MODES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

IN

THE POETRY OF HUGH MACDIARMID

by

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THESIS ABSTRACT

'The function of art', writes MacDiarmid in a 1926 essay, 'is the extension of human consciousness'. A preoccupation with such an extension underlies and informs the MacDiarmid poetic corpus as a whole. My concern in this thesis is to examine critically the ways in which MacDiarmid conveys his didactic purpose throughout the corpus. In the poetry of the 1920's and 1930's this purpose is expressed in essentially dramatic terms, whilst in the later poems, In Memoriam James Joyce (1955) and The Kind Of Poetry I Want (1961), it emerges in the form of laudatory catalogues and illustrative analogies.

Sangschaw (1925) and Penny Wheep (1926) are the subjects of the introductory chapter of the thesis. My discussion involves the way in which MacDiarmid's concern with consciousness emerges in dramatic engagements with the natural object or through the medium of 'characters' who enact poetic preoccupations.

In Chapter Two I discuss A Drunk Man Looks At The Thistle (1926) which I see as a prolonged dramatic self-enactment in the interests of an extension of consciousness. The factors which underlie the affirmative vision of the poem are considered in the context of other works of the period.

To Circumjack Cencrastus (1930) is my concern in Chapter Three. I discuss the probable sources of the uncharacteristic note of

dejection in the poem and the way in which the poet's loss of confidence in his ability to transform the world is reflected in the imagery, tone and structure of the poem.

The significance of the political element in the corpus is the main subject of Chapter Four. MacDiarmid is seen in the context of other poets who wrote politically-orientated verse in the thirties.

In Chapter Five I discuss In Memoriam James Joyce (1955) and The Kind Of Poetry I Want (1961). The poet's adoption of a precursory rôle - which involves the preparation of the ground within which a new poetry would take root and flourish - is seen as significant in the context of the structure of the poems.

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ABBREVIATION

C.P. : The Complete Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid: 1920 - 1976.
2 Vols. Eds. W.R. Aitken and Michael Grieve (London, 1978)

CHAPTER ONE

The Vision And The Voice

A Study Of The Early Lyrics In Scots

The abiding impression one is left with in regard to the poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid is that to this poet 'consciousness' is indeed 'exquisitely precious'.[1] The uniqueness of consciousness, its limits, man's collusion in those limits, the pressing need for its extension, the poet's function in its regard - these are the themes which unify the disparate elements of a vast and varied poetic output. The fascination with the nature of human awareness remains constant through changes of voice and form - through the many contradictions which are so characteristic of the poet's work. Indeed, the latter play a positive rôle in MacDiarmid's poetry as Kenneth Buthlay has observed:

> The free play of conflicting and contradictory ideas is for him [MacDiarmid] the most vital intellectual exercise whereby consciousness is extended ...[2]

Inextricably linked with the obsession with consciousness in the MacDiarmid corpus is a constant and passionate preoccupation with language. Indeed, the realisation of the vision of an unprecedented advance in human awareness which underlies his poetry as a whole seems ultimately to depend on a radical change in man's attitude to, and employment of, language. In her interesting study of MacDiarmid, Nancy Gish - although she is referring specifically to 'Gairmscoile' - makes a point about MacDiarmid's conception of the function of language which is apposite in the context of the corpus as a whole. 'MacDiarmid locates language', Gish writes, 'as the power that unlocks, makes known, brings into being'.[3] Given this regard for the demystifying and revelationary properties of the word, it is not surprising that, in a 1933 letter, MacDiarmid deplores the fact (as he sees it) that 'nineteen-twentieths of any language are never used'.[4] The poet seems to view this inattention to language as an instance of man's actual tendency to 'short-circuit' his own consciousness. 'It is vitally necessary to remember', MacDiarmid opines, 'that language is as much a determinant of what is expressed in it as a medium of expression'.[5]

To MacDiarmid, then, language was - to quote Alan Bold - 'the instrument that could change the world'.[6] The poet's conception of the degree to which the human lot could be transformed by a more diligent approach to the word emerges in the following extract from the 1955 poem, In Memoriam James Joyce. (In the extract, the poet employs the kind of illustrative analogy which is so characteristic of much of the later poetry.):

> There lie hidden in language elements that effectively combined
> Can utterly change the nature of man;
> Even as the recently-discovered plant growth hormone,
> Idole-acetic acid, makes holly cuttings in two months
> Develop roots that would normally take two years to grow,
> So perchance can we outgrow time
> And suddenly fulfil all history
> Established and to come. (C.P.1, p. 781)

MacDiarmid's own faith in and love of the word is reflected in the linguistic experimentation of the poetic corpus. The poetic impulse as regards language is always, as in all other aspects of the corpus, towards synthesis. Words must be 'effectively combined' to release dormant and miraculous possibilities. The 1933 letter already referred to also contains the following information as regards the poet's linguistic practice and aspirations:

> ... I write in English, or in dialect Scots, or in synthetic Scots - or in synthetic English - with bits of other languages. I recognise the values of any language or any dialect for certain purposes, but where I am concerned with the free consciousness I cannot employ these - I must then find an adequate synthetic medium.[7]

MacDiarmid's ultimate goal in his lifelong search for an 'adequate synthetic medium' is the subject of that vast hymn to the word, In Memoriam James Joyce. He agreed with Joyce, apparently, as regards 'the utilisation of a multi-linguistic medium - a synthetic use, not of any particular language but of all languages ...'.[8] The 'Free Man', he declares, '... can make do with none other than le mot libre'.[9]

Before proceeding to a detailed discussion of the way in which MacDiarmid's concern with modes of consciousness is revealed in the

lyrics of _Sangschaw_ (1925) and _Penny Wheep_ (1926), which are the main subjects of this introductory chapter, it is necessary to consider at some length the nature of the linguistic medium which MacDiarmid employs in them. The basis of this medium was the lowland dialect which MacDiarmid spoke as a boy. This is augmented, however, by words garnered from literary sources (particularly those of the 15th and 16th centuries which, to MacDiarmid, represented the high point of Scottish literary achievement) and by Scots vocables from many regions and periods which the poet discovered in the course of his 'adventuring in dictionaries' (_C.P_.2, p.823).

In the Preface to _Sangschaw_, John Buchan informed the first readers of the collection that since 'there is no canon of the vernacular, he [MacDiarmid] makes his own, as Burns did, and borrows words and idioms from the old masters'. However, the extent to which MacDiarmid's Scots (which Anthony Burgess has described as an 'intellectual invention')[10] actually differs from that of his predecessors from Burns onwards is touched on in a 1926 _Times Literary Supplement_ review of _Sangschaw_:

> Burns, by reinforcing traditional Scots, from his own "hamely Westlan" dialect, did in a sense create a new diction; but he did not apply it to new purposes; he only showed that Scots could do superbly what it had always done pretty well. Since Burns, Scottish poets have generally founded on their own local dialects, eked out from a traditional stock that wore thinner year by year. Mr MacDiarmid casts his net wider. He founds, apparently, on the traditional Lothian Scots; but he admits good dialect words from any quarter, and he has searched the dictionaries for what Rossetti used to call "stunning words for poetry".[11]

Among the dictionaries which MacDiarmid 'searched' assiduously for his 'stunning words' were Jamieson's _Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language_ and James Wilson's _Lowland Scotch as Spoken in the Lower Strathearn District of Perthshire_. However, MacDiarmid's aims as regards Scots were definitely not those of the Preservationists - indeed for some time he regarded the latter as to some degree responsible for the continuing deplorable state of Scottish Verse in the early 20th Century. (A once fine literary tradition had degenerated - from the late Victorian period onward - into the sentimental, mindless,

'hamespun' offerings of the Kailyard [cabbage patch] school.)[12] In a 1970 essay, 'Satori', MacDiarmid recalls his initial antipathy to 'The Vernacular Circle of the London Burns Club' and the way in which he came to view their ideas and activities in a more positive light:

> The Vernacular Circle of the London Burns Club was agitating for the preservation of Scots, but I knew they conceived it only as a medium for the continuance of post-Burnsian doggerel, banality, jocosity and mawkish sentimentality. All of which I hated like hell. I could think of no other literature which had plunged into such an abyss of witless rubbish as had Scots poetry after the great achievements in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries of poets like Dunbar, Henryson and Gavin Douglas. The Burns cult appeared to be largely to blame, so I opposed the Burns Clubs. And then I suddenly wondered if I was being quite fair. It might all depend on the angle from which one approached the question of exploring the expressive potentialities of Scots as a medium for the whole range of modern literary purpose. The language had disintegrated into dialects, but perhaps these could be more or less arbitrarily combined and so provide a basis from which it might be possible to work towards reconstituting a full canon for the language.[13]

In the twenties, the Scottish Renaissance Movement (which was committed to the revitalisation of Scottish Literature and Culture and in which MacDiarmid was the leading figure) was concerned to restore Scottish poetry to 'a level worthy of the international prestige it had enjoyed in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries ...'.[14] However, if the Scots tongue had eminently respectable connections in the tradition it certainly (given the provincial preoccupations of the 'Kailyard') required international prestige at a contemporary level. A central aim of The Scottish Chapbook (one of the short-lived but influential journals which MacDiarmid, as C.M. Grieve, founded and edited to further the interests of the 'Renaissance')[15] was 'To bring Scottish Literature into closer touch with current European tendencies in technique and ideation'.[16] And certainly - as numerous adaptations in the corpus and his articles in The New Age between 1924 and 1928 testify - Grieve had a wide knowledge of contemporary European poetry in translation. In The Scottish Chapbook, in a three-part 'Theory of Scots Letters', Grieve makes a persuasive case for Scots as a literary medium and is at pains to suggest its relevance in the context of contemporary literary achievement. He writes,

for instance:

> The Scottish Vernacular is the only language in Western Europe instinct with those uncanny spiritual and pathological perceptions alike which constitute the uniqueness of Dostoevski's work, and word after word of Doric establishes a blood-bond in a fashion at once infinitely more thrilling and vital and less explicable than those deliberately sought after by writers such as D.H. Lawrence in the medium of English which is inferior for such purposes because it has entirely different natural bias which has been so confirmed down the centuries as to be insusceptible of correction. The Scots Vernacular is a vast storehouse of just the very peculiar and subtle effects which modern European literature in general is assiduously seeking ...[17]

MacDiarmid also cleverly links his own 'adventuring in dictionaries' with the impressive experimentation of Joyce:

> We have been enormously struck by the resemblance – the moral resemblance – between Jamieson's Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish language and James Joyce's _Ulysses_. A _vis comica_ that has not yet been liberated lies bound by desuetude and misappreciation in the recesses of the Doric: and its potential uprising would be no less prodigious, uncontrollable, and utterly at variance with conventional morality than was Joyce's tremendous outpouring ...[18]

It is these forward-looking, internationalist and intellectualist preoccupations (and not any purely preservationist aims) which underlie the tenderness and colloquialism of the lyrics which I will now discuss in detail – the 'wee bit sangs' of _Sangschaw_ and _Penny Wheep_.

