, brought together in Shaw: Fabianism, empirio-criticism in its organicist and anti-mechanicist form (viz. Whiteheads organic vitalism), Nietzscheanism and a reinforcing Russian influence. As E.H. Carr puts it:

The philosophy of the superman is the natural offspring of subjective idealism, which is the counterpart in metaphysics of Romanticism in art. (28)

Many detailed parallels may be drawn between Shaw and MacDiarmid, and as Shaw was much the older writer there can be little doubt as to his having at least some influence on MacDiarmid. Certainly they share the same tradition of God-building vitalism.

In Shaw's Man and Superman: a Comedy and a Philosophy, the young intellectual rebel, Jack Tanner, describes the genuine artist as thoroughly antinomian, and the function of art as the extension of consciousness or self-knowledge (Act 1). Tanner evolves to become, in Act 3 (set in Hell), Don Juan, where he makes many speeches on God-building vitalism. God-building is presented by him as the process which brings about the ultimate extension of consciousness, and this is delivered (though Shaw may be tongue-in-cheek) with a Nietzschean anti-feminism:

Sexually, Woman is Nature's contrivance for perpetuating its highest achievement. Sexually, Man is Woman's contrivance for fulfilling Nature's behest in the most economical way.. Civilisation is an attempt on Man's part to make himself something more than the mere instrument of Woman's purpose.. Are we agreed that Life is a force which has made innumerable experiments in organising itself.. all more or less successful attempts to build up that raw force into higher and higher individuals, the ideal individual being omnipotent, omniscient, infallible, and withal completely, unilludedly self-conscious, in short, a god ?

Later in Act 3, Don Juan states:

Life was driving at brains - at its darling object:
an organ by which it can attain not only self-
consciousness but self-understanding.

MacDiarmid echoes Jack Tanner/Don Juan when he writes, in Lucky Poet,
of himself:

I have no love for humanity - but only for the higher
brain-centres, the human mind in which only a moiety
of mankind has ever had, or has today, any part or
parcel whatever. An intellectual snob of the worst
description in fact ! (29)

A Nietzschean-informed elitism undoubtedly affects both Shaw and MacDiarmid.
When asked, in Act 3 of Man and Superman, who the superman is, the Devil
replies:

Oh, the latest fashion among the Life Force fanatics.
Did you not meet in Heaven, among the new arrivals,
that German-Polish madman ? What was his name ? Nietzsche ?

In Saint Joan, we have the anachronism of a mediaeval
cleric, the Bishop of Beauvais, Monseigneur Cauchon, quoting Nietzsche:
I know well that there is a Will to Power in the world.

In Back to Methuselah, Act 1, the Serpent is from the
outset associated with the Will to Power ("I have willed and willed and
willed") and she tells Adam: "Bind the future by your will". Introducing
the pre-lapsarians to the very term "life", the Serpent is thus associated
with the élan vital, and MacDiarmid's own conception of the Curly Snake
may owe something of its character to Shaw. Twice, for example, in Act 1,
the Serpent repeats Leo Shestov's dictum "Everything is possible."
(MacDiarmid, we recall, describes Shestov as his philosophical master
in Lucky Poet). In the same Act, the Serpent would seem to echo the
Shestovian notion of engaging with chaos (much beloved by MacDiarmid)
when she says:

I fear certainty as you fear uncertainty. It means that
nothing is certain but uncertainty. If I bind the future
I bind my will. If I bind my will I strangle creation.

In Act 2, Cain, a warlord and potential oppressor portrayed perhaps as
a partial indictment of Nietzsche, states:

There is something higher than man. There is hero and
superman.

In Act 2, Part 2, Conrad Barnabus, significantly enough a biologist,
refers to the contemporary Egyptologist, Flinders Petrie, in terms recalling

Oswald Spengler whose whole argument in The Decline of the West,
we recall, was based on an organic metaphor:

Flinders Petrie has counted nine attempts at civilisation
made by people exactly like us; and every one of them
failed just as ours is failing.

In Act 2, Part 2, Conrad Barnabus' brother and co-theorist, Franklyn, tells us that evolution "is the path to godhead". Both these characters reflect a naive optimism in the writer, a naive optimism that was shared by, and necessary to, the whole God-building tradition:

CONRAD: Yes. Ever since the reaction against Darwin set in at the beginning of the present century, all scientific opinion worth counting has been converging rapidly upon Creative Evolution.

FRANKLYN: Poetry has been converging on it: philosophy has been converging on it: religion has been converging on it. It is going to be the religion of the twentieth century: a religion that has its intellectual roots in philosophy and science just as medieval Christianity had its intellectual roots in Aristotle.

God-building vitalism necessitates by its very nature this desired reconciliation between idealism and scientific materialism. But although Shaw, like MacDiarmid, may have rejected the concept of the omniscient and omnipotent Christian God, neither they nor their Russian counterparts were able to overcome Lenin's criticism that an idealist (or empirio-critical) outlook is ultimately a religious one no matter what 'atheistical' form it takes.

That God-building leads inevitably to outright idealism is made apparent by reference to our previous chapter and many of the quotations from MacDiarmid's poetry given there. One of the most notable examples is given in the "Third Hymn to Lenin" where MacDiarmid declares that ^{thought}is reality "and thought alone !" The very same idealist argument is enshrined in Shaw's Methuselah (Act 3, Part 5):

THE HE-ANCIENT: That, children, is the trouble of the ancients. For whilst we are tied to this tyrannous body we are subject to its death, and our destiny is not achieved.

THE NEWLY BORN: What is your destiny ?

THE HE-ANCIENT: To be immortal.

THE SHE-ANCIENT: The day will come when there will be no people, only thought.

THE HE-ANCIENT: And that will be life eternal.

Although not all idealists or empirio-critics are God-builders, all God-builders are necessarily empirio-critics if not outright idealists. We have already discussed the materialist critique of empirio-criticism, with specific reference to Lenin, one of MacDiarmid's 'heroes', and one to whom he dedicated (as he did to no other) three "Hymns". In order to complete the picture, it is necessary now to say something of Lenin's critique of God-building and of MacDiarmid's God-building "Hymns" to Lenin.

Lenin and the God-builders

Lenin and the God-builders

The question of God-building was something of a thorn in Lenin's materialist flesh. It was a question much discussed by the Bolshevik Party, especially in the columns of their paper Proletary between 1908 and 1909, Lenin opposing Gorky and Lunacharsky. It should be noted that around this time the Bolsheviks came in for a great deal of sarcastic taunting from other marxist groups because of the God-builders in their ranks. The official translators of Lenin's On Literature and Art define God-building as:

..a religious philosophical trend hostile to Marxism, which arose in the period of the Stolypin reaction among a section of the Party's intellectuals, who abandoned Marxism after the defeat of the 1905-7 revolution. The "god-builders" (A.V. Lunacharsky, V. Bazarov and others) advocated the creation of a new, "socialist" religion, and tried to reconcile Marxism and religion.

The meeting of the enlarged editorial board of Proletary in June 1909 condemned "god-building" and declared in a special resolution that the Bolshevik group had nothing in common "with this sort of distortion of scientific socialism". (30)

In a letter to Maxim Gorky in November 1913 (the issue being still very much alive), Lenin writes:

God-seeking differs from God-building or god-creating or god-making etc., no more than a yellow devil differs from a blue devil. To talk about god-seeking, not in order to declare against all devils and gods, against every ideological necrophily (all worship of a divinity is necrophily..), but to prefer a blue devil to a yellow one is a hundred times worse than not saying anything about it at all..

And isn't god-building the worst form of self-humiliation ?? Everyone who sets about building up a God, or who even merely tolerates such activity, humiliates himself in the worst possible way, because instead of "deeds" he is actually engaged in self-contemplation, self-admiration and, moreover, such a man "contemplates" the dirtiest, most stupid, most slavish features or traits of his "ego", deified by god-building.

From the point of view, not of the individual, but of society, all god-building is precisely the fond self-contemplation of the thick-witted philistine. (31)

It is extremely doubtful if MacDiarmid ever read this flyting (the English translation is 1967) but he would have been made aware of it by his reading of Mirsky's Lenin (1931) in which Mirsky says of Lenin:

He was equally patient and tolerant with men whose main business was not politics. Thus his friendship with Gorky was not put an end to when the latter supported Lunacharsky in his 'religious' propaganda. Lenin was ready to make allowances for the subconscious and irrational ways of the imaginative writer. But he did not mince his words in telling Gorky exactly what he thought of the whole business. (32)

Lenin's willingness to "make allowances" is further demonstrated by the fact that he actually appointed Anatole Lunacharsky First Commissar for Education after the Revolution. In the opening address of his "Second Hymn" (based, as we shall see on a close reading of Mirsky's book), MacDiarmid asks that Lenin "mak' allowances" for him too:

Ah, Lenin, you were richt. But I'm a poet
(And you c'ud mak' allowances for that !)
Aimin' at mair than you aimed at
Tho' yours comes first, I know it.

Later in the book Mirsky develops his statement:

..the'revision' of materialism was big with the.. practical danger of developing into a religious faith, for the germ of religion is always inherent in idealism and in everything that approaches it. This did actually happen with Lunacharsky, who evolved the theory of 'God-building' (bogostroitel'stvo), according to which it was incumbent on mankind to build itself a God according to its ideals. The theory was accepted, among other intellectuals, by Gorky, and he has left a permanent trace in literature in his novel A Confession. (33)

MacDiarmid then, given his reading of Mirsky's book (and his friendship with him) was only too aware of what he was asking in the "Second Hymn" when he sought Lenin's indulgence.

Similarly, he could not have but been conscious of his own vis comica which indulged in the irony of the application of his God-building vitalism to his vision of Lenin. In "First Hymn", Lenin is depicted as one of the Nietzschean overmen or supermen. He marks "the greatest turnin'-point" since Christ. The "elemental force", the life-force, has found its course, the poet tells us, through Lenin who is possessed (in Nietzschean terms) of:

..the real will that bides its time and kens
The benmaist resolve is the poo'er in which we exult..

This Will to Power in which the poet exults, along with Lenin, contrasts to "the majority will that accepts the result". It is this God-building vitalism provides the antinomian thrust of his cosmic egotism in "First Hymn":

As necessary, and insignificant, as death
Wi' a' its agonies in the cosmos still
The Cheka's horrors are in their degree;
And'll end suner ! What maitters't wha we kill
To lessen that foulest murder that deprives
Maist men o' real lives ?

The argument may well be Nietzschean. But it is also curiously reminiscent of Raskolnikov's thesis in Crime and Punishment where he divides humanity into two categories. The first are the masses who love to be docile, conservative and respectable:

The men belonging to the second category all transgress the law and are all destroyers, or are inclined to be.. mostly..

they demand, in proclamations of one kind or another, the destruction of the present in the name of a better future. But if for the sake of his idea such a man has to step over a corpse or wade through blood, he is, in my opinion, absolutely entitled, in accordance with the dictates of his conscience, to permit himself to wade through blood, all depending of course on the nature and scale of his idea - note that, please.. The first category is always the master of the present; the second category the master of the future. The first preserves the world and increases its numbers; the second moves the world and leads it to its goal. (34)

This is not to say, of course, that MacDiarmid is a spiritual son of Raskolnikov. But the "First Hymn" does show the dangerous side of MacDiarmid's cosmic egotism if it were to be taken literally. But, in essence, it is little more than the angry affirmation of the same kind of feeling that Dostoevsky invested in Raskolnikov. MacDiarmid, like Raskolnikov, will not leap from the page claymore in hand. It is an insult to the liberal-humanist conscience. It is meant to be. It is intended to shock in much the same way as Dostoevsky and Nietzsche intended to shock their contemporaries.

It is also part of that "heaven-seeking vehemence" which MacDiarmid invests in Lenin in "Third Hymn" where Lenin is presented as no less than "the live heart of all humanity". This God-building poem closes with an exhortation that the "Spirit of Lenin" light up the city of Glasgow and he calls for the reincarnation of "lizard eyes" so that he can take issue "With the piffling spirits of our public men".

In "Second Hymn" we are told that "Lenin's name's gone ower the haill earth" and, as has been noted before, Lenin is addressed as "Barbarian saviour o' civilisation". The word "civilisation", it seems, is used in the conventional rather than the Spenglerian sense, but the use of "Barbarian" echoes not only Bruckner but also Nietzsche. As in Raskolnikov's thesis, the "New Barbarians" would destroy the present in the name of the future.

Kenneth Buthlay has noted what he terms "small echoes" in the "Hymns" from Mirsky's 1931 biography of Lenin. Reference to Mirsky, as he points out, not only clears up the mention of "Montehus' songs" but leads us to "a better insight into the whole tenor of thought in the "Second Hymn"". (35) Further to this, one could go as far as saying that MacDiarmid's 'vision' of Lenin, especially in the "Second Hymn", is based fundamentally on Mirsky's account.

As we noted already, Mirsky provided MacDiarmid with data concerning Lenin's differences with the Bolshevik God-builders. In "Second Hymn", MacDiarmid asks how long it will be till the masses rise to the level of a Pushkin which echoes, in general, the notion of this

'upward' evolution to greater creativity and spirituality, and in particular, Trotsky's argument that through socialism all men are capable of becoming a Shakespeare or a Pushkin. But it is Mirsky who brings Pushkin's name to the fore by relating that he was Lenin's favourite author. In general, Lenin seems to have had an equal dislike for proletcultism and futurism which, in crude terms, one could say, were the 'lowbrow' and 'highbrow' literary off-shoots of the popular struggle in early twentieth century Russia. His tastes were, as he admitted, more old-fashioned than revolutionary where art was concerned.

But what is much more fundamental to MacDiarmid's poem is the image of the unified sensibility of Lenin which Mirsky alludes to time and again in his biography. For example:

Lenin was a zoon politikon through and through. No one's life was more entirely political, more completely identified with one political task. His biography and the history of the Russian Revolution are inseparable, and he is more reducible to his work than any other man in history.. The really human side of Lenin lies in his revolutionary work.. the man was identical with the revolutionary. (36)

It is this revolutionary integrity in Lenin that MacDiarmid celebrates throughout the "Second Hymn": the pursuance of "real ends", of "Organic constructional work, / Practicality and work by degrees", of "exact and complete" knowledge, the whole being "Unremittin', relentless, / Organised to the last degree". As the poet says of Lenin in "The Seamless Garment":

I ken fu' weel
Sic an integrity's what I maun ha'e,
Indivisible, real,
Woven owre close for the point o'a pin
Onywhere to win in.

