Scottish Literature, Nationalism and the First World War

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Introduction

The decade of the birth of C.M. Grieve and the death of R.L. Stevenson, Patrick Geddes's *The Evergreen* and the Mackintoshes showing their work in the Eighth Secession exhibition in Vienna was the prelude to the twentieth century. The decade which followed takes us from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* to Charles Ives's *Unanswered Question* and Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, Fergusson's *Les Eus* and Cursiter's *Impression of Crossing Princes Street, Edinburgh*. The era from around 1890 to 1914, seen from the distance of more than a century, not only in Scotland but internationally, was a vortex of energies and forms, all wheeling into the First World War.

This sense of something moving towards an unprecedented future is memorably conveyed by Stefan Zweig (1881-1942), writing of his boyhood in late nineteenth-century Vienna in *The World of Yesterday*: 'The truly great experience of our youthful years was the realisation that something new in art was on the way – something more impassioned, difficult and alluring than the art that had satisfied our parents and the world around us. But fascinated as we were by this one aspect of life, we did not notice that these aesthetic changes were only the forerunners of the much more far-reaching changes that were to shake and finally destroy the world of our fathers, the world of security.'[1]

There is no single story in which Scottish literature, the growth of Scottish nationalism and the experience of the First World War, can be defined. Such stories are often proscribed by their own definition of what their heroes oppose. For Walter Benjamin and

[1] Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday: Memoirs of a European*, trans. Anthea Bell (London: Pushkin Press, [1942] 2009), p.80.

Bertolt Brecht, the principle oppression was capitalism; for Karl Kraus and Joseph Roth it was, rather, militarism. The bourgeois world was to be condemned for social injustice rather than economic exploitation. For Scottish writers, an imperialism that gathered national identity into British empowerment leading to war was increasingly understood as the enemy, thus the elision of 'British' and 'English' became an infuriation. My point is that all these identifications of necessary resistance were articulating themselves separately, in different ways, creating different forms, in individual writers, political groups, parties, and governments, and at different speeds.

It might be argued that these resistances reached a confluence in 1928 with the founding of the National Party of Scotland and in 1934 with that of the Scottish National Party but these too were forming themselves alongside the mobilisation of the Labour movement in the development of the Labour Party. The essential point is that the poly-vocal, multi-media and temporally mutable nature of the Scottish literary response to imperialism and world war cannot be reduced or defined to a single party, moment, poem, book or author. The complexities of both incitement and purpose, the impositions and the resistances, have to be appraised with a more careful discrimination in this cradle of social revolution and mortal danger.

And how these resistances were articulated by writers is always affected by the context of the public operation of language. This is why Karl Kraus is a key figure. In Marjorie Perloff's words, 'His argument about the making of World War I is that the public media, in their inevitable reliance on headlines, captions, and sound bytes, create an atmosphere in which citizens no longer understand how barbaric and pointless a given policy

may turn out to be.' So 'what happens when the media take on a life of their own as they have today, when the "imagination" is itself the product of mediation?'[2]

Kraus's great play, *The Last Days of Mankind*, was not completed until 1922, but the understanding that made it possible had been developing since before the war, and, as Perloff says, it 'is extraordinarily prescient about this situation'. While the most familiar war poets, Wilfred Own, Siegfried Sassoon and Rupert Brooke, for example, wrote vividly of immediate personal witness, Kraus's play 'uses every device in its poetic arsenal to dramatize the complicity, cravenness, and often inadvertent cruelty, not only of those who make war but also of those who carry it out or remain behind.'[3] The crucial, agonising conjunction and confrontation is not between conflicting ideologies or empires, national ideals or histories, social hierarchies or theologies, but rather between the prevailing language of a culture and the private individual.

The language of any culture helps define how things are seen and understood: it opens the eyes but directs the vision. When its pervasive purpose is to narrow the eyes and foreclose vision, the frontline is occupied by the writers most aware of its practice, and resistant to it, because that language – of media more than anything – is the arbiter of the prevalent attitude towards experience. And there is always more than one attitude seeking expression, and more than one motivation at play.

(1) Internationalism, Industrialisation, the First World War and Modernity

In the period leading up to the First World War, what would become identifiable as modernism can be understood as developing plural possibilities, latent modernisms of various kinds. From at least the 1890s to 1914, in an international cradle, the growth of Scottish national self-awareness developed at different rates of growth. Key figures in this era are

[2] Marjorie Perloff, *Edge of Irony: Modernism in the Shadow of the Habsburg Empire* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2016), p.25.
[3] *Edge of Irony*, p.24.

Stevenson, Violet Jacob, Marion Bernstein, James Young Geddes, John Davidson, Robert Bontine Cunninghame Graham and Ruaraidh Erskine of Mar.

For Stevenson, the art of the writer – essayist and man of letters, travel writer, writer of children's fiction and genre fiction, a writer for the periodicals – was balanced against the experience of society in different social classes, different geographical, cultural and religious locations. His balance of detachment and sympathy is prophetic of early twentieth-century modernism. In Stefan Zweig's terms, Stevenson speaks more of far-reaching changes than of the security of the world of our fathers.

Both Stevenson in Samoa and Violet Jacob in imperial British India, then South Africa and Egypt and Scotland again, represent locations at different points of the British Empire, geographically and historically, and the roles of women and men moving through different strata within it. Both are opening questions of cultural relativism.

Other poets, and particularly women writing between 1850 and 1900, reflect and protest about the social conditions of industrialised Scotland. Janet Hamilton (1795-1873), Jessie Russell (1850-?) and Marion Bernstein (1846-1906) directly addressed questions of women's rights and social justice in working-class Glasgow. Male poets writing of alienation in industrialised modernity included James Young Geddes (1850-1913) in Dundee, with 'Glendale & Co. (After Walt Whitman)' and the Nietzschean John Davidson (1857-1909).

So: international provenances and industrial cities developed through the British Empire were the habitations of these writers, each of them prophetic of conflicts to come, colonial, feminist, or class-based. Nationality, in complex varieties, is part of their character. None would have declared outright for Scotland's political independence.