MacDiarmid's metaphysical speculations as regards 'language and the point of consciousness'[19] are – for the most part – made concrete and immediate by a presentation throughout the corpus of exemplary images. In later poetry, such as _In Memoriam James Joyce_ (1955) or _The Kind of Poetry I Want_ (published in 1961), these images are presented in laudatory lists or in a multiplicity of illustrative analogies. However, in the earlier works they are essentially dramatic in nature. They can, for instance, take the form of 'characters' of whom MacDiarmid himself is the major instance. Or they can emerge in the course of dramatic engagements with the natural object. Thus stone, water, an indistinct rainbow (or 'watergaw') and the bogland of 'Tarras' all

function as illustrative media through which MacDiarmid conveys poetic purpose.

A major characteristic of the early lyrics in Scots is the way in which a pensée (or piece of reality as MacDiarmid conceives of it) is given its representative dramatic figure. Thus, we have a cast of 'characters' who - to tragic or comic effect - enact poetic preoccupations. The cast of Sangschaw and Penny Wheep includes the following players: a playboy God who is 'happy as a loon in the swings'; a tearful, neglected 'bairn' who is symbolically crowned Lord of the universe; a mad girl who lavishes love and song on a dead baby; the moon, as melodramatic piper, celestial painted lady and prying neighbour; a stinking corpse who refuses to rise to the call of Gabriel's trumpet and the rampaging, ranting 'Duncan Gibb' who considers that 'might is right' but who will, it is hoped, get his come-uppance - not before the throne of God, perhaps, but of man.

And it is not only the dramatic mask that is used to good effect in the early lyrics in Scots - the paraphernalia of the drama in general is called into play. Thus, with the meticulous attention that is generally extended to matters of mise-en-scène in subsequent poetry (notably A Drunk Man Looks At The Thistle (1926), hereafter A Drunk Man), the 'characters' of the lyrics are carefully located. We find them 'ayont the cairney', in 'Crowdieknowe', in 'Focherty', in 'the hedge-back', 'oolin' owre the fire', in the candlelit room of a servant girl.

The performers of the early lyrics in Scots are, on the whole, vividly realised in all their robust physicality: they have eyes 'blue as corncockles' and 'tousie' hair; they are dirty and neglected or sumptiously attired; they are 'braid' faced or 'muckle' and 'bearded'. They weep, wonder, laugh, love, drink, die and, always, they evoke a strong sense of the numinous as they move under the 'chitterin'' (shivering) 'licht' of the timebound or the bonnie 'lowe' (flame) of

'eternity'. The delineation of character is certainly facilitated by what Alan Bold has referred to as a

> dramatist's flair for words that vividly convey physical conditions and mental states. (See The Thistle Rises, p. xx)

All these 'characters' are employed to articulate a poetic vision of man's unique position in the context of a mighty and mindless 'other'.

In his perceptive essay, 'The Piper on the Parapet', Peter Thirlby makes an invaluable point in regard to Sangschaw and Penny Wheep - and it is a point moreover which has implications in connection with the corpus as a whole. Thirlby writes:

> ... one characteristic must be noted, for it is central both to the most ambitious poems in the collections and to MacDiarmid's subsequent development: a quasi-religious sense of the uniqueness of the human spirit, its distinctness from everything else in nature and also life.[20]

And, indeed, it is this 'distinctness' which MacDiarmid is at pains to convey in Sangschaw and Penny Wheep as he portrays the cognate being against the mindless magnificence of the planets or in the context of the automatism of animal life.

Perhaps the most memorable characters of the early lyrics in Scots are the 'bairn' of the introductory lyric of Sangschaw and the bereft mother of the Penny Wheep poem, 'Empty Vessel'. These 'characters' are major images in what appears to be a dialectic of mind and mindlessness in the 1925 and 1926 collections - and it is through them that MacDiarmid's commitment to the conscious being over and above the mighty round of the cosmos is most effectively articulated. In the cosmic scenario of 'The Bonnie Broukit Bairn', the Earth, as a 'broukit' (neglected) child, is ignored by the colourfully personified planets:

> Mars is braw in crammasy,
> Venus in a green silk goun,
> The auld mune shak's her gowden feathers,
> Their starry talk's a wheen o' blethers,
> Nane for thee a thochtie sparin',
> Earth, thou bonnie broukit bairn!
> - But greet, an' in your tears ye'll droun
> The haill clanjamfrie! (C.P.1, p.17)

Although the lyric opens on what appears to be a note of eulogy as the magnificence of the planets is vividly evoked, we become aware in the third line that what the poet is actually doing is bringing down the mighty from their seats as the irreverent 'auld' effectively diminishes the posturing 'mune'. In the following line there is a further indication of poetic intent as the mythological music of the spheres is casually dismissed as 'a wheen o' blethers'.

By contrast, the commitment to the 'bairn' (and through him to all suffering humanity) is cued in the fifth line by the tender diminutive 'thochtie', becomes quite explicit in the soaring, strongly-stressed, alliterative apostrophe and reaches its climax in the unique affirmation of human consciousness in the final italicised lines. As T.S. Law and Thurso Berwick have observed

> the symbol of humanity and all its travails is glorified and vivified beyond its rivals with such a lovely, living tenderness that all the varied beauty of the heavens pales into nullity.[21]

A major characteristic of Sangschaw and Penny Wheep is the remarkable compression of meaning which MacDiarmid manages to achieve in the scope of a tiny lyric. And this is, of course, largely due to the multiple significations of the Scots words employed. In one of his 'Theories of Scots Letters', MacDiarmid writes:

> ... the Vernacular abounds in terms which short-circuit conceptions that take sentences to express in English. Take only one - Guyfaul. It takes nine English words to convey its meaning. It means "Hungry for his meat but not very hungry for his work".[22]

The contribution of the words 'broukit' and 'clanjamfrie' (which MacDiarmid found in Jamieson) to the success of the opening lyric of Sangschaw is particularly worthy of note. The plight of the 'bairn' is metaphysically and visually reinforced in the light of the Jamieson definitions of the words. Here is one gloss of 'broukit':

> The face is said to be 'broukit' when it has spots or streaks of dirt on it, when it is partly clean and partly foul.

In the context of MacDiarmid's antithetical vision - his constant awareness of the duality of all earthly things - 'broukit' can be seen as particularly apt. Another definition of 'broukit' in Jamieson has similarly appropriate implications. The word can be used, apparently,

> to denote the appearance of a child who has been crying and who has left marks on it by rubbing off the tears with dirty hands.

In this light, the situation of the bairn becomes more poignant, visual and dramatic - and since the child is Earth its hands are appropriately 'dirty'.

And, indeed, the full impact of MacDiarmid's diminishment of the ostentatious planets can only be fully appreciated in the context of the many significations of the word 'clanjamfrie'. 'Clanjamfrie' is glossed in Jamieson as

> a term used to denote low, worthless people or those who are viewed in this light.

The word can also be employed, though, to denote 'purse-proud vulgar' or 'nonsensical talk'. And all these meanings are telescoped into one memorable word.

The process of exaltation of the cognate being and diminishment of the mighty but mindless 'other' is apparent also in the Penny Wheep lyric 'Empty Vessel'. And, as in 'The Bonnie Broukit Bairn', the poet again achieves his results by the juxtaposition of opposing images.

'Empty Vessel' is based on a song which MacDiarmid found in Herd's Ancient and Modern Scots Songs which was first published in 1769. Here is a verse of the crude and rustic ditty which MacDiarmid's inventive genius turned into a lyric of acute perception and supreme tenderness:

> I met ayong the Kairney
>   Jenny Nettles, Jenny Nettles,
> Singing till her bairny,
>   Robin Rattle's bastard;
> To flee the dool upo' the stool
>   And ilka ane that mocks her
> She round about seeks Robin out,
>   To stap it in his oxter.

The poignant exemplar of 'Empty Vessel' is a girl who has lost her baby but still cradles it in her arms

> Singin' till a bairnie
> That was nae langer there ... (C.P.1, p.66)

In a dramatic change of focus, the poem moves from the pathos of the human image to a cosmic view of the extravagantly endowed 'wunds' who have 'warlds to swing' - beautifully retaining the cradle image and thus the unity of the tiny poem. The all-of-a-piece imagery has a wonderful economy: thus, the girl cradles; the 'wunds' cradle; the girl sings; the 'wunds' sing and, in a memorable conclusion, the girl, bending over her babe, is echoed in an image from Einsteinean physics of the light 'bending' over all things.

Although the actions of the human and elemental 'mothers' echo one another, it is the essential difference between them which is the point of the little lyric. The scene 'ayont the cairney' of the tousie-haired Madonna and babe is an unforgettable dramatisation of the absolute centrality of love in the human condition. In the concluding verse there is a significant change in rhythm as initial trochées are introduced to give force and emphasis to what is, in effect, a celebration of the uniqueness of the human subject:

> Wunds si' warlds to swing
> Dinna sing sae sweet,
> The licht that bends owre a'thing
> Is less ta'en up wi't. (C.P.1, p.66)

MacDiarmid's debt to the traditional Ballad is clearly evidenced in 'Empty Vessel'. Catherine Kerrigan, in her perceptive study of MacDiarmid, outlines the far-reaching and felicitous implications of MacDiarmid's recourse to the ballad form in the early lyrics:

> Not unexpectedly, the form which MacDiarmid is using as a touchstone is the ballad and is the means by which he conveys a deep sense not only of the continuity, but also of the tragedy of life. As the ballad originated in the oral tradition it presented a direct line with spoken language, one which stretched back in time to the very earliest tribal forms of

> poetry. By drawing on this ancient source what MacDiarmid was giving expression to was both the collective imagination of his culture and the primitive emotional experience of man. The power of the ballad resided in its capacity to effortlessly evoke the sense of a world which, although lost in the remoteness of time, persisted in the subconscious. The ballad could reawaken the kind of barely understood fears and premonitions that force upon us the truth that the human species - no matter how great its aspirations and achievements - is always subject to the laws of the natural world. By using the ballad MacDiarmid succeeds in his lyrics in that synthesis of "contemporaneity and myth" which Eliot claimed was the great achievement of Joyce's Ulysses.[23]

Certainly, in MacDiarmid's use of a modified ballad form in such lyrics as 'Empty Vessel' and 'The Innumerable Christ' (in which the poet plays with the idea of the omnipresence of the incarnate Christ throughout the cosmos) one is aware not only of the link with 'tradition' but of the contribution of the 'individual talent' in matters of 'technique and ideation'.

In his interesting study The Real Foundations, David Craig comments that MacDiarmid's lyrics in Scots

> ... take the almost irretrievably hackneyed imagery of stars, moon and universe and intensify them into unforgettable images of what it is to be mortal ...[24]

Yet, ultimately, it is not so much 'what it is to be mortal' that is the poet's concern - but what it is to be human. By the presentation of man against the background of cosmic geography (in 'The Bonnie Broukit Bairn' and 'Empty Vessel') MacDiarmid highlights 'the uniqueness of the human spirit'. In 'Farmer's Death', by juxtaposing illustrative images from animal and human life, the poet again foregrounds the distinctiveness of the human subject - and this despite the fact that both modes of being share in a common mortality. There is nothing of the Burns kinship of mouse and man in MacDiarmid - no indication, as in the poetry of Henryson - that beasts are 'animated by the same instincts as humans'.[25] Animals, like the planets of 'The Bonnie Broukit Bairn' or the elements of 'Empty Vessel', are clearly consigned to the category of 'mindlessness'.