As here, in "Second Hymn" the poet declares all poets, himself included, must imitate this unity of life and purpose and also of effect. At this point it is interesting to note that, according to Mirsky's account, one of Lenin's major abilities was to extend revolutionary consciousness in others:

Lenin, while he brought out the revolutionary passion of his audiences, made them think, transforming their feelings into ideas. (37)

It is with this practical success in mind that MacDiarmid chides Burke, Joyce, Morand and himself (as well as deriding Trotsky), and it is, equally, with this in mind that he asks:

Are my poems spoken in the factories and fields,
In the streets o' the toon ?

- and then states:

Gin they're no', then I'm failin' to dae
What I ocht to ha' dune.

The fact that Shakespeare, Dante, Milton, Goethe and even Burns have not succeeded in this task does not soothe his passion, because the example that overrides all these is that of Lenin's success:

Wi' Lenin's vision equal poet's gift
And what unparalleled force was there !
Nocht in a' literature wi' that
Begins to compare.

Part of what MacDiarmid admires in Lenin is the fact that, in Mirsky's book, in striving to extend revolutionary consciousness Lenin never simplified or patronised people. Mirsky:

[Lenin] very firmly opposed the tendency among some of his comrades to treat the workmen as intellectual inferiors and feed them with a simplified adaptation of Marxian theory, always insisting on giving the more advanced and forward of them a complete theoretical equipment that would place them on a level with the Marxist intellectuals. (38)

It is this very example that the poet must imitate in "Second Hymn":

Nae simple rhymes for silly folk
But the haill art, as Lenin gied
Nae Marx-withoot-tears to workin' men
But the fu' course instead.

But the *imitation* is not slavish for the poet's task is greater than that of the politician. There is no doubt as to MacDiarmid's agreement with Shelley that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world:

Sae here, twixt poetry and politics,
There's nae doot in the en'.
Poetry includes that and s'ud be
The greatest poo'er amang men.

- It's the greatest, in posse at least,
That men ha'e discovered yet
Tho' nae doot they're unconscious still
O' ithers faur greater than it.

These other undefined powers greater than poetry belong with those future 'overmen' who can put aside "A' that's material and moral" and live in the "new state" of Man-Godhood.

That MacDiarmid applies his own God-building vitalism to the most important opponent of the God-building faction is, however, only one of the ironies of "Second Hymn". For, while he may also deride Trotsky in the poem, he is not averse to exploiting Trotsky's prose for his own purposes. As Trotsky looked forward to "a society which will have thrown off the pinching and stultifying worry about one's daily bread", so the poet cries shame that "breid-and-butter problems" should be in any man's way; and as Trotsky looked forward to the time when all children would be able to "absorb the fundamental elements of science and art as they absorb albumen and air", ⁽³⁹⁾ so the poet writes:

Sport, love, and parentage,
Trade, politics, and law
S'ud be nae mair to us than braith
We hardly ken we draw.

Bread-and-butter problems, he says, should be like "the tails we tint / On leavin' the monkey stage", a simile that he may well have adapted from Shaw's Methuselah where, in Act 3 Part 5, the He-Ancient claims that as prehistoric men outgrew tails, so now men may outgrow the need for "a head" and exist as pure mind.

What Trotsky (or Lenin, for that matter) meant by getting rid of the "pinching and stultifying worry about one's daily bread" is not quite the same as what MacDiarmid means by overcoming bread-and-butter problems, as the allusion to Shaw's Methuselah indicates. For what MacDiarmid evokes in "Second Hymn" is a state where "Life, Death; and a' thing else.. are equal", a state which is clearly something other than the materialist millenium. MacDiarmid, like Shaw's He-Ancient, is intent upon the meta-physical: the realm of pure thought.

The "deep line o' cleavage", he tells us, does not lie between life and death ("quick or deid") any more than it does between male and female, and he has "sma' patience" with life's ideas of what death is. The implication is idealist and, in imaginative terms at least, against the reality of death he posits his own cosmic egotism:

Black in the pit the miner is,
The shepherd reid on the hill,
And I'm wi' them baith until
The end of mankind, I wis.

Thus, it is not just poetry which is the "core o' a' activity" but the God-building vitalism which - in MacDiarmid's case - underlies it. With this realm of consciousness in mind/^{he delivers} the final dialectical thrust upon which both Gorky and Lunacharsky would most heartily have agreed:

Ah, Lenin, politics is bairns' play
To what this maun be !

The "mysticism of a formally atheist creed" is how Lunacharsky's God-building vitalism is described by the translators of his Faust and Other Plays (1923), (a book which MacDiarmid may well have read).⁽⁴⁰⁾ Lunacharsky himself claimed otherwise:

I preached a tragic and active religion without any trace of 'faith' or 'mysticism'. ⁽⁴¹⁾

Both descriptions are paradoxical and both could be applied equally to the Scot as to the Russian. Of his differences with Lenin, Lunacharsky noted:

He approached all issues as a man of political action with an immense audacity of spirit, as a tactician and indeed as a political leader or genius, whereas my approach was that

of the philosopher, or, to put it more accurately, the poet of the revolution. To me the revolution was a stage, inevitably tragic, in the world-wide development of the human spirit toward the "Universal Soul", the greatest and most decisive act in the process of "God-building", the most striking and definite deed in the realisation of the programme which Nietzsche had so felicitously formulated when he said, "there is no sense in the world, but we ought to give sense to it". (42)

This testament could, mutatis mutandis, be applied to MacDiarmid and not just the MacDiarmid of the Hymns to Lenin. Only, MacDiarmid, by and large, eschews the notion of the "inevitably tragic", his vitalism characteristically retaining both its optimism and humour. Nevertheless, what unites MacDiarmid with writers like Gorky and Lunacharsky is what might be aptly termed the 'tradition' or 'school' of Nietzschean Marxism.

Nietzschean Marxism

It is George L. Kline (Religious and Anti-Religious Thought in Russia (1968)) who delivers, despite his obsessive anti-communism, the felicitous phrase when he describes the Russian God-builders as "Nietzschean Marxists", a description which could certainly be applied to MacDiarmid. As Kline points out:

Nietzsche and Marx, despite their differences, share a post-Hegelian "culture-historical" orientation. Nietzsche stands much closer to Hegel and Marx than to the existentialists. He does not value existential subjectivity or inwardness, as does Kierkegaard for example. He values cultural creativity; the individual is a means for enriching a cumulative culture in process of becoming.

Nietzsche glorifies individuals as creators because he very sensibly doubts the creative power of committees or collectivities. He does not, however, value individuals as individuals.. In a word, Nietzsche does not recognise individual or personal but only cultural and social values. And culture, for him, is cumulative and historical.

In Nietzsche's view every society is anti-democratic, made up of the creative few and the uncreative many.. The few geniuses speak to each other.. But as time goes on there will be more and more such geniuses.. The culture of the future, with a dozen or even a hundred creative giants in every generation equal to or greater than Rembrandt, Shakespeare, and Beethoven.. for Nietzsche may be called "godlike" or "divine" (göttlich). Its builders are , in a clear sense, "God-builders". (43)

It is clearly within this tradition that Lunacharsky writes:

The faith of the active human being is a faith in future mankind; his religion is an aggregate of those feelings and thoughts which make him a co-participator in the life of mankind, a link in the chain which stretches toward the overman / sverh-chelovek = Nietzsche's ubermensch (Kline) /, toward a beautiful and powerful creature, a perfected organism. (44)

History demands, wrote Gorky in 1930:

..the emergence of a new human being, free from race, national, and class prejudices.

Is such a human being possible ? The working class is already creating him. Direct all your energy, all the days of your life towards the creation of this ideal human being and you yourself will become one. (45)

So it is, similarly, that MacDiarmid writes in Lucky Poet that he believed the time was coming

..when the earth will be occupied by 'a race of people all of whom come up to the level of what we now call "genius"'. (46)

To the tradition of Russian radicalism, the God-builders added, according to Kline

..the claim that the ideal mankind of the future, vastly surpassing the frail, fragmented men of the present in power, creativity, and 'beauty', will be truly divine. It will be supra-individual and 'immortal', a source both of inspiration and consolation to impotent and perishing individuals. (47)

It is this very paradox of individual impotence and transience coupled with supra-individual immortality that possesses the Drunk Man's vision of

..Him, whom nocht in man or Deity,
Or Daith or Dreid or Laneliness can touch,
Wha's deed owre often and has seen owre much.

The "primary emphasis" of the God-builders, says Kline,

..is directed toward the future. They offer not so much an interpretation of the history of positive religions as a program for a new, purified 'humanistic' religion.. Gorky and Lunacharsky preached not the ideal in man, with the ethical culturists and humanists, or the ideal above man, with the theists, but the ideal ahead of man in history. Their piety and reverence was directed in anticipation toward a perfected future mankind, and by 'future' they meant not so much five or fifty years hence as five hundred or twenty-five hundred years hence. (48)

The ideal ahead of man (symbolised by the Man-God) is a major theme throughout MacDiarmid's work, both critical and creative. Several examples have been drawn already from, notably, A Drunk Man and Cencrastus, but the concept pervades the whole of his work. In "Talking with Five Thousand People in Edinburgh", for example, he writes:

Edinburgh is capable here and now of a human life
As illimitably greater than any it has yet known,
As any human being's is to the lowest order of animal existence.
All they need to do is to lift up their hearts
And conceive nobler conditions of life, and at once
The necessary organs of these will appear,
Just as life at first put out arms and legs.

Gorky's argument that the working class is already creating the new human being, is one that MacDiarmid takes up in "To the Younger Scottish Writers" where he writes:

It is a lying cry to say
That human nature cannot be changed.
It can be, and is being, completely..

Human nature is the last thing we need to worry about.
Let us attend to the circumstances that condition it..

The poem closes with the declaration that the writer must express:

The class war, the struggles and ideals
Of the proletariat bent on changing the world,
And consequently on changing human nature.

In the self-portraying poem, "The Poet as Prophet" (1953), subtitled "The Man for whom Gaeldom is waiting", the artistic 'overman' declares himself a "barbarian" and states that his sympathies lie wholly with "A Communist Europe.. Whose centre is Moscow and whose prophet is Karl Marx". But what one is struck by in the poem is the attempted amalgamation ('attempted' in that the poem is far from MacDiarmid's best) of communist intent with an idealistic self-fulfilling cosmic egotism that is rooted primarily in the nationalist Representative Personality:

Suddenly, splitting the sky
Was heard a great voice
Which echoed round the firmament.
'Stand fast for Scotland !' ..

In him were incarnate at that moment
The liberties and the rights of man asserted in the face of power,
The independence of the spirit which demands
That conscience be satisfied
Even against one who ranks himself higher than its claims.
Scotland felt at that moment
That no man ever personified her,
Ever would represent her,
As he did,
And she grew in glory
And was transfigured with pride.
It was not a Scottish moment;
It was a universal moment.

The pattern of the poem is familiar to this study of MacDiarmid. Here, the poet invests himself in the Celtic-barbarian overman of the future. The pattern is so familiar to his own psyche that it is by now (1953) written out as a spiritual cliché. The theme has become overworked in his own consciousness. It has been written out so many times before. It was already encapsulated in his earliest work, as for example, "Creation", a short poem of 1924:

Cells o' my brain are trauchelt yet
Wi' daiths o' airmies an' the birth
O' wild floc'ers owre their burial pit.
For ilka heid has a' the earth,
Its past an' future, for its load.
Wha fin's himsel' fin's Man an' God.

The notion of the ideal ahead of man, of a God-like extension of consciousness,

exists, as was noted in the previous chapter, in contradistinction to the poet's "savage realism" and even the supposedly 'atheistic' long poem, "On A Raised Beach", is shot through with God-building vitalism. In that poem the "Cold, undistracted, eternal and sublime" stones represent the cosmic egotism of Man-Godhood and it is their "resolution" and "Spartan impassivity" that have to be "lived up to". One must be:

Imperturbable, inscrutable, in the world and yet not in it,..

The question is not one of pious God-seeking but of the Nietzschean Will to Power:

By what immense exercise of will,
Inconceivable discipline, courage, and endurance,
Self-purification and anti-humanity,
Be ourselves without interruption,
Adamantine and inexorable ?

The question may be imponderable, but the poet's sublime ego takes itself to be akin to a staging-post in this extension of consciousness:

Something at least of the necessary power has entered into me.

It is not a question of surrender to the 'otherness' of existence:

It is not a question of escaping from life
But the reverse - a question of acquiring the power
To exercise the loneliness, the independence, of stones,..

In his own book, the God-builder's disposition is not towards religious mysticism but "towards spiritual issues / Made inhumanly clear.. Super-humanly, menacingly clear.."

That note of menace (apparent in the reference to the Cheka in "First Hymn to Lenin") is alien to the God-seeker who may also achieve a personal surrender to the will of, or union with, God. But the Nietzschean-Marxist God-builder cannot achieve his goal in isolation. As with Gorky and Lunacharsky, so with MacDiarmid the ideal ahead of mankind depends upon a more earthly imperative. For the end-process of God-building can only be finally achieved in the mass:

These bare stones bring me straight back to reality.
I grasp one of them and I have in my grip
The beginning and the end of the world,
My own self, and as before I never saw
The empty hand of my brother man,
The humanity no culture has reached, the mob.
Intelligentsia, our impossible and imperative job !

The concept of the extension of consciousness as an ideal ahead, rather than within or above, man, symbolised in the poetry by the image of Man-Godhood, is common also to his prose writings. In The Company I've Kept (1966), for example, MacDiarmid envisages a "mutation" of humanity as necessary not simply for 'progress' but for survival itself:

..it seems to me at the present time, at this great turning-point in history, we are just at a point where the arts may be coming into their own.