But R.B. Cunninghame Graham (1852-1936), like Stevenson and Jacob an international traveller, was also a practising politician, prioritising socialism, feminist enfranchisement, Scottish nationalism and cultural authority. Along with Keir Hardie, he was

a founder member of the Scottish Labour Party (1888), which joined the Independent Labour Party (1895) and later the Labour Party (1906), and was also a founder member of the National Party of Scotland (1928), evolving into the Scottish National Party (1934). MacDiarmid met him in the early 1920s, later saying: 'My decision to make the Scottish Cause, cultural and political, my life-work dates from that moment.'[4]

Another key figure in this scene, Ruaraidh Erskine of Mar (1869-1960), advocated a Gaelic confederation of nations within the British Empire, gaining the endorsement of Padraig Pearse in 1906. His support for the Easter Rising in Ireland in 1916 enhanced the association between Irish separatists and Scottish politicians, intellectuals and artists. In contrast to all these writers, George Orwell's contemporaries at an English boarding school in the year running up and into the first years of the war, offer a very different picture of what 'Scotland' was understood to be.

Orwell attended the fee-paying boarding St Cyprian's School, Eastbourne, East Sussex, from 1911 to 1916, and in his essay 'Such, Such Were the Joys' (1947), he described the decade before 1914 like this: 'The extraordinary thing was the way in which everyone took it for granted that this oozing, bulging wealth of the English upper and upper-middle classes would last for ever, and was part of the order of things. After 1918 it was never the same again.'[5] Of course, this is only a specific part of England. The point, however, is that there is a direct connection between the ethos thus presented and self-righteousness of the projected image of Englishness perpetrated by increasingly widespread media, including, as the century progressed, screen media. The fictional nature – false consciousness – of this atmosphere is familiar less from the historical account than from the myth elaborated over

[4] Hugh MacDiarmid, *R.B. Cunninghame Graham: a centenary study* (1952), in *Albyn: Shorter Books and Monographs*, ed. Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1996), pp.130-61 (p.132).
[5] George Orwell, 'Such, Such Were the Joys' (1947), in *Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), pp.416-452 (p.441).

decades in books, radio, films and television. Orwell summarised the idea of Scotland then taken for granted at such an institution:

> Our picture of Scotland was made up of burns, braes, kilts, sporrans, claymores, bagpipes and the like, all somehow mixed up with the invigorating effects of porridge, Protestantism and a cold climate. But underlying this was something quite different. The real reason for the cult of Scotland was that only very rich people could spend their summers there. And the pretended belief in Scottish superiority was a cover for the bad conscience of the occupying English, who had pushed the Highland peasantry off their farms to make way for the deer forests, and then compensated them by turning them into servants.[6]

Orwell cuts sharply through the delusion to the portentous weight of economic and political power, and forecasts, even if only implicitly, its deployment in the second half of the twentieth century. As clearly as in *Animal Farm* or *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell allegorises reality and prophecies horrific continuities in the structures of political power.

The defining character of the legacy of the British Empire by which, in Orwell's account, Scotland is a colonial caricature, contrasts starkly with the international and economically realistic awareness in which Scottish writers were increasingly developing self-conscious understanding of national potential.

(2) Patrick Geddes, the Poetry of the First World War, and the Scottish Renaissance

When Patrick Geddes published his essay 'The Scots Renascence' in the first issue (Spring 1895) of his periodical, *The Evergreen*, he began with the sentence: 'Blackie was buried

[6] 'Such, Such Were the Joys', p.442.

yesterday.' The first part of the essay is an account of the procession and service at St Giles's High Kirk in Edinburgh's High Street, and reads like a short story, the various mourners 'headed by kilt and plaid', kinsmen, advocates, students, and 'the Town itself': and 'working people in their thousands and tens of thousands'. Part II begins: 'From this pageant of Edinburgh it is but one step in thought to that solitary Samoan hill, up which dusky chiefs and clansmen, henceforth also brethren of ours, as he of theirs, were so lately bearing our other greatest dead – the foremost son of Edinburgh and Scotland.'

Starting with funeral of J.S. Blackie, professor of Greek at Edinburgh University and prominent advocate of Gaelic literature, and that of Stevenson on the other side of the world, gives Geddes a global provenance for a multifaceted Scottish identity. [For Blackie, see Stuart Wallace, *John Stuart Blackie: Scottish Scholar and Patriot* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006)] Geddes embraces Gaelic, Scots and English, universal humanity, priorities of education, language, affection, respect and nationality, defined by the passing of an age of heroes, 'Ossian after the Fianna'. Then his essay turns forward: 'What then – save "Finis Scotiae!" – can remain for us to say?' His answer follows: 'these are the phenomena of Winter, not of Spring – of death, not of life.' Winter slush won't stop the swelling buds and peeping shoots: 'in the long run it even helps.' For, in Geddes's vision, 'year by year, the possibilities temporal and spiritual of the renascent capital return or appear.'

Taking his cue from Allan Ramsay's anthology of older poets from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, *The Ever Green* (1724), noting how it urged later regenerations of Scottish literature, Geddes proposes, 'our new "Evergreen" may here and there stimulate some new and younger writer, and hence beside the general interests common to all men of culture' and 'youngest Scottish art, its revival of ancient Celtic design.'

Part III concludes: 'Such is our Scottish, our Celtic Renascence – sadly set betwixt the Keening, the watching over our fathers dead, and the second-sight of shroud rising about each

other. Yet this is the Resurrection and the Life, when to faithful love and memory their dead arise.'[7]

When the First World War began, the regeneration envisaged went underground. The counterpoint to early enthusiasm for warfare was protest and satiric denunciation. Charles Murray's 'A Sough o' War' registers the determination to fight for the sake of Scotland, but the patriotism was not only tempered and revised as the war went on, but transformed: what might 'Scotland' be said to 'count for' in the longer term?