'Farmer's Death' - one of the most successfully achieved lyrics in _Sangschaw_ - subtly illustrates this point.

By the employment of an accumulation of visual, auditory, gustatory and kinaesthetic images, MacDiarmid, in 'Farmer's Death', presents animal life in terms of frenetic, mindless movement, meaningless sound and orgiastic consumption. The details of human death - in the latter half of each quatrain - are, by contrast, bleak, low-keyed and repetitive. And this alternation of exuberantly foregrounded and muted language continues throughout the poem. However, over and above the cinematic presentation of the colourful images of animal survival, one is aware of the subtle location of value in the human being whose life has been extinguished:

> Ke-uk, ke-uk, ke-uk, ki-kwaik,
> The broon hens keckle and bouk,
> And syne wi' their yalla beaks
> For the reid worms houk.
>
> The muckle white pig at the tail
> O' the midden slotters and slorps,
> But the auld ferm hoose is lown
> And wae as a corpse.
>
> The hen's een glitter like gless
> As the worms gang twirlin' in,
> But there's never a move in by
> And the windas are blin'.
>
> Feathers turn fire i' the licht,
> The pig's doup skinkles like siller,
> But the auld ferm hoose is waugh
> Wi' the daith intill her.
>
> Hen's cries are a panash in Heaven,
> And a pig has the warld at its feet;
> But wae for the hoose whaur a buirdly man
> Crines in a windin' sheet. (_C.P._1, p.34)

In his essay, Thirlby suggests that in 'Farmer's Death' 'animality is left master of nature'.[26] Yet the automatism of animal movements in the poem as a whole suggests not 'mastery' of anything but complete subjugation to some outside determining force. The pig may have 'the warld at its feet' but it is a world of mere, mindless consumption - a world in which he has no choices and over which he has no real control.

MacDiarmid's commitment to the dead farmer is subtly suggested

by the repeated 'But' throughout the poem. However, it emerges in a more decisive - though still understated way - in the concluding stanza of 'Farmer's Death'. There is a significant change of tone in the opening lines of this quatrain as the poet - whose presentation of the animals thus far had been in purely descriptive terms - now comments, with a wry irony, on their seeming inheritance of the world. In the final lines of the poem, MacDiarmid presents a carefully orchestrated and poignant conclusion to the low-pitched lament in the latter half of the preceding stanzas. The climactic effects are achieved by the following means: the penultimate 'mourning' line is foregrounded by its greater length and by the fact that it has four (rather than the predominant three) strong stresses; a more personal note is introduced by an actual description of the dead man ('buirdly') who, thus far, had been a mere shadow hovering above the spare details of his own death; and, finally, the inspired use of stress and assonance produces the elegiac cadences of the closing line of the poem. Certainly, it emerges in 'Farmer's Death' that even a decomposing man is of more intrinsic worth than the 'haill clanjamfrie' of animal life.

Another poem in which MacDiarmid juxtaposes images from animal and human life - to telling effect - is the charming 'Country Life'. Like 'Farmer's Death', the lyric is richly onomatopoeic. Indeed, these poems seem to bear out MacDiarmid's opinion that as regards onomatopoeic effect 'the Doric has a wider range and infinitely richer resources than English'.[27] In the lyric, with its 'bairnsrhyme' rhythm, a delight in animal and insect life, for its own sake, is clearly indicated. Yet the poem is not, as I see it, just an accumulation of vividly descriptive images from indoor and outdoor life, but an affirmation of the human role in the scheme of things:

> OOTSIDE ! ... Ootside !
> There's dooks that try tae fly
> An' bum-clocks bizzin' by,
> A corn-skriech an' a cay
> An' guissay i' the cray.

Inside ! ... Inside !
There's golochs on the wa',
A craidle on the ca',
A muckle bleeze o' cones
An' mither fochin' scones. (C.P.1, p.31)

The comforting presence of the 'mither' in the poem suggests not only a distinctively human kind of love and caring but the purposeful way in which man impresses himself upon the space he inhabits. The 'mither' - though in a modestly domestic way - is essentially a 'maker'.

In 'Farmer's Death' and 'Country Life', a comparison of man and animal highlights the mindless automatism of the latter. The hen's 'bouking', the pig 'slotterin' and 'slorpin', the 'bum-clocks bizzin' by' have a curiously mechanical effect. And, in those poems (such as 'Overinzievar' and 'On An Ill-Faur'd Star')[28] in which animals are not being mindlessly busy they are being mindlessly still. This stillness is nothing like the repose of the conscious being but rather the imposed periodic inactivity of the mechanical toy.

However, although man is seen as somehow 'special' in the early lyrics in Scots, the actual limits of human consciousness are, generally, realistically confronted. In two notable instances - 'The Eemis Stane' and 'The Watergaw' - these limits are memorably suggested in dramatic engagements with exemplary images drawn from inanimate nature.

An image of the world as an unsteady stone which 'wags' precariously in space suggests the uncertainty of man's hold on life in the Sangschaw lyric 'The Eemis Stane'. From some extra-terrestrial point, the 'stane' - which bears an indecipherable inscription - is gravely and reflectively regarded on a cold harvest night. There is, perhaps, a certain irony in the exalted vantage point since the observer does not, in fact, have a God's-eye view of things but an entirely human perception of his own limitations:

I' THE how-dumb-deid o' the cauld hairst nicht
The warl' like an eemis stane
Wags i' the lift;
An' my eerie memories fa'
Like a yowdendrift.

Like a yowdendrift so's I couldna read
The words cut oot i' the stane
Had the fug o' fame
An' history's hazelraw
No' yirdit thaim. (C.P.1, p.27)

As in so many of the lyrics of Sangschaw and Penny Wheep, the employment of the recondite and onomatopoeic Scots vocables contributes in a major way to the articulation of poetic purpose. An awe-inspiring cosmic stillness is, for instance, skilfully evoked by the strange and strongly stressed Scots compound which qualifies nicht in the opening line - 'how-dumb-deid'. The phrase works with the musing tone and slow rhythms to suggest the utter isolation of the viewing consciousness. The wor d Yowdendrift - with which the verse closes - is, as we shall see presently, also of major significance in the poem.

In the second verse, the 'stane', according to David Daiches, 'becomes a worn tombstone with its inscription obliterated by moss and lichen'.[29] Such an interpretation is, of course, made feasible by the reference to 'memories' and by the epitaph connotations of 'the words cut oot i' the stane'. But - bearing in mind the cosmic context which is central to the poem - the stone is surely not a tombstone firmly embedded in Earth but that unsteady 'stane', Earth itself, 'wagging' in space. And 'the words cut oot i' the stane' (despite their implications of memento mori) represent reality itself. This reality is obscured for the observer not only by the weight of external events (the 'fug' and 'hazelraw' of objective history) but by the accumulation of 'memories' which constitute his own life story. It is man's misreading of Time and the falsifications which arise from it - in the form of memories - which makes 'the words cut oot i' the stane' impossible to decipher.

The way memories distort reality is aptly suggested in 'The Eemis Stane' by their 'yowdendrift' (blizzard) characte ristics. By employing a central characteristic of the traditional ballad - incremental repetition - at this point, MacDiarmid not only foregrounds the evocative Scots word but achieves memorable effects of rhythm and cadence.

MacDiarmid's consummate care as regards lexical choice and his proper regard for scientific fact are evidenced in his image of the world as a stone which 'wags' in space. This can, I think, be demonstrated by a consideration of an English gloss of the phrase, and an attempted French translation. The English version reads thus:

> The world like a teetering stone sways in the sky ...[30]

Denis Saurat, the French critic, translates as follows:

> Le monde est une pierre malequilibrée
> Qui tremble au vent ...[31]

Both attempts fall short of accuracy. If a thing 'teeters' it does so on the _verge_ of something. The 'eemis stane' does not 'teeter' on the brink of anything - nor does it 'sway'. It 'wags' in the midst of space. In Saurat's translation, the insecure stone 'trembles in the wind'. But there is no suggestion of 'trembling' or 'wind' in the original. The world, in the lyric, is seen in a cosmic context in which terrestrial weather would have no meaning. The force which prevails around the 'eemis stane' is not wind, but the force of the mutual gravity of the planetary bodies. If this cosmic context is lost the tone and the language work to no avail.

Another illustrative medium through which MacDiarmid conveys man's vulnerability and the limits of his consciousness is that of an indistinct rainbow or 'watergaw'. On the face of it, 'The Watergaw' (the first poem to appear in _The Scottish Chapbook_ under the name of "Hugh M'Diarmid")[32] seems to commemorate the death of a loved one. But the poem actually expresses much more than straightforward elegiac sentiments:

AE weet forenicht i' the yow-trummle
I saw yon antrin thing,
A watergaw wi' its chitterin' licht
Ayont the on-ding;
An' I thocht o' the last wild look ye gied
Afore ye deed!

There was nae reek i' the laverock's hoose
That nicht - an' nane i' mine;
But I hae thocht o' that foolish licht
Ever sin' syne;
An' I think that mebbe at last I ken
What your look meant then. (C.P.1, p.17)

From the privileged position of the editorial chair of The Scottish Chapbook, C.M. Grieve (always a zealous self-publicist) has this to say of 'The Watergaw':

> Doric economy of expressiveness is impressively illustrated in the first four lines of Mr. MacDiarmid's poem. Translate them into English. That is the test. You will find that the shortest possible translation runs something like this: "One wet afternoon in the cold weather in July after the sheep shearing I saw that rare thing - an indistinct rainbow, with its shivering light, above the heavily-falling rain".[33]

By the use of the Scots 'Yow-trummle', MacDiarmid not only introduces a tremulous note into 'The Watergaw' (the significance of which will become evident shortly) but economically sets the scene of the poem - 'Yow-trummle', or ewe-tremble, is the cold spell in July after the sheep shearing. And, indeed, the poem is all a-tremble since everything in it hovers on the brink of surrender to its opposite. Thus the event takes place in the 'forenicht' as evening is on the brink of night; the light of the 'watergaw' is 'chitterin'' (shivering) as it is threatened by the onset of rain (the on-ding); the person addressed in the lyric is about to shed individual identity and be absorbed into the cosmic round.

The implications of the image which opens verse two of 'The Watergaw' are not immediately apparent - indeed MacDiarmid, in a 1934 letter, has described it as 'a good example of the virtual untranslateability into English of many highly concentrated Scots phrases'.[34] After some painstaking deliberation on the subject, the poet suggests that the

following is perhaps 'the best gloss':

> The first line reads 'There was no smoke coming from the lark's nest that night', a proverbial figure of speech meaning that it was a dark and stormy night, while the second line must then be read as meaning 'and my heart was dark and stormy too'.[35]

Certainly, the lines seem to suggest a sense of cosmic desolation in which bird and man alike are involved. The remaining lines of the verse represent the poet's reflections on the event in the first half of the poem.