The drones everywhere are going down the drain; through automation, cybernetics, there's going to be no work in the future for the stupid. There must be an enormous mutation of the human species, and that mutation can only be towards higher intellectuality. (49)

The poet's role, for MacDiarmid, lies in the extension of the human imagination and whatever one makes of his artistic elitism (which rarely, if ever, translates itself into social elitism except in the sense of claiming allegiance to Nietzschean-Marxist 'vanguard'), engagement with the mass, or in the mass, remains the ultimate imperative:

..the great majority of people simply rest on their laurels. They're not concerned. I want to concern them. The whole purpose of poetry is to ingenerate that kind of concern.. It's that question of fullness of life that I have always been concerned about.. It's that quality of intensity of life, the realisation of the potentialities of all human beings, that underlies a great deal of my own work. (50)

As he put it in "Problems of Poetry Today":

..it is the parasitical 'interpreting class', those who 'talk down to them' and insist that the level of utterance should be that of popular understanding, and jeer at what is not expressed in the jargon of the man-in-the-street, who are the enemies of the people, because what their attitude amounts to is 'keeping the people in their place', stereotyping their stupidity. The interests of the masses and the real highbrow, the creative artist, are identical, for the function of the latter is the extension of human consciousness. The interests of poetry are diametrically opposed to whatever may be making for any robotisation or standardisation of humanity or any short-circuiting of the human consciousness. (51)

It is not enough to say of MacDiarmid (as more than one apologist has) that his seeming contempt for the ordinary man is based upon, or cannot be judged except in relation to, his self-contempt. While that may well be the case, further to it, it is necessary to appreciate that the derisive and sometimes brutal flyting itself expresses a positive concern. Present stupidity and indifference seems all the more wasteful and offensive given the potential he sees, and celebrates in the poetry in imaginative terms, ahead of mankind. It is necessary to grasp that thistle in order to even approach the fundamentals of MacDiarmid's political-aesthetic. Indeed, without that understanding the term 'Nietzschean-Marxist' is practically meaningless. Political, conceptual and moral difficulties even may arise for the reader, not because MacDiarmid attempts to 'circumjack' or eschew engagement with the mass of mankind, but because he desires engagement and is willing to give vent to present feelings. Moreover, he has a 'mass-awareness' the equivalent of which it would be difficult to find among any of his western contemporaries.

Thus, it is precisely because "The interests of the masses and the real highbrow, the creative artist, are identical" that the stones in "On A Raised Beach" while representing the desired cosmic egotism also illustrate something of the masses and the artist's relation to them:

So these stones have dismissed
All but all of evolution, unmoved by it,
(Is there anything to come they will not likewise dismiss ?)
As the essential life of mankind in the mass
Is the same as their earliest ancestors yet..

Nay, as all thinkers and writers find
The indifference of the masses of mankind, -
So are most men with any stone yet, ..

It may be that the symbolism of the stones is manifold. In this instance it certainly cuts two ways. In Cencrastus, similarly, the overmen, "Those nameless wha by ither standards judge", are described also as (see p. 154 above) "The mighty masses that we ken nocht o'". In "Lament for the Great Music" the highbrow artist's relation to the masses is dealt with more prosaically, but the import is similar:

So those who have had to dwell
In solitude, at the furthest remove from their fellows,
Serve the community too. Their loneliness
Is only because they belong to a wider community
Than that of their immediate environment,
Not to one country or race, but to humanity,
Not to this age but to all time..

To return, however, to his prose writings, MacDiarmid, in Burns Today and Tomorrow (1959), a few pages after quoting Gorky's dictum that "Man only becomes man as he resists his environment", notes:

I have been reproached at times for a propaganda that could only succeed if there were a sudden and profound change in the psychology of the majority of my compatriots, and I have replied that it would be by no means the first time that had happened - and that it must be made to happen again now. (52)

As is implied here, the mutation of consciousness depends upon an act of will. In "The Caledonian Antisyzygy and the Gaelic Idea" (1931-32), MacDiarmid agrees with Dostoevsky that, as he puts it, "all human organisations become conspiracies to short-circuit the development of human consciousness", quoting from his own Cencrastus:

A' men's institutions and maist men's thochts
Are tryin' for aye to bring to an end
The insatiable thocht, the beautiful violent will,
The restless spirit of Man.. (53)

The perfected organism, the ideal ahead of man, has from the outset manifested itself as a concept central to marxist philosophy, though the particular interpretation given it by the God-builders may stray far from orthodoxy. Nevertheless, according to Marx:

It becomes a question of life and death to replace.. the partial individual, the bearer of a partial social function, by the totally developed individual, for whom different social functions constitute successive modes of activity. (54)

It is, according to Marx and Engels, the division of labour which prevents the "partial individual" becoming the "totally developed individual". In their analysis (in The German Ideology), the division of labour

..is said to have opposed 'abstract' individuals to a 'totality' of productive forces which confront them in reified form; and this is said to imply a stunting of individual development that can only be overcome by the abolition of private property, by a remoulding of society in such a way that every man will be able to develop his full human potential and thus produce a new kind of 'totality'. (55)

Thus, we read in Capital:

The realm of freedom truly begins only where labour determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases; in the very nature of things, therefore, it lies beyond the sphere of actual production. (56)

So MacDiarmid writes (as early as 1926):

The whole tendency and meaning of human inventiveness is towards the Workless State, the state in which all human drudgery is eliminated, in which the great majority of people will not require to work at all in the usual sense of work today, but will be able to concentrate on the far more important business of becoming human beings in any real sense of the term. (57)

But, in general, the kind of "freedom" beyond the sphere of production and the new kind of "totality" envisioned by the God-builders, MacDiarmid included, goes well beyond the conception of the "Workless State". There is not only a forswearing of strict materialism; but there is also a marked tendency to substitute a Nietzschean-Dostoevskian cult of "the beautiful violent will" for dialectical analyses. Thus, there is not only a difference in degree between what Marx means by the "totally developed individual" and what the God-builders mean. There is, in the final analysis, a difference in kind.

It is perhaps best to regard "Nietzschean-Marxism" or God-building as a 'mythological' or 'poetical' appendage to dialectical materialism though, as we have seen, its roots and manifestations are far more complex than such a description would indicate. Nevertheless, with the exception of writers like Shaw and MacDiarmid, God-building never really took root in the West in the same way as it did in Russia, the pervasive influence of Nietzsche notwithstanding. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the development of Russian communism has

retained echoes of God-building vitalism, perhaps because elements of God-building, already inherent in Russian culture, were possessed of sufficient strength to 'adapt' to a putatively materialist outlook.

Kline, for example, quotes one God-builder, M.A. Reisner, as stating in 1923:

We declare war on the old Gods, long live the new man - maker and creator - who not only equals but far surpasses them.

Many others, says Kline, including the anonymous author of On Proletarian Ethics (1906) and the marxist economic historian, N.A. Rozhkov, came to believe in individual immortality. In 1911 Rozhkov wrote:

It is conceivable that even the dream of eternal youth will be realized. Men who lived many centuries ago will be resurrected in the chemical laboratory. And, of course, they will resurrect those whom they knew and loved. The task of immortality will finally be carried out. We must try to be worthy of future resurrection.

Of less bizarre (and less gris(y)) notions of God-building, Kline points to a poem by Vladimir Mayakovski (a poet well-known to MacDiarmid) where he speaks of the "eternally youthful" centenarian, one who will achieve a hundred years without old age. In Soviet Life (September 1966 as cited by Kline), the scientist, Vladimir Keler, states that in the future in such long-livers "hereditary memory will be revived.. people will awake to their past and remember what their forefathers lived through and saw hundreds, thousands, and perhaps millions of years back". (58)

In a two-part study, "On Physical Immortality: Materialism and Transcendence", published in Survey: A Journal of Soviet and East European Studies (July and October 1965), Peter Wiles points out the long tradition of God-building in Russia, citing Nikolai Federov (1823-1903) - whom Soloviev once described as one of the most original thinkers since Christ - as among the earliest believers in physical resuscitation and physical immortality. MacDiarmid himself may have been made aware of such notions as early as 1908 as there is, in The New Age for January 4th. that year, an anonymous review of Professor Elie Metchikoff's The Prolongation of Life which argues that "death is a preventible disease", a thesis first expounded in his earlier work The Nature of Man.

(Incidental to this, The New Age also provides at least one example of the more humorous (or bizarre) aspects of God-seeking. In an article of the 5th. August 1926, a certain Madame V.Z. tells of her first visit to Rasputin in 1914, a visit undertaken because, she says, "My interests at that time centred more and more in various aspects of God-seeking". But, according to her account, Rasputin did not try to seduce her into God-seeking. He just tried to seduce her.)

Although MacDiarmid may not have indulged in some of the more bizarre aspects of God-building, he was certainly not the only 'wayward' communist writer. The tradition of Nietzschean-Marxism was widespread and many-sided and MacDiarmid was not alone in being "fu' o' a sticket God". Both Trotsky and Lunacharsky, for example, made claims on behalf of Christ. Trotsky:

Take the old religious teachings, take the message of Christ: the most noble, the most beautiful content of his Gospel is incarnated in our social message. (59)

Lunacharsky:

If Christ came back amongst us He would not hesitate to join our Bolshevik Party. (60)

Alexander Blok's poem of the Russian Revolution, "The Twelve", heralds also the coming of Christ. The 'Nietzschean' perspective on such statements was given by Oscar Levy in 1931:

Today neither Czar in Heaven nor Jew on earth could deny the fact that Christ has really risen in Russia, and that Marx was His theoretical and Lenin His practical prophet.

Yet neither Marx nor Lenin knew anything of the holiness of their message.. Nietzsche would have called tipsy freethinkers "Christians in disguise". (61)

Further to this coalescence of pseudo-religion or 'mysticism' and dialectical materialism, Gustav Wetter has noted that "there are striking points of contact to be found between dialectical materialism and non-Marxist tendencies in Russian philosophy" and that these contacts above all concern the Slavophile writers "so radically opposed to Marxism and materialism generally", writers like Soloviev, S. Bulgakov, N. Berdyaev, S. Frank, P. Florensky and L. Karsavin.⁽⁶²⁾ The correspondence in ideas between MacDiarmid's messianism and that of the Slavophile movement is the subject of our final chapter. However, of the matter under present scrutiny, Wetter writes:

This affinity can be apprehended most clearly.. in.. the adoption of the Hegelian dialectic, which despite its 'materialist inversion' continues to lend a certain touch of 'mysticism' to the dialectical materialist view.. Truly Russian, at least, is the excitement with which Lenin seizes upon the notion of a dialectical explanation of the universe; it is wholly in the spirit of that enthusiasm for Hegel so characteristic of Russia in the 'thirties and 'forties of the nineteenth century.. Hegel has found his most ardent votaries on Russian soil.. In virtue of this connection one may perhaps venture to assert that the element of 'mysticism' deriving from the dialectic is the very feature in Marxism which has enabled it to attain such sweeping success in Russia. (63)

A similarly 'mystical' appreciation could be argued for with regard to

MacDiarmid's avowed materialism: his belief that the transcendental is inherent in the material and his declaration that thought, and thought alone, is the ultimate reality.

Wetter also points to several features which show what he calls a "striking affinity" between Russian religious thought and Leninist philosophy, including:

..they typically romantic vision, again ultimately inherited from Hegel, of a reciprocal inner connection and unity pervading the infinite multiplicity of essences in the world. We may remember what it was in Hegel that so delighted Lenin: the idea, splendid in spite of its 'mysticism', of a 'living' (!) inter-connection of everything with everything else, and like the unity of opposites, this intuition also goes back to the conceptions prevailing in Platonic, and still more in neo-Platonic, mysticism. (64)

According to Wetter, then, Lenin himself was not free from the mysticism for which he so sharply chided the God-builders. That is as may be. All men are children of their time. But the important point is that there were many interconnections between 'mystical' or 'religious' thought and a putatively materialist outlook which have to be borne in mind regarding MacDiarmid and the Nietzschean-Marxists. However, when bearing this in mind, it is important to recognise the crucial distinction between God-seeking and God-building. Otherwise, MacDiarmid's writing is distorted, or, put another way, our perspective on it is warped. It is only the God-builder and not the God-seeker who could have written, as MacDiarmid did at the close of "Ode to All Rebels":

Your song, O God, that none dare hear
Save the insane and such as I
Apostates from humanity
Sings out in me with no more fear
Than one who thinks he has the world's ear
From his padded cell
- Insane enough, with you so near,
To want, like you, the world as well !

This is not the piety of the God-seeker, but the will to power of the Man-God who sets himself up in opposition to the "sticket God". This cosmic egotism found a parallel in MacDiarmid's cultural-nationalist messianism which, as the next chapter illustrates, drew heavily from the messianism of the Slavophiles so much in vogue in the New Age circle to which MacDiarmid, in many ways, belonged.

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- 4 Mirsky op. cit. pp. 106-7.
- 5 A. Volynsky "Dostoevsky and Tolstoi" The New Age 16th. Nov. 1916 p. 60.
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- 8 Ibid p. 154.
- 9 Ibid p. 117.
- 10 Letter to Ogilvie (15/11/1920) NLS Acc. 4540.
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- 30 V.I. Lenin On Literature and Art (Moscow 1967) p. 269 n. 29.
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- 33 Ibid p. 69.
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- 36 Mirsky Lenin op. cit. pp. 9-10.
- 37 Ibid pp. 98-99.
- 38 Ibid p. 32.
- 39 Quoted Arthur Bouchier Art and Culture in Relation to Socialism (I.L.P. London 1926).
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- 41 A. V. Lunacharsky Revolutionary Silhouettes (London 1967) p. 13.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 Kline op. cit. pp. 106-09.
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- 48 Ibid pp. 105-06.
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CHAPTER FIVE

Russian Influence and Counter Influence:
Slavophilism and Sophiology; Shestov and
Anarchism; Lenin and Proletcultism

Introduction

This, our final chapter, concerns the influences of Slavophilism and Sophiology on MacDiarmid's Celtic messianism and attempts to place MacDiarmid's messianism in perspective by illustrating something of the messianic element in Russian communism which was to have at least an equal influence on his thought and writings. In order to give as near complete a picture as possible it will be necessary to say something of the countervailing influence of Leo Shestov on MacDiarmid, finally, turning our attention to the poet's anarchism and his attitude to proletcultism and related movements. As Lenin's name is inextricably bound in to any discussion of MacDiarmid's attitude to proletcultism, and, as Shestov's name is inextricably linked to any discussion of his anarchistic elements, so too it is impossible to explore MacDiarmid's messianism without dealing conjointly with Slavophilism and Sophiology.

It is necessary, from the outset, to appreciate this conjunction since Soloviev's concept of St. Sophia (or Hagia Sophia) as the Wisdom of God, the Eternal Feminine, a force which will reconcile the fallen world - through man - to God, went hand in glove with declarations of Russian messianism. Slavophilism and Sophiology are closely associated ideologically, historically and culturally, and the two names who figure largest, for our purposes, are those of Soloviev and Dostoevsky.