William Cameron, in 'Speak not to me of War!' (first published in *Forward*, 15 August 1914), was overtly cautionary: looking over a 'bloody corpse-strewn plain, / Where man has butchered man' Cameron's scorn is severe: 'Show me the glory there!' And Charles Hamilton Sorley raised this to a searing vision: 'When you see millions of the mouthless dead / Across your dreams in pale battalions go, / Say not soft things as other men have said…' The dead are deaf to our laments and praises. Death itself has claimed everything, 'for evermore.'

One of the consequences of war is the polarisation of women and men, and the experience of the Home Front is as vital as that of the trenches. Eunice G. Murray argues the feminist question in her 'Warrior Women: Should Women Fight?': 'When one reads of the fate that overtakes the civilian population, more especially the horrors that have taken place in Belgium, the burning of houses, the devastation of the land, the imprisonment of the male population, the ruthless orders given to women to retire to their own houses and leave the doors unlocked. When we realize what these things mean there can be but one hope, and that is that warfare is doomed, and that men as well as women, in the words of Adomnan, the Abbot of Iona, "will stop from things of that kind," and that reason, not might, will govern the world.'

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[7] Patrick Geddes, 'The Scots Renascence' (1895), reprinted in *Edinburgh Review* 88 (1992), pp.17-22.

Soldiering itself, though, was the central topic of many of the writers, but not by any means in glorification. Joseph Lee poem 'The Bullet' reflects: 'Perhaps I killed a mother / When I killed a mother's son.' The bitterness is grim, and is borne out in parody, such as Ewart Allan Mackintosh's 'The Charge of the Light Brigade Brought Up to Date': 'Into the mouth of Hell, / Sticking it pretty well, / Slouched the six hundred.'

Charles Murray himself insisted on the common end of killing, regardless of rank or class, 'Staff' and 'six hundred' will come to equally, in 'A Green Yule':

> Dibble them doon, the laird, the loon,
> King an' the cadgin' caird,
> The lady fine beside the queyn,
> A' in the same kirkyaird.

And there is remembering. JB Salmond writes in 'Twenty Years Ago': 'The boy is dead in all of us, and War's an ugly thing, […] / And there isn't much romance about shell-shock and nervous wrecks.'

The memories can affirm the actions in retrospect, but they might equally give cause to question the worth of it all, and prompt questions about what has been learned from the experience, among those who have survived it.[8]

[8] For the poems, see David Goldie and Roderick Watson, eds., *From the Line: Scottish War Poetry* (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2014); Lizzie McGregor, ed., *Beneath Troubled Skies: Poems of Scotland at War, 1914-1918* (Edinburgh: Scottish Poetry Library and Polygon, 2015); Andrew Ferguson, ed., *Ghosts of War: A History of World War I in Poetry and Prose* (Stroud: The History Press, 2016).

Poetry in the Scots and English languages is well represented but it would be wrong to overlook the Gaelic poetry of World War One, when so much of Gaelic-speaking Scotland was disproportionately depopulated. This poetry of immediate experience broke across the achievement of song and folk-lore collectors such as Alexander Carmichael (1832-1912), so while the treasury of Gaelic literature was being recovered and recorded, and the attractions of the 'Celtic Twilight' writers were appealing to a readership eager for sentimentalism, the Gaelic war poets were doing something else, discussed by Ronald Black elsewhere in this volume.

Hugh MacDiarmid, or rather, at this stage, still Christopher Murray Grieve, enlisted in the royal Army Medical Corps in July 1915, spending a year in England before being posted as a sergeant to the 42nd general hospital in Greece. He published his earliest poems in the local newspaper in the town he came from, the *Eskdale and Liddesdale Advertiser*. These early poems are in tune with those expressing familiar tones of sympathy, encouragement, longing to fight, honouring the fallen. In 'To My Soldier and Sailor School Mates', he writes:

> Honour and glory yours,
> For some the victor's bays,
> But mine – nothing to show
> Through endless days! [9]

And in 'To Private John Roddick, Australian Expeditionary Force (Wounded at the Dardanelles)', he writes:

[9] [Hugh MacDiarmid], *A Langholm Lad Goes to War*, edited by Ron Addison (Langholm: Langholm Library Trust, 2014), p.24.

I wondered if far off beneath the Southern Cross

Your heart was torn as mine beneath our Scottish sky

Watching the way my school-mates played their part

While I all powerlessly stood by.[10]

But in the poem, 'June 1915' the tone is different:

June's golden heart is torn in twain,

Her glad blue eyes are grey with tears,

Her radiant face is white with pain,

For the lost promise of the years

And the Christ crucified again.[11]

In April that year, Grieve's best friend from before the war, John Bogue Nisbet, had been killed while in the trenches on the Western Front, at the age of twenty-three. Grieve, one year senior, was invalided home in 1918 with cerebral malaria. In 1922, in the first issue of his magazine, *The Scottish Chapbook*, under the name Hugh M'Diarmid, one of Grieve's first published works was a 'conversation piece' entitled 'Nisbet, an Interlude in Post War Glasgow'. Here, the dead soldier, former school friend, gassed to death in France, has returned and is thinking about poetry and sound in the industrial Scottish city, and what might

[10] *Langholm Lad*, p.25.
[11] *Langholm Lad*, p.28.

make ‘a new insubmersible sort of song’.[12] It is characteristic of MacDiarmid to draw that vision of what the future might bring out of the horror and loss of the past. And Grieve’s first book, *Annals of the Five Senses* (1923), was dedicated to John Buchan, ‘for the encouragement and help he has given to a young and unknown writer’. His description in this book of the battlefields of France takes a full retrospective view but the book points forward too:

> How would he describe the battle-field of the Somme? A broad road leading through an open country, rising and falling in conformity with the configuration of the ground. A long stretch of that road covered with traffic of all kinds: huge guns being dragged along by heavy tractor-engines; great motor-wagons in an interminable line, carrying food, ammunition, clothing; men marching towards the front, either fresh from their training or returning from rest camps…making once more towards the hell of the trenches; others returning from the battle-ground covered with a caking of mud and yet fretted with an odd cheeriness despite the strain through which they had passed and the bitter cold that bit to the bone: long strings of horses…
>
> This was the very heart of the trench-crossed, shell-pitted, mine-caverned battle area. As far as the eye could see on each side of the road there was nothing but desolation. All had been cultivated ground, studded with villages, farm-houses, villas, and here and there a chateau. Pleasant woods had risen up in parts,,, Today a few stumps showed where the woods had been, a few heaps of bricks remained of the villages. Even the piles of bricks were few and far between: in most cases the last vestiges of

[12] Hugh MacDiarmid, ’Nisbet, an Interlude in Post War Glasgow’ (1922), in *Annals of the Five Senses and Other Stories, Sketches and Plays*, edited by Roderick Watson and Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 1999), pp.104-113 (p.108).