The metaphysical point of 'The Watergaw', as I see it, involves an identification of the rainbow's 'chitterin' licht' and 'the last wild look' of the dying person before both are absorbed into an uncaring cosmos. The 'foolish licht' and 'the last wild look' are affirmations of individuality - and they are 'foolish' and 'wild' because of their daring quality in the face of the great mystery to which each must inevitably surrender. Both are precariously poised between the extremes of self and other. The individual light of the dying person is about to be extinguished; the colourful, timidly assertive 'watergaw' must give way to the 'on-ding' and merge into the general light. Each briefly sings itself before it is silenced forever. The 'foolish licht' and 'the last wild look' do not so much 'rage against the dying of the light' as make a final, fleeting affirmation that the light is <u>there</u>.

In the MacDiarmid corpus as a whole - in which the idea of diversity-in-unity is a major theme - each mode of being (such as the 'watergaw', the 'broukit bairn', the multi-faceted 'Drunk Man', the plants of 'Tarras' and countless other individual manifestations of a multiform world) has a 'thisness' which it must stubbornly assert in the face of cosmic opposition. Yet, realistically, the poet also perceives that all must ultimately surrender to the whole.

'The Watergaw' - with its alternating long and short lines, masculine (but, appropriately, not obtrusive) rhyme and concluding,

'clinching' couplets - has an interesting unity of structure. The finely-judged tentativeness of the penultimate line ('I think that mebbe ...') is of particular significance in the context of the lyric, and, indeed, of the corpus as a whole in that it delicately suggests the limits of human perception.

MacDiarmid's practice, as regards the Scots vocable in 'The Watergaw', 'The Eemis Stane', 'The Broukit Bairn' and other lyrics in the 1925 and 1926 collections, seems to bear out a claim he makes in Lucky Poet. MacDiarmid writes:

> Because of a profound interest in the actual structure of language, like Mallarmé's, like Mallarmé I have always believed in the possibility of 'une poésie qui fut comme deduite de l'ensemble des propriétés et des caractères du langage' - the act of poetry being the reverse of what it is usually thought to be; not an idea gradually shaping itself in words, but deriving entirely from words ...[36]

In the early lyrics in Scots then, conscious man is not only uniquely endowed but uniquely vulnerable. Certainly, he moves precariously in a world of suffering and uncertainty. There is - as I hope to show presently - a consolatory vision in Sangschaw and Penny Wheep which involves human sexuality and, predominantly, language. Nowhere, however, in the 1925 or 1926 collections - or indeed in the corpus as a whole - does MacDiarmid seek to assuage human angst by offering reassuring visions of a Father-in-Heaven who would, in the fullness of time, redress all earthly wrongs. In a letter to F.G. Scott (dated 14th October, 1941) the poet writes:

> ... The real out-and-out materialists, anti-God, anti-all supernaturalism, are few and far between - it is to these I belong.[37]

Yet there is a deeply religious element in the MacDiarmid corpus, although the poet seems to see the grounds of the numinous in Being itself and not in any extrapolations from it in the form of Gods. 'The transcendental, if I am right', MacDiarmid says in an interview with Walter Perrie, 'comes out of the seed of things. It's inherent in the original substance - it's part of the materialism'.[38] In a

discussion of the metaphysical implications of MacDiarmid's poem 'On A Raised Beach' (from Stony Limits And Other Poems: 1934; 1956), D.M. MacKinnon makes the following interesting observations as regards atheism and theism:

> ... both alike are ontologies ... if the atheist denies that God exists, he does so on the basis of his own apprenticeship in the school of the transcendent.[39] He is almost obsessively pre-occupied with what there is ...

And, indeed, throughout his poetry MacDiarmid's religious sense manifests itself in a close engagement with 'what there is' and with the nature of the relationship between this and human consciousness itself. MacDiarmid 'sings' substance, and in that substance he finds his particular eternity.

However, the sense of man's isolation in a mindless cosmos is reinforced in the early lyrics in Scots by the fact that he inhabits a world in which the Deity is either absent (as in 'Sea-Serpent' or 'God Takes a Rest') or irrelevantly present (as in 'Crowdieknowe' or 'The Last Trump'). God's abandonment of his creation is dramatically highlighted in 'Sea-Serpent' - one of the longer poems of Penny Wheep, which, like 'Bombinations of a Chimaera' and 'Gairmscoile', point to MacDiarmid's subsequent commitment to freer, more expansive forms. The linguistic medium of the poem, as a whole, is a discursive 'hauf-Scots' - but there are moments (of vigorous play or impassioned prayer) when language becomes denser and its phonic aspects are enthusiastically foregrounded.

In 'Sea-Serpent', MacDiarmid juxtaposes images of a God-centred primal order and the chaos which ensues when 'God neither kens nor cares'. In the following stanzas (which end with one of the most memorable kinaesthetic images in 'Sea-Serpent') there is a lively dramatisation of primordial joy as an exultant God busies himself with his brand new creation and an all-unifying serpent moves vigorously and delightedly throughout the universe:

His joy in his wark gied it lint-white lines
Brichter than lichtnin's there.
Like starry keethins its far-aff coils
Quhile the nearer rings
Ran like a raw o' siller girds
On the wan-shoggin' tap o' the waters
And soupled awa' like wings.

Round the cantles o' space Leviathan flickered
Like Borealis in flicht
Or eelied thro' the poorin' deeps o' the sea
Like a ca' o' whales and was tint to sicht,
But aye in its endless ups-and-doons
As it dwined to gleids or walloped in rings
God like a jonah whirled in its kite
But blithe as a loon in the swings. (C.P.1, p.49)

The playboy God of the initial stages of creation tires of his game, however, and deserts it. The serpent - one of the many symbols of diversity-in-unity in the MacDiarmid corpus - loses direction and chaos prevails throughout the universe. The poem ends with a prayer for the reassuring unification of 'the moniplied maze o' the forms'. Unlike A Drunk Man, Calvin is not a felt presence in the early lyrics in Scots but the sermonic cadences, pace and weight of the concluding stanzas of 'Sea Serpent' momentarily suggest him. Kenneth Buthlay regards these stanzas as 'the most majestic lines heard in Scots verse for centuries':[40]

O Thou that we'd fain be ane wi' again
Frae the weary lapses o' self set free,
Be to oor lives as life is to Daith,
And lift and licht us eternally.
Frae the howe o' the sea to the heich o' the lift,
To the licht as licht to the darkness is,
Spring fresh and fair frae the spirit o' God
Like the a'e first thocht that He kent.was His.

Loup again in His brain, O Nerve,
Like a trumpet-stang,
Lichtnin-clear as when first owre Chaos
Your shape you flang
- And swee his mind till the mapamound
And meanin' o' ilka man,
Brenn as then wi' the instant pooer
O' an only plan! (C.P.1, pp.50-51)

God's desertion of his creation is again the theme of 'God Takes A Rest'. In this poem the Deity is dramatically diminished as he returns - not to a Heavenly home - but to man's oceanic beginnings:

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. (C.P.1, p.33)

In connection with 'God Takes a Rest', Catherine Kerrigan, in her informative study Whaur Extremes Meet (1983), writes:

> Here, the extraordinary reversal of God seeking escape from His creation, thwarts usual expectations. This God is more human than divine, for he has wrapped himself in the blanket of the world for comfort and shows a peculiarly human need for solace. Similarly, the startling image of God crawling back to the primeval slime, carrying as it does, not the story of Genesis, but Darwin's account of the emergence of species, makes Him as much a part of the process of the material world as all else in nature.[41]

In the beautiful lullaby 'O Jesu Parvule', the Deity is presented as both human ('wee craturie') and Divine ('byspale' - a child of whom wonderful things are expected). With its traditional Madonna and child images and wonderfully tender diminutives, this poem might, on the face of it, seem to offer a measure of solace to suffering mankind. And, certainly, this Christ seems a long way from the defamiliarised version of 'Sea-Serpent' and 'God Takes a Rest'. It is significant, though, that the infant Jesus seems to be impervious to the request of his mother who is traditionally seen as mediating between God and man. Paradoxically, Mary's action of drawing the Babe into the 'bool o' her breist' highlights not the closeness of man and the Divine but the Deity's cheerful but determined indifference to human behest. Nancy Gish's comments on the poem are revealing:

> What initially appears as a lullaby evoking a medieval sense of Christ's closeness and intimacy becomes in the reading an expression of His distance and diverted attention ...[42]

It does seem, also, that when God is not absent in the early lyrics in Scots, he is irrelevantly present. The lyrics 'Crowdieknowe' and 'The Last Trump' represent blasphemous reworkings of the Christian myth of The Day of Judgement. In this regard, Kenneth Buthlay refers to 'a kirkyard humour specialising in the Resurrection that is a familiar part of popular tradition in Scotland'.[43] Catherine Kerrigan also refers

to 'the poems with Resurrection themes' and suggests that 'MacDiarmid was perfectly capable of treating such traditionally sacred themes with a mischievous wit'.[44] It is arguable, though, that MacDiarmid's intention was not just to amuse but to demystify - in the interest of a vision which seems to locate value not in the Deity but in man himself. The toppling of traditional hierarchies (from the planetary elite of 'The Bonnie Broukit Bairn' to God and his heavenly choirs) certainly seems to be a feature of Sangschaw and Penny Wheep.

However, 'Crowdieknowe' and 'The Last Trump' have their humorous side. The former is a kind of danse macabre in which the multitudinous and defiant dead (including the vividly realised 'muckle' men whom MacDiarmid had 'grat' as a child) emerge from the clay hurling abuse at the heavenly hosts who had dared to disturb their rest. Far from being responded to with the traditional fear and trembling, the Deity and his party are contemptuously dismissed as 'Thae trashy bleezin' French-like folk' (C.P.1, p.27).

In 'The Last Trump', the clamorous Gabriel is met not with 'a feck o' swearin' but rank disobedience. The 'black affrontit corpse', who is being called to account for his sins, behaves like an impudent schoolboy who refuses to get up for school:

> 'Na, Na' Still the nicht is black.
> I'll sleep on an' winna wauk.
> Dinna reeze me. Dinna ca'.
> Chapna' on my coffin-wa'. '... (C.P.1, p.29)

The defiant dead of 'Crowdieknowe', the diminished planets of 'The Bonnie Broukit Bairn', a God divested of his Divinity - and, as we shall see in the context of 'Au Clair de la Lune' - a radically demystified moon can all perhaps be seen as attempts to liberate that vis comica which MacDiarmid had found to be 'bound by desuetude and misappreciation in the recesses of the Doric'.