Slavophilism and Sophiology

MacDiarmid, as we have seen, had read a great^{deal} of, and about, Soloviev. In J.N. Duddington's article in The Hibbert Journal he would have read that:

Sophia is not only the perfect unity of all that is sub specie aeternitatis, but also the unifying power in the divided and chaotic world, the living bond between the creator and the creature. (1)

It is this sense of mystical unity which MacDiarmid attempts to express in the two early poems "A Moment in Eternity" and "Hymn to Sophia: The Wisdom Of God", the latter closing:

Yet will creation turn to thee
When, love being perfect, naught can die,
And clod and plant and animal
And star and sky,
Thy form immortal and complete,
Matter and spirit one, acquire,
- Ceaseless till then, O Sacred Shame,
Our wills inspire !

MacDiarmid was inspired by the notion of St. Sophia but he was never the devout believer that Soloviev was. St. Sophia remained for him an

imaginative symbol in the expansion of consciousness. Despite the veneer of mystical 'worship' or 'devotion' in these two early poems even, it is noticeable that in the first, "A Moment in Eternity", the poet's cosmic ego identifies with and assimilates the power and ecstasy of Sophia, and, in the second, the appeal is not to religious awe but to inspired will-power (recalling Nietzsche). Moreover, what the "Hymn" strives to celebrate is not reunion with God, in essence, but the desire to overcome the dualism of "Matter and spirit" alone.

So, in A Drunk Man, the "silken leddy", the vision of whom he adapted from Alexander Blok who, in turn, had adapted it from Soloviev, associates not with the glory of God, or any such notion, but is at least a reflection (or externalised symbol) of the poet's own cosmic ego. Thus, he writes, "A sun is gi'en to me to haud" and there is no "key" to the vision "but mine". Moreover, the mysterious eyes of the "silken leddy" appear not in the heavens above but, through the inner quest of his own "benmaist history", they are to be seen (by his eyes alone) in the ocean from which all life evolved.

Similarly, in the second of the two Blok adaptations incorporated into the Drunk Man, Sophia is hailed by the "generations.. unborn" that he feels within himself. Not only this, but it is his own heart that has painfully brought her into existence:

Ill-faith stirs in me as she comes at last,
The features lang forekent... are unforecast.
O it gangs hard wi' me, I am forspent.
Deid dreams ha'e beaten me and a face unkent
And generations that I thocht unborn
Hail the strange Goddess frae my hert's-hert torn !

What MacDiarmid did, then, was to adapt the concept of Sophia in relation to his own cosmic egotism and she was to play a symbolic role not only with regard to his evolutionism but also with regard to his messianism.

In his article, Hibbert talks of the "antitype" to Sophia as the World Soul which strives for chaos but may be induced to surrender to the harmony of Sophia. The crucial link in this chain of being is consciousness:

The essential unity of all that is becomes now for the first time recognised by the World-Soul through the reason and conscience of man. The Divine Wisdom finds at last the conscious subject that can enter into conscious and reciprocal union with her and raise up to her the whole of the material world.. since in man the spiritual and the material principles are indivisibly connected, the regeneration of man must necessarily involve the regeneration of matter.(2)

In the first part of a three part series entitled "Towards the New Order", in The New Age in 1925, MacDiarmid, echoing and adapting Hibbert, writes:

But what I propose to concern myself with is the problem of Human Genius; and.. it is sufficient for my purpose to regard human consciousness as Vladimir Soloviev regarded it - as the conscious element whereby St. Sophia, the Divine Wisdom, hopes to reconcile the Universe to God. The first task of the conscious is to recognise that this is its duty and its still more or less unconscious desire; and the first thing it must do towards the accomplishment of that mighty task is to win to a like consciousness first the unconscious masses of humanity (including all the dead); then the lower orders of creation, the animals, plants, etc., and finally so-called inanimate matter. (3)
(italics mine)

MacDiarmid then goes on to amalgamate his Sophiology with Social Credit arguing that the latter will help "towards winning to the necessary consciousness the unconscious masses of humanity at any rate". Obviously, this is not a Solovievian disciple seeking God through Sophia but is evidence of MacDiarmid's abiding passion for mythologising his own environment according to the dictates of his cosmic egotism. Here, he is already attempting to synthesise western rationalism (in the form of Douglas's economic theory) with Russian mysticism.

This East-West parallel is pursued in the following two articles where he introduces a Celtic equivalent for Sophia, "Awen", whom he associates with the Bardic tradition, truth and genius, and, not unsurprisingly, with the extension of consciousness:

The prime characteristic of Awen, then, is an exultant sense of progressive consciousness of destiny - an avidity in seizing upon everything that may promote that consciousness - a sustained effort to achieve or retain maximum clairvoyance - and a ceaseless vigilance to defeat any instinct or influence that would impair or diminish it.. Those who are manifestly destitute of Awen have no conception of the Truth; those who only evince Awen intermittently have no secure hold on the Truth. In other words, genius is the criterion of Truth.. As to the requisites of Awen - Genius does not exist until it knows that it does; Genius cannot exist without understanding exactly what it exists for: Genius is incapable of failure. (4)

The note of aggressive elitism and self-justifying infallibility distinguishes MacDiarmid's Celtic 'goddess' from that of Soloviev. His mythologising is taken further in Lucky Poet where he introduces a similar figure to Awen, "Audh the Deep-Minded". As Sophia was the symbol of Russian genius, so Audh is the parallel symbol of Scottish genius.

MacDiarmid describes Audh (betrayed by the Union with England) as the "heroine" of his autobiography. She is the "vigour", the spiritual will-power, that can re-animate Scotland and the poet's purpose is to effect the "re-enthronement of Audh in her proper place". As with Awen, she is associated with the elite perception:

..how few have any conception of 'all the changes of approach and mood' a sense of actuality demands - and Audh is the sum

of all these changes, actuality rendered completely and not excluding the least graduation. (5)

Awen and Audh, then, are presented as symbols of an ideal or achieved Scottish consciousness, their genesis in MacDiarmid's writing having been inspired by the example of Soloviev's Sophia, and as such they are illustrations of MacDiarmid's East-West parallelism and are indicative of how central that parallelism is to his drive to mythologise his own immediate cultural environment.

What attracted the poet to Soloviev was not the notion of God-seeking, nor the notion of a "free Christian theocracy" uniting all mankind. (6) It was not the Orthodox Soloviev who inspired MacDiarmid, but the pagan elements in his Sophiology.

In his book, Holy Moscow (1940), Nicholas Arseniev draws out the implications of Soloviev's writings on Sophia:

Soloviev worships, with the devotion of an ancient Greek or a half-heathen Gnostic, the great mystery of sex, the birth-giving womb, the Eternal Womanly, which he strongly emphasises in some of his philosophical writings, but still more in his mystic cravings, adventures, and experiences. And that brings an unhealthy [sic], naturalistic flavour, a kind of sublimation of the sensuous and sexual, into his mystic experiences and teachings. Side by side with a platonic transcendence and with a true transfiguration and rehabilitation of the world by the power of grace through the Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection of the Son of God, he teaches a kind of naturalistic transfiguration of the world, in which the sexual merges into the Divine. Here, from the Christian standpoint, lies the great danger of his theory of redemption by sexual love, and of his "Sophia" teaching. It is not a Christian doctrine, rather it is gnostic, pagan, and naturalistic, sensuous (although sublimated) in its inspiration; nor is it free from the morbid and occult. (7)

One does not have to look far in the Drunk Man for naturalistic and sensual imagery associated with the Eternal Womanly nor for images of the sexual merging with the divine. The "silken leddy" is no distant goddess, rather from her robes "A rocky dwamin' perfume flits" about the howff. That she has been torn from the poet's heart (in the second Blok adaptation) itself suggests something of sublimation, a sublimation suggested by the lines:

It's queer the thochts a kittled cull
Can lowse or splairgin' glit annul.

Man's spreit is wi' his ingangs twined
In ways that he can ne'er unwind.

In the sequence opening, "O wha's the bride..", the bride tells her gudeman:

And on my lips ye'll heed nae mair,
And in my hair forget,

The seed o' a' the men that in
My virgin womb h'e met.

The sequence certainly images a merging of the sexual and the metaphysical if not of the sexual and divine. In "To Luna at the Cradle-and-Coffin" the eternal female principle is represented as a regenerative force resolute against the weaknesses of humankind, giving birth and rebirth despite the poet's cry, "I'll no' be born again / In ony brat you can produce".

The complement to the Eternal Womanly is the cosmic ego itself. "And nae Scot wi' a wumman lies", says the Drunk Man, "But I am he" and he wishes "a' the warld.. for a bride", concluding:

Disease is but the privy torch o' Daith,
- But sex reveals life, faith !

In the following lines there is a conscious merging of the sexual and divine where the Drunk Man images himself as a kind of persecuted Christ whose birth was the result of a liaison between the Holy Trinity and a "drucken hizzie":

The tug-o'-war is in me still,
The dog-hank o' the flesh and soul -
Faither in Heaven, what gar'd ye tak'
A village slut to mither me,
Your mongrel o' the fire and clay ?
The trollop and the Deity share
My writhen form as tho' I were
A picture o' the time they had
When Licht rejoiced to file itsel'
And Earth upshuddered like a star.

A drucken hizzie gane to bed
Wi' three-in-ane and ane-in-three.

The conception, here, of the cosmic ego, marked by a notable 'upshuddering' of the earth, is far from immaculate. The Eternal Womanly is here associated with the Mother of God but not in a way that Soloviev would have approved of. (The association of Sophia with the Mother of God is apparent in Soloviev and was propounded explicitly by some of his followers, notably Bulgakov and Florensky). (8) MacDiarmid's female principle is certainly not holier than thou:

It would be wrong, however, to see MacDiarmid's Eternal Womanly as a result of his own sexual sublimation. The imagery is far too earthly and earthy, the tone too overtly reductive, for this to be the case. As he puts it in "Ode to All Rebels":

To make sex out ethereal and inspiring
Hides the belief that it's ugly and obscene
In all such sublimation of it only
A variant of the Christian vilification's seen.

There is little doubt that MacDiarmid's Eternal Womanly is in part an adaptation of Soloviev's Sophia but the difference in degree between the

two symbolic figures is such that it amounts to a difference in kind. MacDiarmid creates his own equivalent(s) to Sophia.

The poet, in his own eclectic fashion, drew on Sophiology from translations of Soloviev and translations - by Mirsky, and by Deutsch and Yarmolinsky - of writers and poets Soloviev influenced: Blok, Merezhkovsky, Hippius, Berdyaev, Ivanov, Bely and Tyutchev. It is recorded that Dostoevsky attended Soloviev's lectures on "Godmanhood" and it is interesting to note how Dostoevsky in later life deserted the Nietzschean Man-God for Soloviev's God-Man. While Dostoevsky is addressed, and referred to, throughout the Drunk Man and Cencrastus, MacDiarmid also wrote Scots adaptations of poems not only by Blok but also by Merezhkovsky and Hippius. In Cencrastus he declares:

Tyutchev was richt and men maun gang
Awa' frae life to find
Haill worlds o' magic thochts
Day's licht can only blind..

MacDiarmid had also more than likely read Bakshy's translation of Soloviev's War, Progress, and the End of History (1915) in which Bakshy notes of the Russian mystic:

Through all the works there runs one cardinal thought: the idea of the evolution of the world which has made humanity a factor in the life of the Deity itself.. and has destined it for a final union with God "the all-unity".. There was a period when he believed that such a unity would be possible in this world, and that it would be accomplished by a transformation of the present-day states into a world theocracy. In this transformation a mission of special importance was assigned to Russia, who was believed to nourish within herself the idea of universal salvation. Soloviev was not alone in these hopes.. He shared them and, moreover, practically worked them out in close co-operation with his friend, Dostoevsky who, for his own part, gave expression to them in his famous novel, "The Brothers Karamazov". (9)

The whole notion of St. Sophia was bound in with Russian messianism and Slavophilism despite Soloviev's later "violent repudiation" of Slavophilism. (10)

MacDiarmid had an intimate knowledge of Slavophilism and Sophiology, and his eclectic mind accepted, adapted or discarded according to his own psychology and creative and propagandist purposes. A primary source of information was J.Y. Simpson's The Self-Discovery of Russia (1916). In early 1923, the poet wrote an article for the Glasgow Herald on Simpson and Soloviev and he quotes Simpson at the opening of "The Innumerable Christ" in Sangschaw (1925). In his book, Simpson, in his turn, had quoted Nicolai Berdyaev as stating:

That which has worked ceaselessly in the depths of the Russian spirit is no longer to be provincial and confined in its manifestation: the Slav race with Russia at its head is hence-

forth called to a defining role in the life of humanity..
There is a call to creative effort on the part of the
national will and spirit. (11)

This type of "call" to the national will and spirit was to be echoed by MacDiarmid for years to come, in both prose and poetry, one significant instance coming in "A Glass of Pure Water" where "the call is to the Celt" to overthrow capitalism and, indeed, abolish all government. MacDiarmid's messianic ideas in many ways begin here: with his reading of and about Slavophilism.

In The Self-Discovery of Russia, Simpson expends much energy in a sympathetic, not to say naive, analysis of Russian messianism. To the Slavophiles, Simpson, tells his readers, Constantinople was Tzargrad..

..economically, politically, and religiously Tzargrad - Town of Towns.. All the questions of Russian life and the present war are subsumed in this, Will it be possible for Russia to restore the defiled Temple in the sense of again showing to the world the light extinguished by the Turks ? (12)

Quoting and paraphrasing Prince E.N. Trubetskoy, friend and follower of Soloviev, Simpson paints a picture of Slavophilism as a desire for world unification under the reign of St. Sophia. To begin with, Russia's destiny is to 'free' the Slav peoples and unite them under her maternal and protective wing. Taken in this purist form, Slavophilism appears supra-national and, says Simpson, regards nationalism as "the negation of this united humanity because it puts one nation above others". (13)

The references to Trubetskoy's idealistic programme are drawn from his pamphlet Saint Sophia: Russia's Hope and Calling (English Edition 1916) which concerns itself with Russia's "religious mission". Trubetskoy informs us that "each nation has in Sophia its own individual idea" and attacks nationalism - with a very careful qualification:

Only in the quality of universal deliverer of smaller nations, and interferer in their behalf, can Russia obtain Constantinople and the Straits. (14)

The notion of each nation having its individual idea was one that appealed to MacDiarmid and he was to parallel his "Scottish Idea" with the Slavophiles' "Russian Idea". This last quotation appears in Simpson's book and it may well have caught MacDiarmid's eye. One quotation that does not, however, is the following, a quotation that betrays something of the dubious fabric of the messianic Sophiologists:

A prominent man [writes Trubetskoy] who lately returned to Moscow from Galicia and Poland spoke of his impressions: "If you doubt Russia, go from the rear of the army and enter the trenches. There they do not doubt. There are neither generals, nor officers, nor soldiers. There is only a grey crowd of men, dressed alike, equally brave, and equally ready to die for what to them is holy. (15)

Within two years (the Russian edition is 1915) mass desertions had rendered revolution inevitable.