> habitations and of the materials whereof they had been composed had been utterly obliterated. [And] the same desolation had been spread from Riga to the Black Sea…[13]

Out of this devastation, a new resolution was rising in MacDiarmid. He wrote of himself in *Annals*: 'He came back with an *idée fixe* – never again must men be made to suffer as in these years of war…'[14] As Homi Bhaba puts it in his essay 'Interrogating identity': 'the state of emergency is also always a state of *emergence.*'[15]

For MacDiarmid, the First World War was the forcing ground of his sense of what the future must ensure. Many poets began in affirmation then increasingly questioned the values and priorities of the war, but characteristically MacDiarmid drove further. The devastations he witnessed would underlie the vigour and ruthlessness with which he would pursue his vision for a Scotland regenerated, politically as much as culturally, seeing both drives as inseparable. The vernacular Scots, the formal legacy of ballad structures and song, the significance of the Gaelic language and the essential questions to do with the virtues of minorities – whether minority languages or small nations – were all in the understanding of what the war had been for, and the authority of imperialist ideals in contest, bringing such destruction upon multitudes, was what he – and by and large the Scottish Renaissance he was soon to initiate – would oppose.

Throughout the First World War, Patrick Geddes had held the Chair of Botany at University College Dundee, from 1888 to 1919, then he went to India to occupy the Chair of Sociology and the University of Bombay from 1919 to 1924. In 1925, he was back in

[13] C.M. Grieve, *Annals of the Five Senses* (Edinburgh: The Porpoise Press, 1923), pp.113-115.
[14] *Annals*, p.89.
[15] Homi Bhabha, 'Interrogating Identity': http://readingtheperiphery.org/bhabha/, accessed 04/06/2019.

Edinburgh, chairing a meeting at Ramsay Gardens beside the Outlook Tower at the top of the Royal Mile, just below the Castle. Reading his poems at the meeting was C.M. Grieve, by this time Hugh MacDiarmid. MacDiarmid's former schoolteacher, the composer F.G. Scott, who was to become a key figure of guidance and authoritative endorsement of the Scottish Renaissance movement, played piano settings of some of MacDiarmid's poems. In other words, precisely the kind of 'Renascence' that Geddes had envisaged in 1895 was being initiated thirty years later, at this meeting. The point is, perhaps, that the war had not only delayed it, it had forced it through, made possible life from the dead ground of its devastation.

According to Geddes's son Arthur, Patrick and he had read MacDiarmid's poems in their home in Montpellier, France, in the French literary periodical *Les Nouvelles littéraires* (which began publishing in 1922), and Patrick had written to MacDiarmid to introduce himself: hence the meeting.[16]

On 19 October, shortly after the reading, Geddes wrote to Grieve: 'More & more there is growing on me the possibility of strengthening all our scattered movements of synthetic & constructive & progressive character – whether regional, literary, scientific, artistic, economic or social etc., by trying to bring them together, & thus increasingly present them as each part of a *synthetic movement*, reaching out beyond the chaos-Babel of current action & thought so apparently predominant.'[17] In his autobiographical book of essays, *The Company I've Kept*, MacDiarmid wrote: 'This reawakening of the vital and the organic in every department undermines the authority of the purely mechanical. Geddes's prime

[16] Hugh MacDiarmid, *The Company I've Kept: Essays in Autobiography* (London: Hutchinson, 1966), p.79.
[17] John Manson, ed., *Dear Grieve: Letters to Hugh MacDiarmid (C.M. Grieve)* (Glasgow: Kennedy & Boyd, 2011).

significance lies in the fact that he was one of the greatest prophets and pioneers of this change.'[18]

Literary history has dealt to some extent with the poetry and fiction of the war, but theatre has been less widely understood in the context of the Scottish Renaissance. This is partly because at any given moment there are different theatrical traditions, not all of them coinciding with the visions of MacDiarmid and his contemporaries. David Hutchison has suggested three broad categories for theatre and performance in this era: (1) popular music hall; (2) lightweight comedies and 'entertainments'; (3) high culture drama.[19]

Dublin's Abbey Theatre was the model for the Glasgow Repertory Company, established 1909 and suspended in 1914. One of their most significant productions was of Chekhov's *The Seagull* (1909), the first performance of Chekhov in Britain, the play's fin de siècle ethos having particular bearing in pre-war Scotland. Anthony Rowley's *A Woman's Shuttle* (1910) presents a family firm failing to update their production processes in a way reminiscent of the inadequate business skills of Gourlay in George Douglas Brown's *The House with the Green Shutters* (1901), as the railways undermine his dominance. Their early productions included work by George Bernard Shaw and Ibsen and two Scottish plays of lasting value: Donald Colquhoun's *Jean* (1910), a realistic portrayal of the life of a farming family in hard times, with strong Scots dialogue and powerful characters from different generations; and J.A. Ferguson's *Campbell of Kilmohr* (1915). The latter is set after the Jacobite rising of 1745 and portrays the predicament of a Highlander confronted with the sly duplicity of a Lowlander's military interests.[20] These intensely literary plays and others were written just before the First World War in the national context of commercial theatres,

[18] *The Company I've Kept*, p.81.
[19] David Hutchison, 'Scottish Drama 1900-1950', in Cairns Craig, ed., *The History of Scottish Literature* Volume 4: Twentieth Century (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), pp.163-177.
[20] John Ferguson, ed., *Seven Famous One-Act Plays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, [1937] 1950).