MacDiarmid's early lyrics in Scots, then, are not reassuringly

God-centred. Indeed, all the indications are that man must look to his own nature for solace in a harsh world. Human sexuality and language (specifically in the framework of 'the sang') are seen as potentially liberating forces - ways by which man can lessen the odds between himself and an uncaring cosmos. In the lyrics, certain lovers (although not those of 'The Love-sick Lass' or 'Moonlight Among the Pines' who suffer the unassuaged pangs of unrequited love) can momentarily transcend Time. The representations of the mystical experience of the lovers have none of the trappings of high romance: they take place, like any animal encounter, 'in the hedgeback', or, with all its traditional connotations of tawdry exploitation or brutal coercion, in the room of a servant girl. In the lyrics 'In the Hedge-back' and 'Servant Girl's Room', MacDiarmid, by a skilful combination of setting, imagery and colloquial Scots diction, achieves both a deromanticisation and a radical exaltation of human sexuality.

In the four quatrains of 'In the Hedge-back', love is played out against all the force of the elements. The lovers, however, are not seen as a mere 'wheen o' nerves that hotch in the void'[45] but as constituting in themselves a cosmic force. Each verse begins with the line 'It was a wild black nicht' and opposes a challenge thrown out by human consciousness as the exultant lovers align themselves with cosmic energies and claim the ability to generate heat and light. Thus, as a power to be reckoned with in the universe, they drive 'back the darkness wi' a bleeze o' licht'; they defeat the 'snell' (cold) air by generating a heat that could melt them 'utterly'; they hear their own 'herts' beating 'triumphantly' above the wind. There is immense pride in that end-stopped, emphatic 'we' which is repeated throughout the poem in the line which precedes the human challenge. And the line which contains that challenge dominates the verse by its greater length and verbal vigour. The poem has hauntingly numinous undertones as the lovers'

embrace enfolds infinity.

Another moment out of time is recorded in the tiny but profound Penny Wheep lyric 'Servant Girl's Bed' which seems to concern the aftermath of sexual union:

> THE talla spales
> And the licht loups oot,
> Fegs, it's your ain creesh
> Lassie, I doot,
> And the licht that reeled
> Loose on't a wee
> Was the bonny lowe
> O' Eternity. (C.P.1, p.65)

With remarkable economy and an exquisitely calculated employment of stress in the poem's eight lines, MacDiarmid has juxtaposed the timeless and the timebound. The spent candle with which the girl's 'creesh' (flesh) is identified suggests finitude. However, the licht which had 'reeled' (the foregrounded verb appropriately imports into the poem visions of a turning world) briefly on the talla and, incidentally, on the girl's body in the act of love, is the 'bonny lowe' (flame) of Eternity.

Like the lover, the poet - who is indubitably the major 'character' in the MacDiarmid corpus as a whole - can, in the pursuit of his craft, experience his moments in Eternity. One such moment occurs in the Sangschaw sequence 'Au Clair de la Lune'. 'Au Clair de la Lune' differs from the other dramatised pensées in that, like 'Ex Vermibus' and 'Gairmscoile' which I shall discuss presently, it focusses not on the generality of mankind but specifically on the poet and his function in society. Significantly, in the sequence the poet brings order out of the 'chaos o' Thocht'. In this respect, 'Au Clair de la Lune' points to MacDiarmid's subsequent work in which the poet is perceived as a mediator between reality and empirical reason.

Any suggestion in 'Au Clair de la Lune' of fin-de-siècle whimsicality (which is evoked, perhaps, by the 1890's title) is undercut by the energetic colloquialism and exactitude of the diction and by the serious reflections on the relationship of thought and language which

underlie the sequence. In the 'Prelude to Moon Music', the poet muses dispassionately on the nature of Time who relentlessly crumbles ('meissles') even the glory of Empire between his fingers until not even a scent of decay remains. The exclamatory opening of the second verse ushers in a dramatic change of focus as in an evocative visual and auditory image the moon is presented 'piping in' (back lill is the thumb-hole of a bagpipe chanter) the inevitable dissolution of all earthly things.

It transpires, however, in the following lyric that, by the good graces of what appears to be a partial moon, the poet can, momentarily, escape the clutches of Time. The element of play now becomes central to the articulation of the vision, as in a cosmic game of 'I Spy', a spinning top ('peerie') Earth is busily, but myopically, scanned by a radically defamiliarised 'mune':

> When the warl's couped soon' as a peerie
> That licht-lookin' craw o' a body, the moon,
> Sits on the fower cross-win's
> Peerin' a' roon'. (C.P.1, p.24)

MacDiarmid's portrayal of cosmic phenomena yet again involves a diminishing irreverence. That 'light-lookin'' in the verse works hard for its living - suggesting not only that the moon is bright but inconsequential, and indeed, perhaps, something of a whore - 'a light of love'. The startling image of the luminous moon as 'a craw' also effectively strips her of all conventionally 'poetic' associations.

In the second verse of 'Moonstruck', however, the moon regains some of her traditional glory as, with a breathless and childlike 'she's seen me ... she's seen me' her inspirational function is evoked. With the revelationary 'quhither' (beam) of cold, lunar gold (made piercingly tactile in the context) the poet's visionary experience begins. The final line of the verse is interestingly ambiguous in that it suggests that the 'quhither' both startles the poet and inspires him - gives him 'a stert'.

The poet's at-oneness with the cosmos is powerfully suggested in the concluding verse of 'Moonstruck' by the sudden diminution of sound. The auditory images are mere treble threads of sound: the ocean's roar is 'peerieweerie'; the 'thunner' is a 'tinklin' bell'. The lyric ends in an image in strongly-stressed monosyllables in which MacDiarmid hum orously links the dauntingly abstract and the minutely, ludicrously concrete. And, far from dissipating the sense of the numinous which characterises the verse thus far, the final image actually re-inforces it:

> ... Time
> Whuds like a flee. (C.P.1, p.24)

The cosmic game of 'I Spy' continues in the penultimate lyric with a change of partners - not moon and poet, but world and 'thocht'. The earth - not the 'littered' one of the 'Prelude to Moon Music' but the world in all its primordial nakedness ('white as a mammoth's bane') - is 'peered' at by a 'dumfoun'ered Thocht'. The limited nature of the 'Thocht' (or indeed of human consciousness) is implied by its need to 'peer'. It has only a 'keethin' sicht o' a' there is'. 'Keethin' sicht' is glossed in Jamieson as 'the view a fisher has of the motion of a salmon, by marks in the water, as distinguished from what is called a "bodily sight"'. The word 'dumfoun'ered' is, as I see it, employed not just in the sense of being 'nonplussed' but 'dumbstruck'. It suggests not only the limits of perception but of man's capacity to name what he sees. The image of the 'thocht' peering at the world encapsulates an enormous metaphysical abstraction. Indeed, if MacDiarmid's preoccupation with the relation of thought and language in the context of the corpus as a whole could be summed up in one image it would be in this evocative one from 'Au Clair de la Lune'.

The concluding lyric of the Sangschaw sequence is also of considerable significance in that it images forth, at this early stage, an idea which is of central importance in the corpus as a whole: the potential

significance of poetry (or 'the sang') in the scheme of things. In 'The Huntress and Her Dogs', the mythological image of the moon as Diana is given an imaginative and scientifically inspired twist as MacDiarmid makes poetic capital out of the gravitational pull of the moon on the tides. Thus, instead of the traditional hounds at her heels Diana has the oceans which 'Slink in like bidden beasts'. The image is echoed in the last verse to predict the way in which the distressed masses of mankind will yet respond to the attraction of 'the sang':

> So sall Earth's howlin' mobs
> Drap, lown, ahint the sang
> That frae the chaos o' Thocht
> In triumph braks or lang. (C.P.1, p.25)

An interesting and important characteristic of the early lyrics in Scots is the way in which mind and mindlessness are defined in terms of significant and meaningless sound. Thus, the 'wheen o' blethers' of the planetary elite of 'The Bonnie Broukit Bairn' is countered by the significant and superior 'greeting' of the 'Bairn' - and the indifferent 'song' of the elements is, in 'Empty Vessel', opposed to the sweet and meaningful song of the bereft mother. Again, the automatism of animal movements - as in 'Farmer's Death' - is generally accompanied by a cacophony of mindless sound. Certainly, in the MacDiarmid corpus as a whole, it transpires that mankind's greatest blessing lies in his unique relationship to the most significant sound in the universe - to language itself. As Kenneth Buthlay has aptly observed:

> With MacDiarmid one finds that one is always returning to questions of language. Indeed it is this factor that holds his whole life's work together as perhaps nothing else does.[46]

In 'Ex Vermibus' and 'Gairmscoile' which, like 'Au Clair de la Lune', focus specifically on the poet and his function in society, the commitment to language - and especially to the revelationary Scots shibboleth - is exuberantly imaged forth. The force of the introductory line of 'Ex Vermibus', with its strong stresses and repeated imperative 'Gape', gives

way to the playfully conspiratorial as the poet promises to present the 'gorlin'' (the embryonic Scottish Renaissance ?) with the 'worm' that will give it 'a slee and sliggy sang'. The worm, with its connotations of death, represents, perhaps, the obsolescent Scots words which will acquire vigorous new life in the throat of the poet/maker. Clearly, the fledgling and the poet will join forces in a grand scheme which will have wide-ranging effects. Whatever the message, the exuberant 'gorlin'' will carry it across the heavens illuminating them with it. The exultation of the tiny light-bringer is vividly dramatised in the second and third verses of the poem:

> Syne i' the lift
> Byous spatrils you'll mak'
> For a gorlin' wi' worms like this in its wame
> Nae airels sall lack.
>
> But owre the tree-taps
> Maun flee like a sperk,
> Till it hes the haill o' the Heavens alunt
> Frae dawin' to derk. (C.P.1, p.23)

This little lyric demonstrates - like so many others in the 1925 and 1926 collections - the extension of meaning which MacDiarmid can achieve by his use of Scots. The word 'spatrils', in the second verse, is of particular note in this regard. 'Spatrils' is glossed in The Complete Poems as 'musical notes (as printed)' - but it is suggested that the word is used in 'Ex Vermibus' 'to denote visual effects of a bird singing'. And, clearly, this is so. Perhaps, however, the literal meaning can also be seen as relevant in its context. It could suggest that the Scots shibboleths of an oral tradition would, by the actions of the 'fledgling' (Scottish Renaissance) be given contemporary prominence in print.

'Ex Vermibus' - with its repeated long third lines of four strong stresses and the emphatic brevity of the lines which precede and follow them - has a satisfying and interesting unity. And a vigorous and predominantly masculine rhyme is used throughout the lyric to good effect. Perhaps what impresses most about 'Ex Vermibus', though, is the poet's

obvious joy in the materiality of his medium. He clearly delights in the sibilance of 'slee and sliggy sang', sensuously savours the luxuriousness of 'Byous Spatrils' and takes humorous pleasure in the phonic link of 'worm' and 'whuram'. I would heartily concur with David Daiches when he writes, of 'Ex Vermibus':

> A verbal joke becomes a striking poem: I can think of no more immediately convincing illustration of how MacDiarmid makes language work in his Scots poems from Sangschaw to A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle than this wonderful little lyric.[47]

The Penny Wheep poem 'Gairmscoile' stands out in the early collections not just because of its length ('I Heard Christ Sing', 'Ballad of the Five Senses' and 'Bombinations of a chimaera' are long poems) but because of its political and polemical content as well as its radical departure from the ballad form. It also introduces a certain contradictory element into the early lyrics in that whereas the significance of human utterance (in contradistinction to the other sounds of the cosmos) is generally highlighted in Sangschaw and Penny Wheep MacDiarmid's commitment in 'Gairmscoile' is to 'soond, no' sense'. And he makes this commitment, as Kenneth Buthlay has observed, 'at the very moment when he was engaged in what he called the intellectualisation of Scots verse ...'.[48]

We do not find in 'Gairmscoile' the exquisitely discreet economy of the lyrics but an abandoned plenitude - a pre-eminently sensual verbal display. The phonic aspect of the poet's linguistic medium is extravagantly foregrounded (in accordance with MacDiarmid's professed commitment in the poem to 'soond no' sense') by the use of recurring assonance, alliteration and consonance and by the preponderance of hard-to-pronounce polysyllabic Scots words. In a prologue, the poet prepares us for the celebration of the aboriginal words which constitutes the major part of 'Gairmscoile' by the presentation of two images which illustrate the stubborn survival of the primordial beneath the veneer of civilised living.