The point is crucial to an understanding of Slavophile propaganda and its influence on MacDiarmid. For it must seem ironic that MacDiarmid adapted this purist supra-national 'philosophy' for his own nationalist purposes. But the truth is that Slavophilism was virulently nationalistic and was consciously manipulated by the Tzarist regime for aggressive and imperialist purposes. While MacDiarmid was undoubtedly aware of the purist arguments of such as Simpson, Trubetskoy and Dostoevsky, he must have been equally aware of the less attractive political realities that motivated Slavophile doctrines. For example, his philosophical master, as MacDiarmid called ^{Shestov} in Lucky Poet, wrote in Anton Tchekhov and Other Essays (English Edition 1916):

Dostoevsky did not discover one single original political idea. Everything of the kind that he possessed he had borrowed without examination from the Slavophiles.. Dostoevsky.. appeared in the role of a prophet of the Russian government.. For instance, the government began to cast covetous glances towards the East (at that time the Near East still); Dostoevsky begins to argue that we must have Constantinople, and to prophesy that Constantinople will soon be ours. His 'argument' is, of course, of a purely 'moral character', and, sure enough, he is a writer. Only from Constantinople, he says, can we make avail the purely Russian ideal of embracing all humanity.. the Moscow Gazette gives its opinion that it would be well for the Crimean Tartars to emigrate to Turkey, since it would then be possible for Russians to settle in the Peninsula. Dostoevsky catches up this original idea with enthusiasm. 'Indeed', he says, 'on political and state and similar considerations.. it is necessary to expel the Tartars and to settle Russians on their lands.' When the Moscow Gazette projects such a measure, it is intelligible. But Dostoevsky ! Dostoevsky who called himself a Christian.. Men took the poet-laureate of the existing order for the inspirer of thoughts and governor of Russia's remotest destinies. It was enough for Dostoevsky. It was even necessary for Dostoevsky. He knew of course that he was no prophet.. (16)

"Thou, Dostoevski, understood," says the Drunk Man, "Wha had your ain land in your bluid" - which suggests that MacDiarmid was certainly taken in by the purist accounts of Russian messianism. But there is a conscious and curious ambiguity in his acceptance of Dostoevsky's "Appallin' genius" in the following lines from the Drunk Man. One cannot be sure whether he is simply referring to the cult of the Man-God and its attendant antinomianism, or whether the ugly side of Dostoevsky's messianism is equally in his mind:

I, in the Thistle's land,
As you in Russia where
Struggle in giant form
Proceeds for evermair.

In my sma' measure 'bood
 Address a similar task,
 And for a share o' your
 Appallin' genius ask.

Shestov's scepticism contrasts violently with MacDiarmid's synthetic Romanticism. Alluding to the indiscriminate butchering which sparked off the 1905 Revolution, Shestov states:

In Moscow, in the heart of Russia, women, children, and old men have been shot down. Where now is the Russian universal soul of which Dostoevsky prophesied in his speech on Pushkin ? (17)

It was that speech, rather than his philosophical master's scepticism, which influenced MacDiarmid. As Kenneth Buthlay has pointed out, the references to Narodbogonosets (God-bearer) and the vse-chelovek (the All-Man or Pan-Human) in A Drunk Man are drawn from Mirsky's Modern Russian Literature (1925), and in the passage from which they are drawn we find Mirsky arguing that "Dostoevsky was no vulgar Panslavist or Imperialist".⁽¹⁸⁾ It is Mirsky who obviously influenced MacDiarmid here and not Shestov.

In his later book, A History of Russian Literature (1927), which MacDiarmid reviewed in the New Age (25th. June 1927), Mirsky again gives a very sympathetic account of Dostoevsky's Pan-Slavism whereas Shestov alludes to the madness of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, asking:

What is the Superman but a title, a patent giving the right to be called a noble thing among the canaille ? (19)

It may well be that, in general terms, the scepticism characteristic of Shestov's writings helped to counterbalance MacDiarmid's Romantic mythologising, holding him back from the worst excesses in which Dostoevsky's "Appallin' genius" indulged. But it certainly seems that MacDiarmid held to and adapted what he considered an imaginative thesis in spite of historical realities. His thesis that, for example, Scotland must work for the overthrow of world capitalism (an essential part of its 'mission') and establish a Celtic Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, rings somewhat hollow and does so partly because he lifts wholesale the messianic ideas of Russian writers and grafts them willy-nilly on to Scottish conditions. But that some of his parallel mythologising seems wide of the mark (even bizarre) should not prevent us from appreciating the part this played in allowing him to place correlatives through which he could develop his writing, even some of his best poetry - including the Drunk Man.

It was the "Idea" of Slavdom, the "Russian Idea", as propounded by Dostoevsky, that sent MacDiarmid in search of a parallelogram of forces which could free the human spirit, a parallelogram that he would politicise in a different way to Dostoevsky. The "Scottish Idea" was not to be a 'Holy Mission', but a dialectical necessity:

This little country can overcome the whole world of wrong
As the Lacedemonians the armies of Persia.
Cornwall - Gaeldom - must stand for the ending
Of the essential immorality of any man controlling
Any other - for the ending of all Government
Since all Government is a monopoly of violence;
For the striking of this water out of the rock of Capitalism;

Moreover, not only writers of Scottish descent like Lermontov were to be claimed for the Scottish Genius, even Stalin was to be shown as Celtic Man:

'Stalin the Georgian,' I have said. We are Georgians all.
We Gaels.

The name Karthweli by which the Georgians themselves call
Their race and their country is none other
Than our Scottish Argyll - the Georgian equivalent
Of 'Ard-Gael' (the high place of the Gael)..

("The Fingers of Baal Contract..")

Ah, Stalin, we Scots who had our first home
In Caucasian Georgia like yourself see how
The processes of history in their working out
Bring East and West together in general triumph now.

- Lamh dearg aboo !

("Lamh Dearg Aboo")

While Stalin could be claimed a Celt and a symbolic figure in the desired East-West Synthesis, the Representative Personality could claim a racial equivalence with Lenin. In Lucky Poet, while discussing Christopher Hollis's book Lenin (1938), MacDiarmid states:

I do not agree with all of this, of course, but with the fact that Lenin, like myself - the Slav and the Celt - lies outside Europe [Lenin came from Simbirsk, eight hundred miles east of Moscow] as Eugenio d'Ors also insisted, and this, not only going further than the earlier idea of Aodh de Blacam and myself and other Gaelic writers of the necessity of 'getting back behind the Renaissance' - behind that Greek national whitewashing of all other European countries which had prevented them getting down to their Ur-motives and realising themselves in turn as Greece itself had done - but also because here too the oriental element in Celticism emerges into higher significance, has been one of the principle considerations in all my work.

As he says, with regard to the "oriental element" in Celticism:

The ideas of the East-West synthesis and the Caledonian antisyzygy merge into one. (20)

In this jigsaw of messianic influences on MacDiarmid, Oswald Spengler also played his part. Spengler, as we noted previously, believed that a new light would come from the East, from Russia, and he also talked of small European nations as bearers of a new culture. MacDiarmid seized this notion, applying it to his own small nation and fitting it into the pattern of the Russo-Scottish parallel. The organic metaphor central to Spengler's thesis was drawn, in part at least, (as MacDiarmid must have known from his reading of Mirsky's History of Russian

Literature) from one of the early Slavophile writers, Nikolay Yakolevich Danilevsky (1822-85), and his theory of "biological nationalism".⁽²¹⁾ Danilevsky, himself a curious mixture of the Romantic and the realist, had formed a Pan-Slav programme in which he stated quite straightforwardly that Slavdom needed Constantinople "on the basis of naval, military, commercial and prestige advantages".⁽²²⁾

MacDiarmid, in his inimitable magpie fashion, picked and chose from this jumbled school of thought what he wanted for, or what was assimilable to, the construction of his own world view. But, even outwith Shestov's scepticism, he must have been aware of the negative aspects of Slavophile doctrines. In Bruckner's Literary History of Russia, part of which - as we have seen - he incorporated into the Drunk Man, Slavophilism is dealt with quite critically, Alexander Herzen being quoted, for example, as saying:

..in many Essays in Slavophile periodicals there is a perfect reek of torture-chambers, torn-out nostrils, excommunication and penance.. These are werewolves and corpses; from their demesne no living soul replies, they have wrenched their understanding, Procrustes-like, by feigned Orthodoxy and artificial cult of the people. (23)

But the whole flowering of Russian culture in the nineteenth century was, in one way or another, bound in with Slavophilism. Outwith the literary-creative writers already mentioned in connection with Soloviev, Slavophiles included the philosopher, Ivan Kirevsky; the theologians, Khomyakov and Samarin; the folklorist, Peter Kirevsky; and the historian, Asakov.⁽²⁴⁾ Given this pervasiveness it is hardly surprising that MacDiarmid should become infected by such ideas when, as Mirsky points out in The Intelligentsia of Great Britain, the British intelligentsia found spiritual kinship with their Russian equivalents.

Most notable here is the cult of Dostoevsky who was often heralded as a seer, a great psychologist and, in general, as a kind of superman. Lavrin's Dostoevsky and his Creation (1920) presents a saintly Dostoevsky whose Pan-Slavism seems almost apolitical and akin to Asakov's definition of it as the "Christian Idea pushed to its furthest limits".⁽²⁵⁾ Andre Gide's Dostoevsky (1925) quotes him as saying:

..in Russia, by the very nature of her mission, Europe will be consummated..

..maybe the Russian idea will be the synthesis of all the ideas developed with such courage and persistence in the various European nationalities. (26)

That synthesis MacDiarmid expanded to give more scope to Scottish/Celtic messianism, seeking justification in Spengler. In all of this lies much that is central to the genesis of A Drunk Man and To Circumjack Cencrastus,

the latter introducing, as Roderick Watson has pointed out, the Gaelic Idea, "a political, cultural and psychological concept which was to be of increasing importance" (27) for him:

If we turn to Europe and see
Hoo the emergence o' the Russian Idea's
Broken the balance o' North and Sooth
And needs a coonter that can only be
The Gaelic Idea
To mak' a parallelogram o' forces,
Complete the Defence o' the West,
And end the English betrayal o' Europe.

In A Drunk Man, he had written that he "may aiblins reach / To what this Russian has to teach" and he heralds Dostoevsky as a kind of Man-God

Closer than ony ither Scot,
Closer to me than my ain thocht,
Closer than my ain breath to me,
As close as to the Deity
Approachable in whom appears
This Christ o' the neist thoosand years.

His adoption of the "Gaelic" or "Scottish" Idea as a counter-equivalent to Dostoevsky's "Russian Idea" derives from a felt spiritual kinship between himself - as Representative Personality - and Dostoevsky as a similar embodiment of Russian psychology:

For a' that's Scottish is in me,
As a' things Russian were in thee..

What is meant by "This Christ o' the neist thoosand years" is explained by Spengler whom MacDiarmid quotes, in The Scottish Chapbook for March 1923, as saying:

Dostoevsky is a saint, Tolstoy is merely a revolutionary..
The Christianity of Tolstoy was a misunderstanding. He
spoke of Christ and he meant Marx. The next thousand years
belong to the Christianity of Dostoevsky.

MacDiarmid's counterbalance, his "parallelogram o' forces", Roderick Watson describes as "a highly idiosyncratic theory". (28) It certainly seems a highly individual adaptation of the Russian model. But MacDiarmid's notion is not quite as original and idiosyncratic as it seems. If we look at The New Age in the early 'twenties it becomes apparent that MacDiarmid was by no means alone in this kind of theorising and The New Age can be seen as a further conditioning influence on him.

Messianism in The New Age

In The New Age Under Orage, Wallace Martin notes:

The war led to an exodus of occult philosophers from Eastern and Central Europe, and most of those who arrived in London seem to have appeared at Orage's weekly meetings in the

Chancery Lane ABC. Janko Lavrin introduced R.A. Vran-Gavran, a Russian monk who contributed a number of apocalyptic fables and visions to the magazine.. Even more unusual was Dimitri Mitrinovic, a Yugoslav.. His shaven head indicated that he too had been a monk, but his mystical theories had little in common with any orthodox religion.. These ideas served as the basis of a column on 'World Affairs', written by 'M.M.Cosmoi', which appeared weekly between August 1920 and October 1921.

As Orage had serious reservations about Mitrinovic's theories, he wrote 'World Affairs' for several months from notes taken during their conversations. Mitrinovic himself wrote the column after this probationary period. (29)

The parallel which 'Cosmoi' propounds is that of England and Russia:

It is Russia and England, we repeat, the continental and oceanic blocks of Aryandom, that are centrally responsible for the guidance of the world today.

Russia and Slavdom is the reverse and the correlativity of Great Britain and Anglo-Saxon humanity. Europe cannot exist, cannot be Europe without these two immense collateral members, England and Slavdom.

The destiny and fate of the British Empire is one and identical with that of the planet earth. (30)

This kind of messianic parallelism was common to not a few New Age contributors besides Mitrinovic whom MacDiarmid knew and whom he described in Lucky Poet as "that amazing Serbian 'village Jesus'". (31)

One can see, from the above examples, how MacDiarmid's mythologising could simply substitute 'Scotland' or 'Gaeldom' for 'England' or 'Britain', though it must be noted that his parallelism lacked the imperialistic tone of 'Cosmoi's' and that, eventually, MacDiarmid parallelism was to be characterised along the lines of a Communist International.

Nevertheless, the New Age origin of such parallelism is marked by racist and fascist notions, anti-semitic references, for example, being peppered throughout these post-war articles. Such articles undoubtedly infected MacDiarmid and may have given rise to his own occasional fascist utterance.