traditions of music hall and pantomime, and a lively tradition of amateur and touring companies, visiting towns and villages throughout the country. A long tradition also attaches to 'Galoshins' (the word is from Galatians – the people from Galatia), a folk version of the Christian resurrection performed by locals and travellers in different parts of Scotland.[21]

Another company, the Scottish National Players, founded around 1920 with the remaining funds of the Glasgow Repertory, produced John Brandane's *The Glen is Mine* (1923), depicting the conflict between development and conservation taking place in the Highlands in the aftermath of the war. They produced early plays by James Bridie (1888-1951) but rejected Joe Corrie's *In Time o' Strife* (1927). Corrie, a working miner, was crossing the boundaries between theatre conventions proscribed by class division. Such challenges were to bear fruit later. Bridie's *The Queen's Comedy* (1950) may be read as a reflection on the wars of the twentieth century, as it presents the Trojan Wars, their gods and generals, with the historical and mythological distance allowing Bridie's satire, insight and questioning much more scope than would have been possible through literalism. The National Players toured Scotland and contributed to BBC Radio in the 1920s, and they were driving towards the establishment of a Scottish National Theatre.

And that drive was being made increasingly in this period. Immediately after the war, the push to establish a National Theatre of Scotland was one of the strands, once again, in the Renaissance movement led by MacDiarmid. MacDiarmid noted in an essay of 1924, 'R.F. Pollock and the Art of Theatre',[22] that an authentic Scottish drama must represent 'the profound differences in psychology between Scots and English'. Pollock himself elaborated on this: 'Plays represented night after night follow a definite plan of exits and entrances. This gives different groupings to present episode and action. By developing the plan to include

[21] See Brian Hayward's *Galoshins: The Scottish Folk Play* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992).
[22] Hugh MacDiarmid, *Contemporary Scottish Studies*, ed. Alan Riach (1926; new edition, ed. Alan Riach, Manchester: Carcanet, 1995), pp.177-82.

gesture, facial expression and intonation, the salient features of the Scottish mentality can be faithfully presented on the stage.'[23] MacDiarmid and Neil Gunn both wrote short plays and R.F. Pollock, following Stanislavski, speculated that a drama attentive to distinct aspects of Scots' psychology should begin by acknowledging that one characteristic of many Scots was a terse, restrained, succinct use of language: more goes on below the surface than what is ever seen.

Anglophone modernism is largely understood as engaged with the disruption and fragmentation of the aesthetic priorities of security that characterized the end of the nineteenth century. Eliot's *Waste Land* is made of shards of narratives, Pound's first endeavor was to break the pentameter, Joyce's prose engaged the many internal perspectives of characters alienated from each other. In Scotland, the difference was to reach back through the divided-and-ruled national culture that had been swept into the singular vortex of British imperialism and the First World War, and attempt to bring forward a multifaceted but singular nationality out from the violence that war made unavoidable.

(3) Populisms and Specialisms: Fiction, the Blue and the Red

The appeal of the kailyard novelists in the 1890s was international. Ian McLaren's *Beside the Bonnie Brier Bush* (1894) was snapped up by Queen Victoria and William Gladstone. It was a bestseller in the USA, with 485,000 copies sold by 1908, and 256,000 in the UK. S.R. Crockett's *The Lilac Sunbonnet* (1894) sold 10,000 copies on the first day of its publication.[24] McLaren and Crockett, both Free Kirk ministers, were key figures in the literary marketplace but their popularity had its political character too. Their counterpoints were the anti-Kailyard

[23] *Contemporary Scottish Studies*, p.279.
[24] Chris Bambery, *A People's History of Scotland* (London: Verso, 2014), p.133.

novelists George Douglas Brown and John Macdougall Hay and the dark poets, James Thomson (who used the pseudonym 'Bysshe Vanolis'), in *The City of Dreadful Night*, and John Davidson, with his testaments of lonely outcasts. But beyond the literary, in the realm of political self-identification, it was to Crockett that Stevenson wrote in Spring 1888 from Saranac Lake, USA, taking exception to Crockett's self-styled address in a letter: 'Don't put "N.B." in your paper: put "Scotland" and be done with it,' Stevenson wrote. 'Alas, that I should be thus stabbed in the home of my friends! The name of my native land is not North Britain, whatever may be the name of yours!'[25]

In some respects, Stevenson's popularity may have matched that of the kailyarders, but after the war, Hugh MacDiarmid's book-length poem *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, published on 22 November 1926 in an edition of 500 copies, had sold only ninety-nine copies by the end of the year.[26] Commercial priorities were now an essential factor in mass literary production, and if that meant political compromise, the priorities of conscience and moral urgency were always going to be at stake. Difficult matters and the worst of human potential brought out in tragic literature might tell truth deeply but these things don't sell easily or quickly. Yet neither do they go away.

Two other writers suggest ways in which the idea nationalism was forming over the period. Nationalism itself, of course, is one of those woolly words with multiple meanings. With Compton Mackenzie and Ian Hay, we might think of it in terms of what 'Scotland' means, or meant, to people reading their works in the early twentieth century, before, during and after the war. Self-awareness was becoming a different thing, in the context of the United Kingdom and Europe, and ideas of imperial assertion and political self-determination.

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[25] Robert Louis Stevenson, Letter to S.R. Crockett (Saranac Lake, Spring 1888), in *The Letters* (Volume Three), edited by Sidney Colvin (London: Heinemann [Tusitala Edition volume XXXIII],1926), pp.185-186 (p.186).
[26] Alan Bold, *MacDiarmid: Christopher Murray Grieve: A Critical Biography* (London: Paladin, 1990), p.257.

Mackenzie is familiar for *Whisky Galore!* (1947) but in 1914 his most famous novel was *Sinister Street* (1913), an 800-page bildungsroman centred on the young Michael Fane, growing up in the south of England. He and his sister Stella are scandalously born out of wedlock to rich parents, and Michael travels from school in London to holidays in Cornwall, meets a girl from an Anglo-Indian family, and goes to Oxford. It was praised by Henry James, John Betjeman and George Orwell, and noted as a record of the 1910s 'lost generation'. It anticipates the devastation of the war, like a mirror to Elgar's Cello Concerto (1919), which grieves for the loss it looks back on.