In the first image, a bride - traditional symbol of chastity and institutionalised love - succumbs to the insistent and prior claims of the 'skymmorie monsters' of pure instinct. The brutal coupling results not only in the rupture of the conventionally-prized hymen but of the 'bubbles' or illusions 'o' twa souls'. In the light of this demonic coupling, the concepts of 'love', 'guid and ill, joy and fear' are meaningless. In the second image, the poet himself - lured by the 'wild matin'-call' of the beasts, blindfolds his reason and proceeds on a dark, Lawrentian pilgrimage into the depths of the pre-civilised self:

> ... My bluid sall thraw a dark hood owre my een
> And I sall venture deep into the hills
> Whaur, scaddows on the skyline, can be seen
> - Twinin' the sun's brent broo wi' plaited horns
> As gin they crooned it wi' a croon o' thorns ...
> (C.P.1, p.72)

After this symbolic affirmation of the continuing potency of the instinctual in human life, we are given, in the last line of the stanza, the first indication of the identification between the ancient Scots vocables and the primeval beasts 'in Wha's wild cries a' Scotland's destiny thrills' (C.P.1, p.72).

After an apostrophe to the Norwegian poet, Wergeland (whose Landsmaal experiments, Alan Bold tells, 'adumbrated those of the Scottish Renaissance')[49] the celebration proper begins. From this point onward, there is a delighted emphasis on the materiality of the linguistic medium as, to quote Barthes, 'Value'is'shifted to the sumptuous rank of the signifier'.[50] The poet affirms his own involvement with the Scots shibboleths which, like the 'skymmorie monsters', stubbornly resist the incrustation of generations of civilized life. The 'auld Scots strain' continues to have 'its ain wild say' and seeks, through the medium of the poet, to reclaim its rightful heritage:

> Behold, thwart my ramballiach life again,
> What thrawn and roothewn dreams, royat and rude,
> Reek forth - a foray dowless herts condemn -
> While chance wi' rungs o' sang or silence renshels them.
> (C.P.1, p.73)

Having, through the poet, acquired vigorous new life, the shibboleths descend from the 'rumgunshoch sides o' hills forgotten' and advance on the cities which are threading the formal measures of 'civilisation's canty dance'. The response of the populace to the 'camsteerie cast offs' who threaten, perhaps, to subvert existing sign systems, is initially one of curiosity and dread: 'Free every winnock skimmerin' een keek oot' and 'Streets clear afore the scarmoch advance ...'. Eventually, though, the 'heich-skeich monsters' are seen as a welcome source of illumination as 'winnock efter winnock kindles wi' a sense o' gain and glee'. The revelationary power of the aboriginal words is evoked in an image which memorably juxtaposes the brutally sensual and the dazzlingly surreal. The old vocables are

> – Coorse words that shamble thro' oor minds like stots,
> Syne turn on's muckle een wi' doonsin' emerauds lit.
> (C.P.1, p.74)

Towards the end of Section One of 'Gairmscoile', actual animal noises – rather than the symbolic cries of primeval beasts – are introduced into MacDiarmid's celebration of phonic effects. The final stanza opens with a delightful exclamatory rendition of a variety of onomatopoeic animal sounds and ends, appropriately, with the poet's much quoted commitment to the 'coorse words'. There is also an indication of the poet's internationalist preoccupations in the reference to Esperanto and to all the languages of the world:

> 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 dirl richt thro'
> As nocht else could – for here's a language rings
> Wi' datchie sesames, and names for nameless things. (C.P.1, p.74)

As will become apparent in the dialectic of MacDiarmid's subsequent work, the condemnatory, if it does not actually precede the laudatory, will certainly follow hard on its heels – and so it is in 'Gairmscoile'. After a second apostrophe to the exemplary Wergeland, the language

takes on an almost obscene physicality as the poet indulges in an exultant flyting (a traditional Scots form in which highly inventive, polemical language is indulged in largely for its own sake). On the receiving end of a barrage of abusive dense Scots are those whom MacDiarmid has found guilty of 'Dounhaddin' the Doric' - which he is so assiduously trying to promote. MacDiarmid's flyting can, I feel, be seen as an example of what Barthes refers to as '<u>writing aloud</u>', since it is

> language lined with flesh, a text where we can hear the grain of the throat, the patina of consonants, the voluptuousness of vowels, a whole carnal stereophony ...[51]

Here is the poet in full assonantal, condemnatory flood revelling not so much in the matter as in the manner of his own tirade. The flyting is addressed to his Norwegian counterpart, Wergeland:

> Maist folk are thowless fules wha downa stir,
> Crouse sumphs that hate nane 'bies wha'd wauken them
> To them my Pegasus tae's a crocodile.
> Whummelt I tak' a bobquaw for the lift.
> Insteed o' sangs my mou'drites eerned phlegm.
> ... Natheless like thee I stalk on mile by mile.
> Howk'n up deid stumps o' thocht, and saw'in my eident gift.
>
> Ablachs, and scrats, and dorbels o' a' kinds
> Aye'd drob me wi' their puir eel-droonin' minds,
> Wee drochlin' craturs drutling their bit thochts
> The dorty dodiesl Feech! Nae Sassunuch drings
> 'll daunton me. - Tak' ye sic things for poets ?
> Cock-lairds and drotes depart parnassus noo.
> A'e flesh o' wit the lot to drodlich dings.
> Rae Martin, Sutherland - the dowless crew
>
> (C.P.1, pp.74-75)

The vigorous invective, with its numerous phonic links and percussive rhythms, includes a grand and derisively dramatic gesture:

> I'll twine the dow'd sheaves o' their toom-ear'd corn,
> Bind them wi' pity and dally them wi' scorn.
>
> (C.P.1, p.75)

'Cairmscoile' ends with a threat and a promise - a threat of the extinction of the opposing 'Kailyard' faction and a promise of a radical regeneration in all things Scottish:

> For we ha'e faith in Scotland's hidden poo'ers,
> The present's theirs, but a' the past and future's oors.
> (C.P.1, p.75)

MacDiarmid's zealous and continual recourse to certain areas of the dictionary during the writing of 'Gairmscoile' is, I feel, not only obvious but is meant to be. The poem is a demonstration not only unashamed but prescriptive of MacDiarmid's method of composition. And the lesson to be learned from the poet's 'Gairmscoile' (Roderick Watson helpfully translates the Gaelic word as 'Language School')[52] is this: 'Go to the dictionary where these words are to be found'. MacDiarmid's 'Gairmscoile' offers an alternative to the poet's own experience as a Scottish child who was not allowed to speak Scots at school. In an interview with Nancy Gish the poet says:

> ... when I was a small boy, the people in the little town that I belonged to only a few miles from England all spoke Scots. And we weren't allowed to use it in the classrooms at school. We were punished if we lapsed into it ...[53]

Inevitably - given MacDiarmid's popular image as a political poet - the early lyrics in Scots are bound to be assiduously scanned for traces of political significance. Penny Wheep, perhaps, yields more in this regard in that 'Gairmscoile' and 'The Dead Liebknacht' (in which an accumulation of revolutionary images suggest all sorts of Bastilles being stormed) feature in the collection. Even in 'Gairmscoile', though, one questions whether it is linguistic rather than Nationalistic fervour which actually underlies the poem. However, MacDiarmid has proclaimed that his poetry was 'political from the outset'[54] and one should, perhaps, bear the following words of William Jeffrey in mind in regard to all MacDiarmid's Scots verse:

> To write a line of decently-turned Scots verse is to perform at once a nationalistic and an aesthetic act. It is a sword stroke in the war the spirit wages against the seemingly crushing forces of deracinated uniformity.[55]

However, in the final analysis, one remembers the early lyrics in Scots not so much as ideological acts but as acts of language. In a

valuable essay, 'The Act of Language', John Ciardi writes - and I feel that his words are apposite at this point:

> The poem, in any case, is not in its point of departure, but in its journey to itself. That journey, the act of the poem, is its act of language. That act is the true final subject and meaning of any poem. It is to that act of language the poet shapes his most devoted attention - to the fullness of rhythm, diction, image and form. Only in that devotion can he seize the world and make it evident.[56]

Whilst MacDiarmid was writing the gentle and exquisite lyrics of Sangschaw and Penny Wheep, he was also making a name for himself in contentious (and not always felicitous) prose. In his Contemporary Scottish Studies: First Series of 1926, he had, for instance - as Roderick Watson points out

> confirmed his presence as a critic and reviewer whose journalistic expertise [by this time, MacDiarmid had worked on the Clydebank and Renfrew Press; The Forfar Review; and The Montrose Review] ensured that he could express himself forcefully, frequently and often immoderately with an eye for the new and a fine sense of the value of controversy.[57]

MacDiarmid's cultural campaign was also being fought with vigour and determination in polemical prose - in, for example, his 1927 Albyn: or Scotland and the Future and in numerous articles and journals. It is, of course, important to remember, in this regard, that (as Duncan Glen reminds us) the 'poet's literary revival' was 'only one aspect ... of the Renaissance Movement'. Glen elaborates as follows:

> The young Scots who returned to Scotland after the 1914-18 war were concerned with reviving not only Scottish literature or the arts in Scotland but with reviving "Scotland - the Nation"; Scotland which was culturally, economically, and socially bankrupt; Scotland which had lost not only its political independence but was being swallowed economically and culturally by its larger and controlling partner.[58]

In the mid-to-late twenties, MacDiarmid was also establishing himself as a public figure of some note: in 1922, he was elected to the town council of Montrose as an Independent Socialist; in 1926, he was appointed Justice of the Peace; and, in 1928, he was a founder member of the National Party of Scotland.

Yet, underlying all this frenetic activity, was a vision more extravagantly ambitious than anything the poet had attempted this far: a vision of an unprecedented extension in human consciousness in which the function of the poet in general (and of MacDiarmid in particular) would be of paramount significance. The roots of this vision can, perhaps, be traced back to the poet's birthplace - the little Border town of Langholm.