The 'World Affairs' column indulged in what can only be described as Sophiological garbage, nonsensical syntheses of non-existent identities and amorphous concepts:

The gnosis of Christ and of Sophia is the central and anthropocentric, human, pan-human gnosis of the world.. The pan-human mission of the Russian race is to impose the Northern world-synthesis of Sophian Christianity, of the gnosis of the Pleroma upon the empty and reactionary pseudo-Pleroma of the Semitic revelations, of Jehovah and Allah. (32)

Not surprisingly, as Martin informs us:

Mitrinovic's articles on the psychic functions of

various races and nations.. coincided with the least successful phase of the magazine's history. As a result of their publication, the circulation declined. (33)

Another writer who may well have reinforced in MacDiarmid some of the doubtful element of this messianism was A.G. Pape from whose book, The Christ of the Aryan Road, MacDiarmid quotes in a footnote to "Ceol Mor" (Poems of East-West Synthesis 1946). He is described in Lucky Poet as

..that Napoleon mangué.. whose ancestors on either side embraced almost all the great diplomats of France and of Great Britain and with whom, for a time, I had a great deal to do in Edinburgh. (34)

MacDiarmid certainly revelled in idiosyncratic and eccentric characters, but Pape might be best described as a muddle-headed fascist who wrote such dubious and pseudo-scientific books as Is There A New Race Type ? (1923), The Alternative To Communism (1932) and The Politics of the Aryan Road (1928), the last being dedicated to "The New Race Type".

However, messianism was never restricted to fascist or racist ideologies and MacDiarmid's celtic-communist messianism is comparable to the messianism of post-revolutionary Russia in many ways.

Messianism, Communism and National Psychology

Pan-Slavism did not die out in Russia after the 1917 Revolutions. Indeed, it played its part in spreading Russian communism. One professed anti-communist Sophiologist (writing in 1956 !), Egbert Munzer, notes:

Even Russian atheism is thoroughly pan-Slavist. The criterion of the "good Russian", formerly adherence to Orthodoxy, has now become adherence to Communism.

Although it would be fair to say that Munzer overstates his case, nevertheless his approach to his subject cannot be altogether gainsaid:

It is precisely the spirit of messianic seclusion and particularism.. which has given wings to the heavy doctrines of Marx. Moscow, the Third Rome, has become Moscow of the Third International. Yet all the force inherent in this latter idea is drawn from the power of the first, that is, the messianic idea of Russia's vocation in history. This is what gives strength to the revolution, and not its problematic social and political achievements.. The dream of a priestless religion haunted Russian thought from the beginning of its Christian era and was the forerunner of a corresponding secular dream of a society without classes or external authority.

Outside its Pan-Slavist version, says Munzer,

Russian Communism.. wants to realize an idea which may best be described as "Mangodhood", as opposed to Solovyev's "Godmanhood". In other words, Communism is

a secular perversion of the religious idea of Divine Humanity.. this religious residue was probably the most vital agent of Communism. (35)

We have already discussed the association of "Mangodhood" with Russian communism, with the intellectual faction within the Bolshevik Party with whom it was fashionable, and, although Munzer's axe may be ground in rather too blunt a fashion, the messianic spirit of much of Russian culture (including its religious expression) must have played its part in post-revolutionary Russia. For example, in a poem written to celebrate the Soviet liberation of Russia and Eastern Europe from Nazi occupation, Boris Pasternak shows how Slavophile notions carried through to creative writers long after 1917. I quote from the third and seventh stanzas of "Spring 1944":

The breath of spring within our Motherland
Is washing off the winter's traces,
Is washing off black rings and crevices
From tear-worn eyes of Slavic races..

A dreamer and a half-night-ponderer,
Moscow I love with all my power.
Here is the source of all the wonderful
With which the centuries will flower. (36)

Similarly, MacDiarmid's parallelism, as expounded in "The Kulturkampf" (A Kist of Whistles 1947), seeks for Scotland the "spiritual energy" of Russia:

For Scotland was simply Russia turned inside out;
Russia was the richest of nations in spiritual energy,
We were the poorest; Russia the poorest
In social machinery, we among the richest.

Moreover, MacDiarmid seeks (in "Ceol Mor" Poems of East-West Synthesis 1946) to assure us that this "spiritual energy" is as Celtic as it is Russian by stating that in order "To refresh the Gaelic genius at its oldest sources" Scotland must recapture something of "that vast Celtic Empire / Which about the fourth century B.C. / Claimed as its frontiers the Dneister in Russia..", quoting from Pape's Christ of the Aryan Road in a footnote in order to back up his argument.

MacDiarmid was influenced by both pre- and post-revolutionary Russian messianism and he was not unique as a non-Slavic poet in his understanding of Slavophilism as a positive and, indeed, revolutionary force. Francis Adams, whose Songs of the Army of the Night MacDiarmid recommended as possessing a revolutionary consciousness uncommon in British poetry and from which collection he quotes at the opening of "England Is Our Enemy" in In Memoriam James Joyce, writes in one of the poems "Holy Russia":

And she moves, and around her neck
She feels the iron-scaled Snake

Whose fangs suck at the heart
Hid by her tattered dress,
By her lean and hanging teat.
Russia, O land of Faith,
O realm of the ageless Slav,
O oppressed one of eternity,
This darkest hour is the hour,
The hour of the coming dawn !
Europe, the rank, the corrupt,
Lies stretched out at your feet.
Turkey, India, lo all,
East and south, it is yours ! (37)

MacDiarmid's feeling of kinship with Russia, strengthened by his own political beliefs, undoubtedly came through his wide reading on the subject, and is to a considerable extent based on a notion that the Scot and the Russian have very similar national psychologies. It is thus that, in A Drunk Man, Dostoevsky can be described as "Closer to me than my ain thocht", and both can be presented as Representative Personalities:

For a' that's Scottish is in me,
As a' things Russian were in thee..

The notion, which forms the basis of much poetical exegesis, is one that can be teased out in more detail in MacDiarmid's prose writings. To begin with, there is at least one example of direct racial cross-fertilisation: Lermontov, whose blend of romantic imagination and stern reality, of lyrical inspiration and earthly common-sense, MacDiarmid attributes to his Scottish ancestry. For this blend is none other than a manifestation of the antiszyzyginous qualities of the Scottish psychology:

"I despise myself sometimes, is not that the reason I despise others ? I have become incapable of noble impulses. I am afraid of appearing ridiculous to myself," writes Lermontov, an unmistakably Scottish confession. (38)

Russo-Scottish psychological parallels abound. In Francis George Scott (1955), MacDiarmid argues that the Union of 1707 thwarted Scottish psychology and self-expression, while noting:

As Logan points out in The Scottish Gael the pre-Union Scots were, like the Russians great talkers, and all-night "cracks" were nothing out of the common.. (39)

Both Scots and Russians share a "barbarian" psychology, a parallel which MacDiarmid pursued through his reading of Nietzsche and Spengler, through Bruckner's reference to Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, and with particular regard to the messianic figure of Lenin. The "barbarians", MacDiarmid writes in Scottish Eccentrics (1936), are ultimately anarchistic in temperament:

True, few Scots seem to have had any artistic tendency - the elements that in other peoples would have become the materials of art have always been abundant enough amongst them, but instead of being applied to artistic purpose they flare up to great heights and then are suddenly thwarted and beaten down by contrary forces generally

of a moral (which, of course, includes immoral) sort. As a rule, too, these stultifying forces come from without - they are the European influences the barbarians are unable to withstand, which prevent them from being fully themselves. It is this selecting, organising, and ordering of experience which is alien to the Scottish genius, which lacks the necessary architectonic faculty and purpose - it is the acceptance of a code of any sort. The Scots should sample all philosophies and religions and enjoy their various savours, but switch about freely from one to the other, accepting none - which is, of course, anarchy. "In the field of metaphysics", as Shestov says, "rules the daemon of whom we are not even entitled to assume that he is interested in any 'norm' at all. Norms arose among the cooks and were created for cooks.. The whole art of philosophy should be directed towards freeing us from the 'good and evil' of cooks and carpenters, to finding that frontier beyond which the might of general ideas ceases". It is certainly there that Scottish genius has most abundantly manifested itself - in the play of personality, the indulgence of impulses, not in stated terms of dialectic or art. The true Scot is known by his propensity for a genuine "transition into another field". (40)

Images of things Scottish flaring up to great heights only to be beaten down abound in A Drunk Man. The very movement of the poem is contained within this dialectic of opposing forces, perhaps best encapsulated in "Ballad of the General Strike" from which the following stanzas are taken:

A rose loup't oot and grew, until
It was ten times the size
O' ony rose the thistle afore
Hed heistit to the skies..

And still it grew until it seemed
The hail braid earth had turned
A reid reid rose that in the lift
Like a ball o' fire burned..

Syne the rose shrivelled suddenly
As a balloon is burst;
The thistle was a ghaistly stick,
As gin it had been curst.

Was it the ancient vicious sway
Imposed itsel' again,
Or nerve owre weak for new emprise
That made the effort vain,

A coward strain in that lorn growth
That wrocht the sorry trick ?
- The thistle like a rocket soared
And cam' doon like the stick.

That the stultifying forces are of a moral sort is made clear earlier in the poem:

It is morality, the knowledge o' Guid and Ill,
Fear, shame, pity, like a will and wilyart growth,
That kills a' else wi' in its reach and craves
Nae less at last than a' the warld to gi'e it scouth.

The "knowledge o' Guid and Ill", the norms of the cooks and carpenters, which MacDiarmid and Shestov deride were similarly derided by Nietzsche, and for all his anti-Superman iconoclasm Shestov is here indebted to Nietzsche and "that frontier beyond which the might of general ideas ceases" is an echo of the Nietzschean 'transvaluation of all values'.

With regard to the anarchistic temperament of the Scot and his "continual propensity for a genuine "transition into another field"", one recalls "A Solitary Wing" (Annals 1923) which portrays "Fred" (largely an externalisation of MacDiarmid's own mental juggling) and his transitions into other fields:

I had at that time no knowledge whatever of his other and quite irreconcilable activities. I did not know that he was known in other circles as a philosophic anarchist; nor that he was the author of the powerful Neo-Catholic articles which created such a sensation in the autumn of 1909 and won so many converts for Rome. Nor had I the slightest suspicion of his dipsomaniacal tendencies nor of his countervailing eroticism. (41)

This is an early imaginative illustration of the Scottish eccentric's ability to "sample all philosophies and religions and enjoy their various savours". But that characteristic, or ability, had its Russian parallels too and what MacDiarmid writes in Scottish Eccentrics echoes what he wrote of Rozanov in the New Age almost a decade earlier:

..Rozanov who wrote Conservative articles in the Novoe Vremya, and Radical articles in the Russkoe Slovo, but, when charged with moral insanity, "did not regard this inconsistency as anything outrageous. Politics were to him a very minor business that could not be brought sub speciem aeternitatis. What interested him in both parties were only the various individualities that went to form them, their 'taste', their 'flavour', their 'atmosphere'". (42)

The Faustian longing for the infinite which (imbibing Spengler) MacDiarmid took as an essential attribute of Scottish character rhymes with many Russian examples he must have read, like Bruckner's of Dostoevsky:

Like a true Slav, he does not know at all how to keep a hold on himself, but loses himself in the boundless expanse. (43)

That this shared psychology of the "barbarian" nations forms the basis of his Russo-Scottish paralellism is made explicit in Lucky Poet where he talks of the "determination" of his nature "via Marx and Lenin and Stalin to that concern to get rid of the English Ascendancy and work for the establishment of Workers' Republics in Scotland, Ireland, Wales and Cornwall, and, indeed, make a sort of Celtic Union of Socialist Soviet Republics in the British Isles" in conjunction with "the essentially barbarian (i.e. outside European civilisation) nature of the Celtic genius". (44)

MacDiarmid, then, was consistent in his appreciation of

his 'Russian Model', which he took as a correlative for his own messianism, a messianism rooted in his own "barbarian" psychology and sense of elitism. In his Renaissance tract, Albyn or Scotland and the Future (1927), he wrote:

The conscious minority has, perhaps, still a decade in which to develop a "Scottish Idea" complementary to Dostoevsky's "Russian Idea" (Dostoevsky's mistake was to imagine that Russia alone could prevent the robotization of Europe) and in so doing to demonstrate that Prof. Denis Saurat divined aright the larger hope of the Scottish Renaissance Movement when he wrote that in achieving its immediate objectives it might do more - it might save Europe. (45)

But the decade passed without any appreciable manifestation of the "Scottish Idea", this messianic symbol of the nature and aims of Scottish psychology. Such "Ideas" belong in essence to the last century and, specifically, to the Slavophile movement. Even then, the "Russian Idea" was the indulgence of the few, and an indulgence consciously manipulated for reactionary and imperialist purposes. There is, undoubtedly, a naivety in the way in which MacDiarmid heralds the "Scottish Idea", as if it were some monolithic concept buried in racial genes awaiting singular resurrection. It led him to state his "Programme for a Scottish Fascism" in The Scottish Nation in 1923 where he claims that a "new national will" would reveal "the idea of Scotland".⁽⁴⁶⁾ It led him to accept Wyndham Lewis's "zoological principle" - as Mirsky refers to it - "Blutgefuhl, or blood unity, otherwise known as racial tump".⁽⁴⁷⁾ According to Alexander Herzen, Slavophile ideas "but lately crept out of graves and had not grown more sensible under the moist earth".⁽⁴⁸⁾

Leo Shestov and Anarchism

The countervailing influence of Leo Shestov, as we have already noted, may well have prevented MacDiarmid from indulging in the worst excesses of Dostoevsky's "Appallin' genius" and acted as a counter-balance to his Romantic mythologising after the fashion of the Slavophiles. In the writings of Shestov, most notably All Things Are Possible (English edition 1920), MacDiarmid found much that was compatible to his own anarchistic tendencies.