In the Foreword to the 1949 edition, Mackenzie tells us it was begun in 1912 and its first volume was to be reviewed in a leader article in the *Daily Mail* but this was decided against when two libraries said they would not circulate the book. Publicity followed: the 'Banned Book' war was quickly superseded by 'the real war' which commenced as Mackenzie was finishing 'the Oxford part' of the novel. 'I can hear now,' he wrote in 1949, 'the stillness of that August night before the clock struck twelve, and I can hear now the menacing rumble of the troop-trains and ammunition-trains southward bound all through that August night, until the sun rose and I went to bed.'[27] Mackenzie was sent to Gallipoli (the result of which was his book, *Gallipoli Memories*), finished volume two in October 1914, traveling to Capri with a copy of the first volume of Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, which had been given to him by the critic Edmund Gosse, who suggested it was in 'something of an expression of the same spirit'.[28] Volume two prompted Henry James to write to Mackenzie saying that he had 'emancipated the English novel', but Mackenzie observes the praise was premature since in 1915, D.H. Lawrence published *Women in Love*. Lascelles Abercrombie wrote: 'We seem to be watching that strangest of all modes of

[27] Compton Mackenzie, 'Foreword to the 1949 Edition' in *Sinister Street* [1913] (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1960), pp.9-13 (p.10).
[28] *Sinister Street*, p.11.

evolution, the dissolution of one century's character to make way for the character of another century.' But Mackenzie insisted: 'What no critic has noted is that the scheme of the book demands from the reader that he should identify himself with the principal character through whose eyes he is compelled to look at life.'[29] In this, he anticipates Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), but where Joyce's novel is tightly structured, Mackenzie observed in 1949: 'It will not surprise me to find young people of today, heirs of two mundane wars, impatient of an adolescence of which their own adolescence is riper by a generation, because they will be feeling comparatively so much older and comparatively so much wiser.' Yet the book was still selling 1,000 copies a year. He intended a whole series of sequels to *Sinister Street*, and indeed wrote a number of them, but, he admitted, 'I was compelled to recognise that the First World War had smashed the series of linked novels I intended to call *The Theatre of Youth*. Because I should never be able to escape from it.' He was, he said, 'as impatient of the mood of *Sinister Street* as any man in his thirties should be of his teens.'[30]

In the meantime Mackenzie had been one of the founder members of the National Party of Scotland (NPS) in 1928, amalgamating the Scots National League, the Scottish National Movement and the Glasgow University Scottish Nationalist Association. In 1934 the NPS merged with the Scottish Party to form the Scottish National Party. The foundation of the NPS is recorded in a well-known photograph where Mackenzie stands beside the Duke of Montrose, John McCormick, R.B. Cunninghame Graham, C.M. Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid), James Valentine and John McCormick. Other founders included the popular 'women's novelist' Annie S. Swan, the folklorist and food writer F. Marian McNeill, the architect Robert Hurd, the party's first leader, and the solicitor Alexander McEwen.

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[29] *Sinister Street*, p.11.
[30] *Sinister Street*, p.12.

In other words, Mackenzie had moved from being famous as a highly-respected author of what we might call society and psychological fiction centred in London, Oxford and the south of England, through working for the British Intelligence during the First World War, to being a leading member of the official organisation driving towards political self-determination for Scotland. There is no doubt of his prominence or the publicity he brought to the nationalist movement though one wonders, given his work for the British government and the violence of the political struggle in Ireland from 1916 through to the 1920s, and the popularity of his writing, whether Mackenzie was not keeping his options open. However, his friendship with MacDiarmid continued for the rest of their lives, as their correspondence shows. On 11 January 1962, Mackenzie wrote to the poet: 'Ours has been a long unbroken friendship.'[31]

A different trajectory was followed by Ian Hay. His work is addressed elsewhere in this book but I want to make a point about his most famous novel, *The First Hundred Thousand* (1915), centring on 'army life under training and in the trenches' and written, as the back cover blurb of the 1985 edition tells us, 'while the author was undergoing the experiences he describes.'[32]

The novel was listed by Edwin Morgan as one of his *Twentieth-Century Scottish Classics*. [33] Morgan says of it: 'The matter-of-fact realities of daily life for the recruits of Kitchener's Army, during that first year of war – drill, kit, food, songs, embarkation for France, dugouts, snipers, zeppelins, grenades, gasmasks, souvenir-mad villagers – give a striking immediacy to this book. Its jaunty, laconic, humorous style may seem curious to a generation brought up on the horrors of Owen and Rosenberg, but salutarily so.' There is a further point to be made, thinking about the book's representation of Scotland in the context

[31] Manson, ed., *Dear Grieve*, p.458.
[32] Ian Hay, *The First Hundred Thousand* ([1915] Glasgow: Richard Drew, 1985).
[33] Edwin Morgan, *Twentieth-Century Scottish Classics* (Glasgow: Book Trust Scotland, 1987), p.8.

of British soldiers at war, and in the wake not only of Owen and Rosenberg but *Catch 22*. Chapter Eleven begins with a list of the 'heavenly host' which 'orders our goings and shapes our ends':

(1) The War Office;
(2) The Treasury;
(3) The Army Ordnance Office;
(4) Our Divisional Office

And goes on to categorise these into three 'departments':

(1) Round Game Department (including Dockets, Indents, and all official correspondence).
(2) Fairy Godmother Department.
(3) Practical Joke Department.