MacDiarmid's family (his father was a rural postman of millworker stock, his mother's family had been farmers) lived in the post office buildings, which also housed the public library. 'There were upwards of twelve thousand books in the library ... I certainly read almost every one of them', MacDiarmid recalls in Lucky Poet.[59] By the time he had reached his teens the omnivorous reader had, apparently, 'outgrown' his relatives and the generality of Langholm folk and 'lived in a different mental world altogether'.[60] It is, perhaps, a conviction that this world was the best of all possible worlds - and, consequently, one to which all men should and must aspire - which underlies the ardent intellectualism and didacticism of the greater part of the MacDiarmid corpus. 'We must', the poet earnestly informs Joyce in the 1955 poem which is dedicated to the Irish writer, 'put all our reliance in the intellect/And develop it in everybody' (C.P.2, p.88).

The didactic element is much in evidence from MacDiarmid's early lyrics in Scots onwards. Indeed, on approaching any poem from this later period for the first time one would be justified in speculating thus (the words of MacDiarmid's great predecessor, Burns, are, I feel, apposite):

> Perhaps it may turn out a sang;
> Perhaps, turn out a sermon.[61]

And it is to what is generally considered the poet's masterpiece -

A Drunk Man Looks At The Thistle of 1926 in which the 'sang' and the 'sermon' are magnificently accommodated - that I shall now turn.

NOTES

CHAPTER ONE

1. See The Complete Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid: 1920 - 1976, 2 vols, ed. Michael Grieve and W.R.Aitken (London, 1978), p. 833. Hereafter: Complete Poems.

2. Kenneth Buthlay, Hugh MacDiarmid (C.M.Grieve) (Edinburgh, 1964), p. 11. Hereafter: Buthlay.

3. Nancy K. Gish, Hugh MacDiarmid: The Man and His Work (London, 1984) p. 36. Hereafter; Gish.

4. The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid, ed. Alan Bold (London, 1984), p. 771. Hereafter: Letters.

5. ibid. p. 771.

6. ibid., p. xvi

7. ibid., p. 771.

8. ibid., p. 771.

9. ibid., p. 771.

10. Anthony Burgess, 'MacDiarmid' in The Literary Review, 32, 1 - 14 January 1981, p. 9. Hereafter: Burgess.

11. 'A Scottish Renaissance' in The Times Literary Supplement, 7 January 1926, p. 8.

12. An example of such verse - 'The Burnie' - appears on p. 13 of Roderick Watson's informative study MacDiarmid (Milton Keynes, 1985). Hereafter: Watson.

13. 'Satori in Scotland' in The Thistle Rises, ed. Alan Bold (London, 1984), p. 247.

14. Henryson: Selected by Hugh MacDiarmid (Harmondsworth, 1973), p. 7.

15. Other than The Scottish Chapbook (which survived for fourteen monthly numbers from August 1922 to November/December 1923), C.M.Grieve also edited the monthly The Northern Review (May 1924 - September 1924) and the weekly The Scottish Nation (8 May 1923 - 25 December 1923)

16. This aim was part of editorial policy as stated in the first number of The Scottish Chapbook (August 26, 1922)

17. The Scottish Chapbook, vol 1, No. 8, March 1923, p. 210.

18. ibid., vol 1, No. 7, February 1923, p. 183.

19. See In Memoriam James Joyce, Complete Poems 2, p. 763.

20. Peter Thirlby, 'The Piper on the Parapet' in The New Reasoner, vol. no. 8 (Spring, 1959), p. 58. Hereafter: Thirlby.

21. The Socialist Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid, ed. T.S.Law and Thurso Berwick (London, 1978), p. xxvii

22. The Scottish Chapbook, vol. 1, no. 8, March 1923, p. 211

23. Catherine Kerrigan, Whaur Extremes Meet (Edinburgh, 1983), pp. 68 - 69. Hereafter: Kerrigan.

24. David Craig, The Real Foundations: Literature and Social Change (London, 1973), p. 234. Hereafter: Craig.

25. See John Speirs, The Scots Literary Tradition (London, 1940), p. 19. Hereafter: Spiers.

26. Thirlby, p. 58.

27. The Scottish Chapbook, vol 1, no. 8, March 1923, p. 212.

28. Although one of MacDiarmid's early lyrics in Scots (the poem was written in 1923), 'On an Ill-Faur'd Star' appears not in Sangschaw or Penny Wheep but in the 'Hitherto Uncollected Poems' section of Complete Poems, p. 1233.

29. David Daiches, 'Hugh MacDiarmid's Early Poetry' in Hugh MacDiarmid: A Critical Survey, ed. Duncan Glen (Edinburgh, 1972), p. 63. Hereafter: A Critical Survey.

30. Buthlay, p. 28.

31. Quoted in George Kitchin, 'The "Scottish Renaissance" Group', in The Scotsman, November 8, 1924, p. 8.

32. 'The Watergaw' appeared in The Scottish Chapbook, vol 1, no. 3, October 1922, p. 61.

33. The Scottish Chapbook, vol 1, no. 3, October 1922, p. 63.

34. Letters, p. 506.

35. ibid., p. 506.

36. Hugh MacDiarmid, Lucky Poet (Berkeley and Los Angeles), p. xxiii Hereafter: Lucky Poet.

37. Letters, p. 487.

38. Walter Perrie, Metaphysics And Poetry (Hamilton, Scotland, 1975), pages unnumbered.

39. D.M.Mackinnon, The Problem of Metaphysics (London, 1974), pp. 168-169. Hereafter: Mackinnon.

40. Buthlay, p. 40.

41. Kerrigan, p. 74.

42. Gish, p. 43.

43. Buthlay, p. 36.

44. Kerrigan, p. 76.

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45. See 'The Widower', (Complete Poems, 1, p. 56)

46. Buthlay, p. 43.

47. A Critical Survey, p. 61.

48. Buthlay, p. 42.

49. Alan Bold, MacDiarmid: The Terrible Crystal (London, 1983), p. 80. Hereafter: Bold.

50. Roland Barthes, The Pleasure Of The Text (London, 1976), p. 65

51. ibid., p. 66

52. Watson, p. 26.

53. Nancy Gish, 'An Interview with Hugh MacDiarmid' in Contemporary Literature, 20, no. 2 (1979), p. 138. Hereafter: Gish 'Interview'.

54. See 'The Politics and Poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid' in Selected Essays of Hugh MacDiarmid, ed. Duncan Glen (London, 1969), p. 28 (See also note on p. 19). Hereafter: Selected Essays.

55. William Jeffrey, 'Poetry and the Vernacular' in The Scottish Standard vol 1, no. 9, October 1935, p. 17.

56. John Ciardi, 'The Act of Language' in The American Review, vol 1 no. 4, Spring 1961, p. 43.

57. Watson, p. 12.

58. Duncan Glen, Hugh MacDiarmid and The Scottish Renaissance (Edinburgh, 1964), p. 52. Hereafter: Glen.

59. Lucky Poet, pp. 8 - 9.

60. ibid., p. 19.

61. The lines are from 'Epistle To A Young Friend'. See Poems And Songs Of Robert Burns (London and Glasgow, 1969), p. 129.

CHAPTER TWO

'The Insatiable Thocht'

A Drunk Man Looks At The Thistle

Part One: Introduction

Part Two: The Poem

Part One: Introduction

From A Drunk Man onwards - although a multitude of exemplary figures have their exits and their entrances - the poet himself is indubitably the major character of the MacDiarmid poetic corpus. These works are informed by a passionate and extravagant vision of an evolution in human consciousness which would render man himself almost God-like in his perceptions. For the greater part of Sangschaw and Penny Wheep, however, the poet is content to observe the human drama compassionately from the wings. Insofar as he does appear in the early lyrics in Scots, it is, on the whole, in a consolatory rôle. The 'sang' - which will later be perceived by the poet as the 'greatest poo'er ... in posse at least' (C.P.1, p.326) is already seen as a source of enlightenment. In 'Gairmscoile' it has 'keys to senses lockit'; in 'Ex Vermibus' it has 'the haill o' the Heavens alunt/Frae dawin' to derk'. And, apparently, it also has the power to attract and pacify since the 'howlin' mobs' of 'Au Clair de la Lune' are confidently expected to 'drap, lown' behind it. The poet emerges as, on the whole, a tender 'Redeemer' figure and no blame is attached to man for the limitations of his condition.

However, in what is generally considered to be MacDiarmid's masterpiece, A Drunk Man, there is a significant change in the poetic attitude to his readers and to his art. We become aware of the intrusion of the 'sermon' into 'the sang' and of the polemical proseman into the poetry. And, since the nature of the poet's didactic purposes demanded a form other than that of the 'wee bit sangs' of Sangschaw and Penny Wheep, A Drunk Man also introduces the long poem into the poet's corpus. I believe, then, that this poem, which is often seen as a culmination (the culmination of MacDiarmid's work in Scots, or a tour de force in the light of which his subsequent work is viewed as a falling off), can be seen, in a very real sense, as a beginning. It is with this sense of A Drunk Man,

as a beginning, that I will concern myself in my analysis of the poem. I intend to discuss the nature of the didactic thrust of A Drunk Man, how it is accommodated in the form of the poem, and how both form and meaning in the poem foreshadow preoccupations in subsequent works.

In A Drunk Man, a cause for the limitation of our consciousness, other than that of our God-forsaken human condition, is vigorously confronted and it is central to the dialectic of the poem. That cause is its limitation by human agency. The extent to which we collude in our own intellectual limitation is, as I hope to show in the context of the poem itself, worked out in the terms of a major theme of the poem - the Scottish 'aboulia'. We soon become aware, in A Drunk Man, that the gentle 'Redeemer' of the early lyrics is being replaced by a deity of sterner persuasion. Despite a certain critique of Calvinism in the poem, MacDiarmid himself demonstrates, by the particular nature of his sermon, how far in fact his own consciousness has been permeated by the stern creed. There is a puritan insistence on earning our 'election' (or a place in MacDiarmid's 'Brave New World') by self-abnegation and dedicated unremitting labour. Neal Ascherson, in The Age Of MacDiarmid, makes a point which is worthy of consideration in any analysis of MacDiarmid's poetry from A Drunk Man onwards:

> No Scottish writer raised in the Presbyterian tradition, however early he or she rejects it, can be entirely free of Calvinist notions of redemption. The election is sure, but before assurance of that grace can be received, there must intervene an utter self-abnegation, an admission that the will and the flesh are corrupt, a purging of the old self through the fire from which the new, God-guided phoenix-man arises.[1]

Fittingly, considering the poet's aspirations for mankind, the 'sermon' which underlies 'the sang' of A Drunk Man concerns the nature of thought. Love and compassion remain part of the poetic vision, since MacDiarmid continues to see himself in the role of 'Redeemer' or sacrificial lamb:

A Scottish poet maun assume
The burden o' his people's doom,
And dee to brak' their livin' tomb. (C.P.1, p.165)

However, it is no longer the uncritical, unconditional love of the early lyrics in Scots. Love must now be subsumed in thought. A dedication to rigorous thought, which hopefully would result in the ultimate in consciousness, is characteristic of MacDiarmid's poetry from A Drunk Man onwards. A letter to his friend, Helen Cruikshank (dated February, 1939), reflects this preoccupation in MacDiarmid's poetry:

> Our unique gift as human beings is the power to think (the great function almost everybody has all along evaded) and it is only by a realization and acceptance of that that we can give our Love the necessary fullness and guidance.[2]

In 1957 the poet again expresses these sentiments which inform his work to the very end:

> The right to ignorance, the avoidance of the excruciatingly painful business of thinking, cannot be conceded by anyone concerned with the interests of the masses of mankind ....[3]

Burns Singer, in his essay 'Scarlet Eminence', seems to blame MacDiarmid's intellectual preoccupations for what he sees as 'a lack of warmth' in most of MacDiarmid's poetry:

> His [MacDiarmid's] emotions seem to follow an intellectual party line so that, when he says he loves, he has always such good reasons for doing so that one feels he is more in love with his train of thought than with any chance object that might get in its way.[4]

Certainly, MacDiarmid is in love with thought and as he moves away from the 'dumfoun'ered Thocht' of the early lyrics in Scots towards 'the insatiable thocht' of To Circumjack Cencrastus we can see how this love intensifies. However, it is arguable that this dedication to thought was not at the expense of a love for mankind but, indeed, on its behalf. In MacDiarmid's ontology, mankind's only hope for a life worth living lies in an extension of consciousness.