Shestov, born Lev Isaakovich Schwarzmann in 1866, left Russia in 1920 and, living most of his later life in and around Paris, co-edited with D.S. Mirsky and the poetess Marina Tsvetayeva a Russian emigre periodical called Vyorsty (Mileposts).⁽⁴⁹⁾ Twice in Lucky Poet Shestov is described as MacDiarmid's "favourite" philosopher and once as

his "master". One of his own "mottoes" he claims is Shestov's

To grasp and admit absolute freedom is infinitely hard for us, as it is hard for a man who has always lived in the darkness to look into the light, but this is obviously no objection, the more so as in life there are difficulties which are far greater, simply unacceptable; he who knows these difficulties will not shrink from trying his luck with the idea of chaos. (50)

Shestov's 'revolt against reason' struck a chord with MacDiarmid's Romantic temperament, and he often quotes (with and without acknowledgement) statements from the Russian philosopher. The attempt to grasp absolute freedom in A Drunk Man is imaged - in several passages - in terms of light and darkness. "Darkness comes closer to us than the light" and is "wi' us a' the time", we are told, and the light of absolute or ideal freedom (symbolised by the moon) is defined as "That queer extension o' the dark" that "has lang confused the dark, / And set it at cross-purposes wi' itsel". Nor does the Drunk Man shrink from trying his luck with the idea of chaos:

For sic a loup towards wisdom's croon
Hoo fer a man maun base him down,
Hoo plunge aboot in Chaos ere
He finds his needfu' fittin' there,
The matrix oot o' which sublime
Serenity sall soar in time !

The most famous definition of the poet's own extremism (in A Drunk Man) appears with a tongue-in-cheek reference to "some foreign philosopher" who can only be Shestov, and the reference itself illustrates the psychological affinity MacDiarmid felt for the Russian:

I'll ha'e nae hauf-way hoose, but aye be whaur
Extremes meet..

I'll bury nae heid like an ostrich's,
Nor yet believe my een and naething else.
My senses may advise me, but I'll be
Mysel' nae maitter what they tell's..

I ha'e nae doot some foreign philosopher
Has wrocht a system oot to justify
A' this: but I'm a Scot wha blin'ly follows
Auld Scottish instincts, and I winna try.

His prayer (two stanzas later) that he will never be "Cut aff and self-sufficient" echoes Shestov's attack on "narrow self-sufficiency". MacDiarmid took for his own Shestov's statements that talent is the enemy of genius and that egoism in others strikes us as unpleasant because it betrays our own poverty. Moreover, Shestov's solipsism may have reinforced that of the Scot. As Shestov says:

..if you must question, then be ready beforehand to reconcile
yourself with something like solipsism [sic] or modern
realism. (51)

As D.H. Lawrence notes of Shestov in his Foreword to All Things Are Possible:

"Everything is possible" - this is his really central cry. It is not nihilism. It is only a shaking free of the human psyche from old bonds. The positive central idea is that the human psyche, or soul, really believes in itself, and in nothing else. (52)

Thus Shestov is important to an understanding of MacDiarmid's impossibilism. That absolute freedom is infinitely hard to grasp and admit is a thought that MacDiarmid took to heart. In Cencrastus he writes:

Freedom is inconceivable. The word
Betrays the cause - a habit o' the mind,
Thinkin' continually in a certain way,
Generation after generation, till it seems
This is Thocht's fixed unalterable mode;

This is why he must try his luck with the idea of chaos. Similarly, Shestov is important to MacDiarmid's evolutionism. He is one of the many sources from which MacDiarmid drew. Shestov writes:

At present a stone remains long enough a stone, a plant a plant, an animal an animal. But it might be that a stone changed into a plant before our eyes, and the plant into an animal. That there is nothing unthinkable in such a supposition is proved by the theory of evolution. This theory only puts centuries in place of seconds. (53)

So MacDiarmid writes in Cencrastus:

The day is comin' when ilka stane
'll hae as guid as a human brain
And frae what they are noo men
Develop in proportion then
(At least it's hoped they will
And no' be owretaeen still)
While sex and ither hauf way stages
Perish wi' the barbarous Ages,.

Shestov, then, reinforced MacDiarmid's own poetic intuitions and psychological predilections. The anarchistic Representative Personality, with its cult of self-contradiction and emotional, psychological and political extremism, could identify with and assimilate much that was in Shestov's writings. One notable example of assimilation occurs in "John MacLean (1879-1923)" where the poet claims that "All law is the contemptible fraud" that MacLean declared it to be. I don't know that MacLean ever made such a declaration. It is certainly not in any recorded speech or published article and it suggests an anarchist position foreign to MacLean's carefully constructed socialist strategy and analysis. But the claim does apply to Shestov who wrote:

Laws all of them - have only a regulating value, and are necessary only to those who want rest and security. But the first and essential condition of life is lawlessness. Laws are a refreshing sleep - lawlessness is creative activity. (54)

To MacDiarmid MacLean's courageous stand against the forces of reaction may well have embodied a Shestovian spirit grasping at absolute freedom and it thus seems that the Representative Personality not only assimilates other

personalities, but conflates them too.

Both Shestov and MacDiarmid seem spiritual and moral anarchists rather than political anarchists. Although he may delineate and celebrate the anarchistic qualities of Scottish psychology, and although he may cry (in "Ode to All Rebels") "Vive L'Anarchie !", MacDiarmid not only never declared himself a political anarchist but he shows little knowledge of or interest in anarchist philosophy, anarcho-syndicalism, in writers such as Proudhon, Kropotkin, Bakunin and Malatesta. But, even accepting that the politics of socialism were subordinate to his artistic drive, there is a tension in MacDiarmid's poetry - or at least a pattern of contradiction - between authoritarian and libertarian values.

As regards his poetry, his declared Stalinism is of little import, although his defence of the Cheka in "First Hymn" would seem to be a notable manifestation of it. His fascination for Lenin is obviously genuine and passionate, but it is more the personality than the philosophy (or strategy) that attracts him. But despite the authoritarian influence these two figures had upon him, the impulse of MacDiarmid's poetry is au fond libertarian or anarchist rather than authoritarian or statist. This is perhaps most concisely illustrated in "Talking with Five Thousand People in Edinburgh" (in which one of his few references to Bakunin occurs) where he writes:

For I am like Zamyatin. I must be a Bolshevik
 Before the Revolution, but I'll cease to be one quick
 When Communism comes to rule the roost,
 For real literature can exist only where it's produced
 By madmen, hermits, heretics,
 Dreamers, rebels, sceptics,
 - And such a door of utterance has been given to me
 As none may close whosoever they be.

The psychological movement of the Drunk Man (recalling in many ways the internal voyaging of Annals) is a celebration not only of the anarchic spirit of the Scots but of human consciousness, as are Cenrastus and "Ode to All Rebels", and the thrust of the Renaissance Idea is itself anti-authoritarian.

MacDiarmid's highbrowism found justification in the writings of Marx and Lenin, but he was also infected with aestheticism (his "a' e gowden lyric") and his literary egotism was not always harnessed to a revolutionary consciousness. His solipsism is a case in point. Often he can successfully merge his cosmic ego and its differing personae with his environment (or at least create the necessary illusion), but at other times he either cannot or does not and is content (as in "At The Cenotaph") simply to state his ego - take it or leave it. It is when he fails to achieve the necessary ubiquity, or when he consciously discards it, that the authoritarian element becomes dominant, but when he fully lets himself go it is the

libertarian element that suffuses his work. It is, in many ways, the ubiquity of the cosmic ego, with or without the attendant messianism, that characterises his best work including such masterpieces as A Drunk Man and "On A Raised Beach".

Another poem which celebrates the anarchic spirit of humankind is "Ode to All Rebels" (Stony Limits 1934). The poem is thoroughly Romantic in its striving for "The Beauty that's won / Frae Terror", and markedly Dostoevskian in its embracing of the 'sticky stuff' of life. Here, the Representative Personality evokes all humanity, but most notably those parts which the 'genteel' and 'respectable' would choose to forget:

I am a' cruelty and lust and filth,
Corruption and law-made crime,
- The helpless prisoners badgered in their cells
In every land and clime.

The notion of crime being "law-made" is an anarchist one. Telling us that "The revolutionary spirit's ane wi' spirit itsel'", the poet attacks the corporate morality of the state and its laws:

Leviathans that mimic the expression of God's will
Ha'e men in thrall - 'laws' they daurna owrespill,
Hydraulic poo'er to Money's and Industry's will
Under the illusion o' progress they tine
Their birthright for livin' daith, and a' their skill
Mak's mindless machines o' Mankind.

Regarding himself as a "Victim o' nae dialectical system", the anarchist rebel dismisses:

A' that trust external authority,
A' short circuiters o' consciousness,
Believers in ony State or system or creed.

In his intellectual 'Come-All-Ye', "The Belly-Grip" (also from Stony Limits), it is not to the Cheka (or any State Police) that he looks, but to "pure example and persuasive force" in order to "transfer all moral issues / And social relations to a higher plane", rejecting "economic pressure" and all "sadistic cant" which threatens the inconceivable human freedom. Here, the emphasis is on the "intelligence and decency" of the majority, and we are told that:

..no religion, no form of government,
Has ever had any sanction except
Brute needs ruthlessly taken advantage of..

This is echoed in "The Glass of Pure Water":

Cornwall - Gaeldom - must stand for the ending
Of the essential immorality of any man controlling
Any other - for the ending of all Government
Since all Government is a monopoly of violence;

To grasp MacDiarmid's development, then, is to grasp a double-edged sword, for the politicisation of his own anarchistic spirit co-exists with his declared Leninism and Stalinism and it may well be that the idealistic expressions of his own anarchist spirit accord with "the imaginative

poetical cult / Whereby I have romanticised and idealised my life" about which he talks in "The Task" section of In Memoriam James Joyce and the more authoritarian strands accord with "the innate and almost savage realism, / Which is a major element in my nature" which he says in the same poem co-exists with that imaginative, poetical cult. These extremes co-exist and meet in many poems, in, for example, his continual attacks on financial monopolies in "On the Money Monopolist Being Like Hell", "The End of Usury", and "In the Slaughterhouse" in Second Hymn (1935), but that "curious gap or 'lacuna'" between the poetical cult (of which the celebration of the anarchistic nature of man is an essential part) and his savage realism remains finally unresolved. And so it must, for the looked-for synthesis is itself the inconceivable freedom after which his poetry strives. That 'lacuna' remains to dog the imaginative, poetical cult, a concomitant to his trying his luck with the idea of chaos.

On the other hand, and as far from the Shestovian attacks on the "regulating value" of laws as one can imagine, MacDiarmid was fond of quoting the most un-Zamyatin-like dictum of Lenin's that literature must be party literature. But, in "Party Organisation and Party Literature", Lenin also wrote:

Are you free in your relation to your bourgeois publisher, Mr. Writer, in relation to your bourgeois public, which demands that you provide it with pornography.. and prostitution as a "supplement" to "sacred" scenic art ? This absolute freedom is a bourgeois or an anarchist phrase (since, as a world outlook, anarchism is bourgeois philosophy turned inside out). One cannot live in society and be free from society. (55)

In marxist terms (for Lenin here is merely reiterating orthodox marxism), the absolute freedom of the imaginative, poetical cult, symbolised above all by the "a'e gowden lyric", is in reality inconceivable because it is, in all its forms, merely an idealised reflection of bourgeois individualism (or its opposite equivalent, anarchism).

The notion of the "a'e gowden lyric" is illustrative of a desire to be free from society or, at least, to place 'art' above mere social concerns.

Art and Society: Leninism and Proletcultism

Further ironies and confusions abound with regard to MacDiarmid's adherence to Leninist principles and, in order to complete this study of MacDiarmid's political aesthetic, it is necessary to say something about them.

Within the ranks of Lenin's Bolshevik Party, the cult of Nietzschean Marxism, or God-building, was closely associated with

Proletcultism especially in the writings and activities of Gorky, Lunacharsky and A.A. Bogdanov. Members of the Proletarian Culture Organisation (Proletcult)

..rejected the cultural legacy of the past and, cutting themselves off from reality, tried to create a special "proletarian culture" by "laboratory methods". While paying lip service to Marxism, Bogdanov, the main Proletcult ideologist, advocated subjective idealism and Machism. Proletcult was not a homogenous organisation. Together with the bourgeois intellectuals who made up the leadership of many of its organisations, there were also young workers who sincerely wished to promote the cultural development of the Soviet State. The Proletcult organisations flourished in 1919 but early in the twenties they went into decline, and in 1932 ceased to exist. (56)

Lunacharsky, as Isaac Deutscher points out,

...backed, to Lenin's and Trotsky's mortification, the Proletcult, whose adherents advocated a breach with all classical tradition, and the advent of the proletarian epoch in art and literature. (57)

Trotsky's arguments against the Proletcult are contained in his Literature and Revolution, published in English in 1925. Trotsky argued that under capitalism conditions prevented the establishment of a truly proletarian culture, that during the period of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat the intensified class-warfare conditions would be equally unfavourable to the flourishing of proletarian culture, and that in an eventual classless society proletarian culture would be neither possible nor relevant since a classless society could not by its very nature produce or support a class-based form of culture.

For both Trotsky and Lenin, Proletcultism meant a narrow-minded sectarianism. Twice in Lucky Poet, MacDiarmid quotes Lenin's anti-proletcult argument that

..we must utilize every moment in which we are free from war, that we may learn, and learn from the bottom up.. It would be a very serious mistake to suppose that one can become a Communist without making one's own the treasures of human knowledge.. Communism becomes an empty phrase, a mere facade, 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. (58)

In his exposition on communist ideas, his introduction to John Singer's The Fury of ^{the} Living, MacDiarmid echoes these words of Lenin:

Mr. Singer.. is a poet of "Mental Fight", in William Blake's sense of the phrase; a Communist of that only authentic kind (Lenin himself insisted that all the others who fall short of this are not really Communists at all but "mere bluffers") of whom it has been rightly said that it would be better to call them "Mentalists" instead of "Materialists". (59)

In Lucky Poet, MacDiarmid also describes himself as a communist "in excelsis of the kind Lenin described" in the above quoted passage which is taken from Lenin's speech to the Fourth Congress of the Third International (November 1922).

The speech is in fact an enlargement on an earlier speech, "The Task of the Youth Leagues", delivered to the Third All-Russia Congress of the Russian Young Communist League in October 1920 (published in Pravda), in which Lenin states:

Proletarian culture must be the logical development of the store of knowledge mankind has accumulated under the yoke of capitalist, landowner and bureaucratic society.. Communism will become an empty word, a mere signboard, and a Communist a mere boaster, if all the knowledge he has acquired is not digested in his mind. (60)

On one level, then, MacDiarmid clearly identified with Lenin's anti-proletcult stand and, it seems, would have disagreed with Lunacharsky. But, to judge from his comments in a New Age article of 1924, his own understanding of Russian Proletcultism was somewhat confused:

The proletcult school headed by such men as Kluyev and Gerasimov in their attempt to express the collective sentiments of the mass, in fashions related to the methods of the Unanamists, are more in keeping with the spirit of Bolshevism than the essentially individualistic futurists. (61)

This analysis, though, he probably adapted from Deutsch and Yarmolinsky's Modern Russian Poetry whose introduction also deals with "the messianic role of the Russian people" which MacDiarmid mentions in this same article. (62)

In another New Age review, only two months later, he writes:

Robert Crawford's work.. has the root of the matter.. this untutored accident-disabled miner.. His "Coalscapes" add notably to the very small quantity of what may be called "industrial" or "proletarian" verse produced in this country, and are an interesting complement, or concomitant, of the Labour movement, while happily devoid of propagandism. (62)

Here, it is the voice of the Fabian and not the Leninist that is apparent, and the notion of poetry being "happily devoid" of propagandism is one firmly repudiated by his own later poem "Poetry and Propaganda".