In Chapter Fourteen, we are told to follow 'the golden rule': 'When given an impossible job by a Brass Hat, salute smartly, turn about, and go and wait round a corner for five minutes. Then come back and do the job in a proper manner.' [34]

The humour of these examples is clear enough but there is less bitterness, futility, irony and anger in the tone here than what becomes pressing in work written later in the war. Towards the end of Chapter Twenty, soldiers in dialogue are considering the question, what is 'the general attitude' of 'the dear old country at large' – by which is meant Britain. [35] The answer is threefold: 'Both sides are trying to drag the great British Public into the scrap by

[34] *First Hundred Thousand*, p.143.
[35] *First Hundred Thousand*, pp. 229-230.

the back of the neck.' [36] One side claims that the British Army is desperate for men, the other that 'the personal liberty of Britain's workers' is being 'interfered with by the Overbearing Militarist Oligarchy'. [37] However, the 'country at large' is 'not worrying one jot about Conscription' its 'one topic of conversation at present is – Charlie Chaplin.' [38] Having dug a new trench before their front line, the soldiers reflect on what lies ahead for them 'the day after tomorrow': '"If this thing goes with a click, as it ought to do," said Wagstaffe, "it will be the biggest thing that ever happened – bigger even than Charlie Chaplin."' Blaikie replies: '"Yes – *if*!"' [39] Then he says this, bringing the Chapter to an end:

> 'Whatever we make – history or a bloomer – we'll do our level best,' replied Blaikie. 'At least, I hope "A" Company will.'
>
> Then suddenly his reserved, undemonstrative Scottish tongue found utterance. 'Scotland for Ever!' he cried softly. [40]

The next, final, chapter, goes into the present tense as the first person plural narrator tells us: 'We move on again at last, and find ourselves in Central Boyau, getting near the heart of things.' And the novel closes by acknowledging that if the author writes again of 'The First Hundred Thousand' they will still bear that designation but no longer be 'The Hundred Thousand'. As the novel close, the casualties are only beginning.[41]

Hay's political conservatism characterised his life and his Scottish patriotism was decidedly and continuously unionist, yet the Scottish identity that prevails in the novel perhaps signals more than one thing. Reference to the working-class movement in Glasgow

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[36] *First Hundred Thousand*, p.229.
[37] *First Hundred Thousand*, p.230.
[38] *First Hundred Thousand*, p.230.
[39] *First Hundred Thousand*, p.233.
[40] *First Hundred Thousand*, p.233.
[41] *First Hundred Thousand*, p.256.

that was to centre on John Maclean, opposing what Hay calls 'the Overbearing Militarist Oligarchy', to the populism of Chaplin, film, and mass media, and to the newspapers and other media supporting conscription, gives the exclamation 'Scotland For Ever!' a more poignant, nuanced, ambiguous tone than might have been predicted, and in the twenty-first century it is inevitable that much of Hay's writing can be read with a sensitivity to its unconscious irony, the bitter legacy of its robustness, the ambivalence of its good humour.

Maclean, calling as he did for a Scottish Socialist Republic, was perhaps one source of the representation of the Clydeside 'reds' in John Buchan's novel *Mr Standfast* (1919) but to return to the text of Maclean's speech from the dock of the High Court in Glasgow, 9 May 1918, we can appreciate his words not only in their historical and political moment but as a lasting masterpiece of literary rhetoric: 'I wish no harm no any human being, but I, as one man, am going to exercise my freedom of speech. No human being on the face of the earth, no government is going to take from me my right to speak, my right to protest against wrong, my right to do everything I can that is for the benefit of mankind. I am not here, then, as the accused; I am here as the accuser of capitalism dripping with blood from head to foot.'

The fact that Maclean's life and words had such a long and deep influence on the major poets of twentieth-century Scotland, including Hugh MacDiarmid, Sorley MacLean and Hamish Henderson testifies to the kind of nationalism that was evolving through the war years. MacDiarmid's poem 'The Innumerable Christ' evokes the blood of the martyr sacrifice, as Christopher Marlowe's *Faustus* did in 1592, and Maclean's similar rhetoric brilliantly works as accusation (capitalism is the bloody business) and his own physical sacrifice in the effort to end it. After sentencing, prison wasted his health and he died only five years later at the age of forty-four.[42]

[42] Henry Bell, *John Maclean: Hero of Red Clydeside* (London: Pluto press, 2018).

In his trial for sedition in 1918, in Edinburgh, Maclean himself said this: ‘I have taken up unconstitutional action at this time because of the abnormal circumstances and because precedent has been given by the British government. I am a socialist and have been fighting and will fight for an absolute reconstruction of society for the benefit of all. I am proud of my conduct. I have squared my conduct with my intellect, and if everyone had done so this war would not have taken place.’

This is a man who did all he could for a socialist republic of Scotland, to end the constitutional horror of class, royalty and the creation of wealth for the few through the exploitation of the many and to end the British Empire of the United Kingdom in the only way truly progressive: to take up once again the best of England, which only can be started, seriously, in the good neighbourly company of an independent Scotland.

Edwin Morgan, in his poem ‘On John Maclean’, quotes the words of the Lenin-appointed Bolshevik consul to Scotland: ‘I am not prepared to let Moscow dictate to Glasgow.’ Morgan comments: ‘it is the firmness / of what he wanted and did not want / that raises eyebrows’ and notes that Maclean evidently wanted ‘to let them know that Scotland was not Britain’ before acknowledging his defeat in a regime of merciless establishment propaganda and force:

Well, nothing’s permanent. It’s true he lost –
a voice silenced in November fog. Party
is where he failed, for he believed in people,
not in partiinost’ that as everyone knows
delivers the goods. Does it? Of course.
And if they’re damaged in transit you make do?

You do – and don't be so naïve about this world!

Maclean was not naïve, but

'We are out

for life and all that life can give us'

was what he said, that's what he said.[43]

Indeed, patriotic unionism was a matter of self-awareness of distinctive nationality; the endorsement of pacifism, seen by some as the most dangerous 'enemy within', was recognised by John Buchan himself as one quality in *Mr Standfast*, in the character of Lancelot Wake, a rare example of a positive contemporary depiction of the conscientious objector as someone of integrity. He sacrifices himself in battle and mortally wounded, gets back to the hero Richard Hannay, and says this: '"Funny thing life. A year ago I was preaching peace…I'm still preaching it…I'm not sorry." I held his hand till two minutes later he died.' Wake's '"I'm not sorry"' refers to his objection to killing but it also justifies the action he has taken, to save the lives of his fellows. Buchan keeps the sense of the character's integrity intact.[44]

Mackenzie, Hay and Buchan remain familiar names and suggest the variety of kinds of writing that were embodying national self-consciousness through the First World War, and influencing the development of particular forms of nationalism in its aftermath. For John Maclean, that influence was directly political and intended to bring about revolutionary social change. Hugh MacDiarmid summarised this:

[43] Edwin Morgan, 'On John Maclean', in *The New Divan* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1977), p.82.
[44] John Buchan, *Mr Standfast* (Edinburgh: Polygon, [1919] 2014), p.324.

> The Social Revolution is possible sooner in Scotland than in England. The working-class policy ought to be to break up the Empire to avert war and enable the workers to triumph in every country and colony. Scottish separation is part of the process of England's Imperial disintegration and is a help towards the ultimate triumph of the workers of the world.[45]

But the popularity of the kailyard writers and the pervasive presence of unionism and militarism in the literary mainstream and the press, and increasingly through mass media (also exemplified in Mackenzie's reference to the 'Banned Books' war of 1913 and Hay's to Chaplin in 1915), clearly indicates the extent to which warfare was and is conducted by more means than one.

The eight-minute film footage of Chaplin and Harry Lauder from 1918 offers strange insight into the appeal of both characters, the 'stage Scot' and the 'little tramp'. [46] Both are performances, the work of actors playing their roles, but where Chaplin's, seen from the twenty-first century, speaks of self-possession, self-conscious playfulness, impishness and cheek, and carries the authority of the poor man with self-respect, Lauder's seems projective of an eccentricity always in thrall and at the service of the greater authority. The truth of this may represent their relationship but it also speaks clearly about the authority of America/Britain/London over Scotland. Lauder's popular Scottishness is discomforting because of its caricature of nationality; Chaplin's speaks of a truth about human dignity in conditions of poverty. When they exchange hats, Chaplin seems to cheerily enact

[45] Hugh MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet: A Self-Study in Literature and Political Ideas* (1943; ed. Alan Riach, Manchester: Carcanet, 1994, p.144)
[46] This can be seen on YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jYf7O4kzGJQ, accessed 08/06/2019).

Scottishness, merrily, but Lauder's hopping after Chaplin is curiously repulsive. No wonder MacDiarmid wrote so spitefully about him.[47]

> 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.[48]

Just as theatre and later, radio, cinema and television, were to address and influence an increasing number of people, the essential value of literary art was becoming eclipsed, or at least, readjusting its co-ordinate points in a world where attitudes to experience were themselves naturally changing and being deliberately manipulated.

Conclusion

Finally, I want to suggest that the centrality of the First World War was only a prelude: the international rise of fascism, the Spanish Civil War, the Second World War, the Cold War, and the information propaganda war, increasingly global since 1989, are its sequelae. In 1940, George Orwell wrote this: 'But, after all, the war of 1914-18 was only a heightened moment in an almost continuous crisis. At this date [1940] it hardly even needs a war to bring home to us the disintegration of our society and the increasing helplessness of all decent people.'[49]

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[47] See David Goldie, 'Hugh MacDiarmid, Harry Lauder and Scottish Popular Culture', *International Journal of Scottish Literature*. No.1, Autumn 2006 (http://www.ijsl.stir.ac.uk/issue1/goldie.htm, accessed 08/06/2019)].
[48] Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Sir Harry Lauder', *Complete Poems*, volume 2, ed. Michael Grieve and W.R. Aitken (Manchester: Carcanet, 1996), p.1287.
[49] George Orwell, 'Inside the Whale', *Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), pp.101-33 (p.131).

The metaphor of militarization was maintained by Hugh MacDiarmid. In an essay of 1942, after praising new work by (among others) Sorley MacLean, George Campbell Hay, Douglas Young, Sydney Goodsir Smith, J.F. Hendry, Nicholas Moore, G.S. Fraser, Norman MacCaig, W.S. Graham, (poets and translators), Robert Melville (art critic), Robert MacLellan and Paul Carroll (playwrights), William Johnstone (artist), MacDiarmid says this (and the bold at the end is in the original text): 'The [Second World] war may thus have acted as a forcing-bed, bringing to somewhat speedier development what was already securely rooted in the circumstances of our nation; and in this sense it may, perhaps, be said later that: "**The Scottish renaissance was conceived in the First World War, and sprang into lusty life in the Second World War.**"[50]

Central to our understanding of this is the context of propaganda generated by the developing technological forms of the press and mass media. The key figure before the First World War was Karl Kraus, whose epic play, *The Last Days of Mankind*, ends with these words: 'This is world war. This is my manifesto to mankind.'[51]

In the major post-Second World War poem by Hugh MacDiarmid, *In Memoriam James Joyce* (1955), Kraus is a critical reference. Quoting from a source by Erich Heller, MacDiarmid makes the point that the Austrian satirist's attention to the detail of press propaganda, the atrocities inflicted on syntax and meaning which Kraus shows up simply by quotation, are the prelude to the increasingly dangerous later twentieth century. MacDiarmid's poem, also structured through quotation and demonstration rather than the projected inspiration of a divinely singular voice, prefigures information technology, but it is driven neither by commercial priorities nor chaotic over-supply, but rather by political and ultimately moral priorities. It prophecies the twenty-first century. As Yuval Noah Harari says,

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[50] Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Scottish Arts and Letters: The Present Position and Post-War Prospects', in *The New Scotland: 17 Chapters on Scottish Reconstruction* (Glasgow: Civic Press and the London Scots Self-Government Committee, 1942), pp.136-151 (p.151).

[51] Karl Kraus, *In These Great Times: A Karl Kraus Reader*, ed., Harry Zohn (Manchester: Carcanet, 1984), p.258.

‘In the past, censorship worked by blocking the flow of information. In the twenty-first century, censorship works by flooding people with irrelevant information. […] Today having power means knowing what to ignore.’[52]

And what to ask, and how to remember.

[52] Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus* (London; Harvill Secker, 2016), quoted in Robert Calasso, *The Unnameable Present*, translated from the Italian by Richard Dixon (London: Allen Lane, 2019), pp.77-78.