No school of Proletcultism, however, was ever established in Britain in the sense that it was in Russia which had a long pre-revolutionary tradition of peasant and worker poets. What MacDiarmid attacks, in the following quotation from his essay "The Great McGonagall", is the false cult of proletarian writers promoted by the D.C. Thomson publishing empire:

Dundee was then and has since been the great home and fostering centre of the cheapest popular literature in Scotland, and huge fortunes have been built up there on precisely the chief ingredients of McGonagall's art - mindlessness, snobbery, and the inverted snobbery of a false cult of proletarian writers. (63)

His elitist position also led him to attack proponents of the Folk Revival in Scotland for being content to reinvigorate traditional music and words

without attempting to work the material into a highbrow art form. In a New Age article of 1924 he writes:

So far from folk-song having attained the "art-song" standard in Scotland, as we are sometimes told, has not the conception of the art standard to be lowered to enable Scotland to make a show at all ? (64)

In a Scottish Educational Journal article on F.G. Scott in 1925, MacDiarmid talks of

..the volume and quality of Scottish Folk-Song, which is undeniably one of the finest in the world. On this incomparable basis - calculated to sustain an inimitable superstructure - we have built literally nothing.. This means that so far as music is concerned there has never been any carrying-over from purely folk-expression into an art-product - i.e., expression as art - the process which has built up the musical traditions of every other country. (65)

Underlying MacDiarmid's analysis lies a concern with highbrow modernism. His elitism leads him to regard "art-song" as superior to "folk-song", that is that folk song is a primitive art form which needs to be worked up into something 'better'. MacDiarmid's concept of "art-song", however, smacks at least a little of the cult of the "gowden lyric" and what he seems to envisage is, in reality, little more than a translation of folk art forms into bourgeois art forms. Moreover, here and in his flytings with Hamish Henderson in the letter columns of The Scotsman in the 1960's, MacDiarmid is mistaken as to the nature of the rich tradition of Scottish music which was the possession of the whole community. As one of Scotland's leading contemporary composers, Edward McGuire, puts it:

Scotland didn't have such a division between composer and folk musician in the past. Scotland was one of the first places to publish and print compositions which were bridging the gap. I would point to the Gows' collection, William Marshall's and Captain Simon Fraser's music, as being something which demolished the barrier at that period. It's probably the reason why Scotland didn't have its Bach or its Handel, because its musical creativity was in the hands of exponents of what people now call the folk culture. (66)

Folk revivalism MacDiarmid regarded as on a level with Proletcultism, and mistakenly so. To talk of attaining "art-song" from "purely folk-expression" is to regard a living tradition(which, in the hands of its best exponents, achieves an incomparable level)as merely a museum culture. MacDiarmid is on relatively safer ground when he restricts his analysis to literature.

Lenin's favourite writer, as MacDiarmid knew from Mirsky's biography, was Pushkin. In Lucky Poet, MacDiarmid quotes with approval:

Pushkin's dicta (1) that 'the whole of his country's history belongs to the poet; and (2) that 'only barbarism, villany, and ignorance do not respect the past, cringing before the present alone'. (67)

So, Pushkin may also be called as a witness against the proletcultist levelling down of consciousness. It should be noted, though, that an anti-proletcult stance is not, of itself, an anti-proletarian stance, as the arguments of both Trotsky and Lenin will testify, and MacDiarmid's elitism does correspond with - at least as often as it contradicts - his declared Leninist principles. Thus, in a 1938 article, "Great Music for a Little Clan", he proudly argues:

The truth of the matter is that Scotland's output of literature has been (relatively to the populations of the two countries) immensely greater than England's, and has been all along a proletarian possession and even product to an immensely greater extent than English. (68)

Being both a proletarian possession and product does not necessitate any levelling of consciousness. As MacDiarmid puts it in Burns Today and Tomorrow:

The public are shrewd enough at bottom. Intelligence and receptivity are by no means synonymous with so-called educational advantages. (69)

Artists, he argues here, must cut out the middlemen and go straight to the people, an argument he had developed by at least 1934 when - under the title "Let Poets Meet the People" - he wrote that if poets read and sold their work at street corners, in pubs, and so on

..not only would a highly lucrative business develop, but it would be immensely good for the poet as well as for the people.. The illusion of "talking down" to the public would be speedily dispelled; he would find them quick on the uptake and searching in their questions, and just as anxious to get the "hang" of the creative process as he could possibly be to communicate it. For the public at bottom is not really deceived; it knows it is being systematically doped, and it is eager for the real thing. (70)

This question of combining elite creativity with direct communication, eschewing both extremes of Proletcultism and the "a'e gowden lyric", was one that commanded much of the poet's attention, especially in the 'thirties. In "Second Hymn" he writes:

Are my poems spoken in the factories and fields,
In the streets o' the toon ?
Gin they're no', then I'm failin' to dae
What I ocht to ha' dune.

Gin I canna win through to the man in the street,
The wife by the hearth,
A' the cleverness on earth'll no' mak' up
For the damnable dearth.

'Haud on, haud on; what poet's dune that ?
Is Shakespeare read,
Or Dante or Milton or Goethe or Burns ?'
- You heard what I said.

In "The Oon Olympian" (Scots Unbound 1932) the problem is met with scepticism.

To quote from the first and last stanzas:

Come a' nit-wits, knaves and fools,
Conventional folk, and celebrate
Goethe's centenary, and cry again
Hoo noble he was, serene, and great..

Come a' you nitwits, knaves and fools
O' the educatit classes,
The name o' Goethe isna kent
- And never will be - to the masses.

In "The Seamless Garment" (First Hymn 1931) the problem is met with "integrity"

And as for me in my fricative work
I ken fu' weel
Sic an integrity's what I maun ha'e,
Indivisible, real,
Woven owre close for the point o' a pin
Ony where to win in.

It is in the "Second Hymn" that he realises that in order to attain such integrity he must be "Unremittin', relentless, / Organised to the last degree". But this question, which never ceased to dog his political aesthetic, is perhaps most clearly put in "On A Raised Beach":

These bare stones bring me straight back to reality.
I grasp one of them and I have in my grip
The beginning and the end of the world,
My own self, and as before I never saw
The empty hand of my brother man,
The humanity no culture has reached, the mob.
Intelligentsia, our impossible and imperative job !

Communication is imperative to the 'vanguard' poet in the extension of consciousness. But just as wilful obscurantism must be avoided so must a debasing populism. In this MacDiarmid remained entirely consistent. In 1976 he wrote:

The poet Laureate, Mr John Betjeman, has recently said that versifying used to be regarded as natural and something almost anybody can do. That is still the case, unfortunately, but it not only in itself hardly ever produces anything worthwhile but it debases the currency and all too often sets itself in opposition to elitist work and claims superiority on the ground that it pleases a far larger public. (71)

This state of affairs cannot be disassociated, in MacDiarmid's political aesthetic, from the anglicisation of Scottish life and letters. Freeing the artist from the middlemen and ridding the artistic consciousness of both populism and paternalism was, for him, part of the drive to re-Celticise Scotland. MacDiarmid desired the artist to be given a place of honour among the people and he called for the re-establishment of Celtic Bardic Colleges - or their modern equivalent. A proletarian but anti-proletcult consciousness which accepted the value of the ancient concept of a Bardic elite was for MacDiarmid part of the "Scottish Idea". The middlemen, the 'log-rolling rhymsters', the Betjeman-like populists, he

But a candelabrum of oxidised silver gemmed
By innumerable points of ruby
Which dominate the whole and are visible
Even at considerable distance
As flame-points of living fire.
That so it may be
With my poems too at last glance
Is my only desire.

All else must be sacrificed to this great cause.
I fear no hardships. I have counted the cost.
I with my heart's blood as the hawthorn with its haws
Which are sweetened and polished by the frost !

- 1 J.N. Duddington "The Religious Philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov"
The Hibbert Journal XV, 3 (April 1917) p. 438.
- 2 Ibid pp. 439-44.
- 3 The New Age 26th. March 1925.
- 4 The New Age 9th. April & 23rd. April 1925.
- 5 Lucky Poet (University of California 1972, 1st. pub. 1943) pp. 385-97.
- 6 Re Soloviev, Dostoevsky and "the cause of a free Christian theocracy"
vide Nicolas Zernov Three Russian Prophets: Khomiakov, Dostoevsky,
Soloviev (London 1944) passim.
- 7 Nicolas Arseniev Holy Moscow (London 1940) p. 114.
- 8 Re Bulgakov and Florensky vide V.V. Zenkovski A History of Russian
Philosophy Vol. 2 (London 1953) pp. 509-10.
- 9 V. Soloviev War, Progress, and the End of History tr. A. Bakshy
(London 1915) pp. xiv-xv.
- 10 Re Soloviev's repudiation of Slavophilism vide Egbert Munzer Solovyev:
Prophet of Russian-Western Unity (London 1956) p. 137.
- 11 Quoted J.Y. Simpson The Self-Discovery of Russia (London 1916) p. 3.
- 12 Ibid p. 206.
- 13 Ibid p. 209.
- 14 E.N. Trubetskoy Saint Sophia: Russia's Hope and Calling (London 1916)
pp. 8, 13, 25.
- 15 Ibid p. 30.
- 16 Leon Shestov Anton Tchekhov and Other Essays (Dublin & London 1916) pp.
70-72.
- 17 Ibid p. 81.
- 18 D.S. Mirsky Modern Russian Literature (London 1925) p. 48.
- 19 Shestov op. cit. p. 201.
- 20 Lucky Poet op. cit. p. 375.
- 21 Vide D.S. Mirsky A History of Russian Literature (London 1927) p. 282.
- 22 R.E. MacMaster Danilevsky: A Russian Totalitarian Philosopher (Harvard
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- 23 Quoted A. Bruckner A Literary History of Russia (London 1908) p. 294.
- 24 Vide N. Gorodetzky The Humiliated Christ in Modern Russian Thought
(London 1938) passim.
- 25 Janko Lavrin Dostoevsky and his Creation (London 1920) p. 177.
- 26 Andre Gide Dostoevsky (London 1925) pp. 31-32.
- 27 Roderick B. Watson A Critical Study of the Cenocrastus Theme in the
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(September 1970) unpub. p. 175.
- 28 Ibid p. 346.

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Preface

This bibliography divides naturally into ten sections. The first three list general, critical and background works referred to or consulted, including articles and theses. The following seven sections list works by Hugh MacDiarmid, including articles, periodicals he edited, and unpublished MSS such as letters.

In the case of articles in The New Age (sections three and six) I have listed separately those by MacDiarmid and those by others, and in both cases the articles are arranged in chronological order. This division and arrangement has been made to effect easier reference for the reader as the number of New Age articles is considerable and is, I consider, of more value than a simple alphabetical listing.

As far as MacDiarmid himself is concerned I have not sought to emulate W.R. Aitken's "A Hugh MacDiarmid Bibliography" (Hugh MacDiarmid: A Critical Survey, ed. D. Glen (Edinburgh 1972)) as regards the many separate selections, editions and re-editions of the poetry but have been content to cite The Complete Poems which to all intents and purposes was my basic text.

Sections:

- 1/ Books and Pamphlets (General).
- 2/ Articles and Theses.
- 3/ Articles in The New Age.
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1927

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(chronological order)

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1924

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"Abracadabra Plus X: Psycho-Analysis and Aesthetics" (May 1st.).

"Mannigfaltig III" (May 8th.).

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"New Verse", start of regular review column, (June 26th.).

"Mannigfaltig - Beyond Meaning I - IV" (June 26th. - July 17th.).

"New Verse" (July 17th.).

"Contemporaries on Three Continents: Wallace Stevens" (Aug. 7th.).

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"Mannigfaltig - The Bankruptcy of Military Art" (Aug. 21st.).

"Contemporaries on Three Continents II: Perez Hirschbein" (Aug. 28th.).

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"Contemporary Criticism: H.R. Barbor's "Jezebel"" (Sept. 18th.).

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"Contemporary Criticism - Theories of Life and Art I & II" (Oct. 9th. & 16th.).

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1925

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"Studies from Ten Literatures", 2 parts, (April 30th. & May 14th.).
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"Wickedness in High Places" (July 23rd.).
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"Foreign Literature I - III" (Dec. 3rd. to 24th.).

1926

- "Gertrude Stein", 3 parts, (Feb. 18th. to March 11th.).
"New Verse" (March 25th.).
"Art and the Unknown", 2 parts, (May 20th. & 27th.).
"Foreign Literature" (June 3rd.).
"The Three Conventions" (July 15th.).
"Contemporary Russian Literature" (Nov. 4th.).
"Foreign Literature" (Dec. 16th.).

1927

- "Scottish Nationalism" (Feb. 3rd.).
"Modern Poetry: Doughty and the Sitwells" (March 31st.).
"Scotland and the Banking System", 5 part series, (April 21st. to May 19th.).
"Scottish Banking Controversy" (May 26th.).
"Recent Poetry: Gerald Gould; E.E. Bradford" (June 16th.).
"New Poetry: Humbert Wolfe" (July 7th.).
"Recent Poetry: Sherard Vines" (Aug. 11th.).
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"The poetry of Robert Graves" (Nov. 17th.).
"Paul Valery" (Dec. 1st.).
"Feodor Sologub" (Dec. 29th.).

1928

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"A Goal in View" (May 3rd.).
"Humbert Wolfe" (May 10th.).
"New Verse" (June 7th.).

"Recent Verse" (July 19th.).

"Lady Chatterley's Lover" (Sept. 27th.).

1930

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1931

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(chronological order)

1933

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1934

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1933

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"A Letter from Scotland" (Nov. 1st.).

"What the Unemployed could do" (Nov. 22nd.).

"A Letter from Scotland" (Dec. 6th.).

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1934

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