These latter pre-occupations may seem sober in the light of the imaginative sweep, creative energy, unflagging inspiration and exuberant

humour of A Drunk Man. However, if Dionysus is undoubtedly present in the poem, in its romantic indulgences and excesses, so too is the sterner prophet who demands a passionate perfectibility of himself and of his followers. Indeed, it is the interaction of these extremes (as I hope to show later) which creates tone and meaning in A Drunk Man.

If MacDiarmid is committed, in A Drunk Man, to an intellectual condition which approaches omniscience for his people, what he sees as their actual addiction to 'short-circuited thought' (C.P.1, p.481) is a source of some anguish. The practical problems of intellectual redemption which he had set himself (and which had not unduly concerned the poet of the early lyrics) were borne in upon him and hence the tone of near-desperation which recurs throughout A Drunk Man and which continues into To Circumjack Cencrastus (1930) and Stony Limits And Other Poems (1934).

In A Drunk Man, the Scottish 'aboulia' is characterised by a provincial frame of mind, a lack of curiosity or drive and a deep, energy-draining apathy. The Scots resistance to change, an ineducable tendency which the poet believed had resulted in intellectual and emotional stagnation, was inimical to his high hopes for his own race, which he envisaged in the vanguard of the longed-for intellectual advance. This apathy is deplored in A Drunk Man:

> They canna learn, sae canna move,
> But stick for aye to their auld groove
> - The only race in History who've
>
> Bidden in the same category
> Frae stert to present o' their story,
> And deem their ignorance their glory. (C.P.1, p.165)

This dialectic, involving stagnation and potential growth, underlies the imaginative sweep of A Drunk Man and, as I hope to show later, determines its form.

To understand the nature of the didactic thrust of A Drunk Man, it is necessary to consider the attitude to the rôle of the poet in society which underlies it. In the poem, the protagonist is seen as a prophet

and visionary whose function is not just to console his followers (as in the early lyrics in Scots) but to transform the world. In his essay 'Art And The Unknown', written in the same year as A Drunk Man, MacDiarmid writes:

> The function of art is the extension of human consciousness .... If consciousness be likened to a "cleared space", art is that which extends it in any direction.[5]

From A Drunk Man onwards, MacDiarmid is obsessively committed to the extension of the 'cleared space'. In the poem, therefore, the emotional, imaginative and intellectual poverty of contemporary Scotland is countered by the poet's vision of an ideal Scotland - a vision which informs much of his subsequent work. In 'Lament For The Great Music', MacDiarmid's dream Scotland is seen as:

> ... the land ... where the supreme values
> Which the people recognise are states of mind
> Their ruling passion the attainment of higher consciousness.
> (C.P.1, p.481)

And in this 'attainment of higher consciousness' the function of the poet would be central.

Douglas Dunn, in 'The Predicament of Scottish Poetry', writes (and one is reminded of the MacDiarmid poetic corpus):

> Scottish poetry is happier with direct utterance and particular address. Its writers seem to need some sort of preconceived certainty or purpose before they can get down to work.[6]

Certainly, MacDiarmid had a 'preconceived certainty or purpose'. And, although 'direct utterance and particular address' are not a central feature of the early lyrics in Scots, they are becoming necessary for the articulation of the poetic purpose in A Drunk Man. There can be little doubt that MacDiarmid was 'assured of certain certainties' in a way that many of his great contemporaries were not. He had, as we have seen, a romantic confidence in the ability of the artist to effect a change in society. He also had a quasi-mystical belief in the possibilities inherent in cultural chaos and consequently did not view it with a typical modernist despair. And he was not plagued by doubts concerning

the ability of language to rise to its expressive function. To fully appreciate the affirmative note in A Drunk Man, one must consider it in the context of other major literary works of the time.

The background against which MacDiarmid was writing A Drunk Man was one of a vast, unfocussed, apocalyptic despair. Historical and religious discontinuity and cultural fragmentation had bred crises of authority in every sphere of life. The meaninglessness of contemporary life was reflected in the work of major poets such as Eliot, Pound and Yeats. The American critic, F. O. Matthiessen, writes, of Eliot's The Waste Land (1922):

> [Eliot] wanted to present here the intolerable burden of his 'Unreal City', the lack of purpose and direction, the inability to believe really in anything and the resulting 'heap of broken images' that formed the excruciating contents of the post-War state of mind.[7]

The mood of 'the post-War state of mind' is also evident in Pound's Hugh Selwyn Mauberley (1920), and it is a bitter and despairing one:

> There died a myriad,
> And of the best, among them,
> For an old bitch gone in the teeth,
> For a botched civilization ....[8]

Yeats's post-Christian forebodings and images of the break-down of authority in 'The Second Coming' (from Michael Robartes And The Dancer, 1921) are also characteristic of the time:

> Turning and turning in the widening gyre
> The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
> Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world ....[9]

The threat of Eliot's 'hooded hordes', of Yeats's 'rough beast' who 'slouches towards Bethlehem to be born', seemed a very real one to the poets who sought to express it.

MacDiarmid, however, confronted chaos head-on and found it to be good: it was a vast reservoir of potentiality - the only background against which his boundless aspirations for the future of mankind could be entertained with any hope of realisation. He stood at the brink of

the abyss and rejoiced:

> - And gin the abyss is bottomless,
> Your growth'll never stop! ... (C.P.1, p.137)

The Russian apocalyptic thought of Leon Shestov (MacDiarmid's 'favourite philosopher')[10] probably underlies this dramatic gesture of defiance in the face of chaos. In In Job's Balances, Shestov writes:

> The idea of chaos terrifies man, for it is assumed for some reason that in chaos, in the absence of order, he cannot live ... In reality chaos is a lack of any order, and consequently also of that order which excludes the possibility of life. Chaos is no limited possibility, but the direct opposite, an unlimited possibility. To grasp and admit absolute freedom is infinitely hard for us, as it is hard for a man who has always lived in darkness to look into the light.[11]

Shestovian thought is certainly a source of metaphors of growth and renewal in A Drunk Man. But there are, I believe, two more significant sources of MacDiarmid's affirmative vision in the poem: one is rooted in religion, the other in politics.

A decidedly puritan element in A Drunk Man suggests that, despite the poet's atheism, MacDiarmid was not 'entirely free of Calvinist notions of redemption'. The 'certainty' of the 'election' was something else that MacDiarmid could be 'assured' about. Of course, he was not labouring for the Kingdom of God, but for his own version of it - an evolution in human consciousness. However, he brought to the task a confidence, diligence and tenacity that were perhaps not unconnected with the Calvinist ethic.

The other likely source of the ultimately affirmative note of A Drunk Man was MacDiarmid's radical Socialism. Although the poet had not as yet actually joined the Communist Party, he had been actively committed to Socialism from the age of sixteen. There is, it is true, only one explicit political reference in A Drunk Man, but it is clear from this reference that MacDiarmid's hopes for the future of Scotland had a Socialist bias. If one accepts this proposition, it could be seen that the god Dionysus not only directs the imaginative flow of A Drunk Man but has a deeper social significance in the poem. Monroe K. Spears, in

his Dionysus And The City, writes (and this has interesting implications in the context of MacDiarmid's poem):

> Dionysus evokes the sense of dark underground forces mysteriously stirring, from Freud's Unconscious to Marx's masses ....[12]

The poet's faith in the 'dark underground forces', in both their instinctual and political aspects, can be seen as a source of his confidence in the future of mankind.

MacDiarmid's vision of the poet as prophet (and his belief in the 'dark underground forces' in their instinctual aspect) was shared by at least one great contemporary - D. H. Lawrence - who, in a letter to Lady Cynthia Asquith (dated 5.9.'15), wrote (and the essential romanticism of the aim reminds one of MacDiarmid):

> I am going to do the preaching - sort of philosophy - the beliefs by which one can reconstruct the world.[13]

However, in MacDiarmid's effort to 'reconstruct the world', he would not have subscribed wholly to Lawrence's sentiments when the latter opined:

> ... words are action good enough, if they're the right words ....[14]

Certainly, in MacDiarmid's commitment to a didactic poetry, from A Drunk Man onwards, words were action, but not action enough. Any cursory perusal of MacDiarmid's career as a publicman will reveal the importance he attached to actually entering the public arena in the pursuit of his goal.

Lawrence certainly shared MacDiarmid's belief in the absolute necessity of an extension in human consciousness:

> If we do not rapidly open all the doors of consciousness and freshen the putrid little space in which we are cribbed the sky-blue walls of our unventilated heaven will be bright-red with blood.[15]

Lawrence, however, placed more emphasis on what he called 'pre-mental' consciousness, and rather less on cognition than did the Scottish poet:

> The primal consciousness in man is pre-mental, and has nothing to do with cognition. It is the same as in animals. And this pre-mental consciousness remains as long as we live the

> powerful root and body of our consciousness. The mind is but the last flower, the cul de sac ....[16]

The mind, to MacDiarmid of course, was not the 'last flower, the cul de sac' - it was of first importance, the only gateway into the real. The instinctual was not important in its <u>own</u> right - it was there to serve the interests of mind. One remembers MacDiarmid's act of faith in <u>mental</u> consciousness in 'Lament For The Great Music':

> The supreme reality is visible to the mind alone.
> (<u>C.P</u>.1, p.475)

MacDiarmid's reverence for human consciousness and his belief in its potential gave him a sense of purpose and a stake in the future. However despondent he became on occasion, about intellectual stagnation in Scotland, his attitude in its regard was never that of 'nothing to be done'.

Implicit in MacDiarmid's confidence in the poet's ability to 'reconstruct the world' is a belief in the ability of the poet's medium - language - to express reality. MacDiarmid, more perhaps than most of his contemporaries, subscribed to the expressive power of the word. Nowhere in the work of the Scottish poet can be found a parallel to Eliot's frustration in the face of 'the intolerable wrestle/With words and meanings':

> Words strain,
> Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
> Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
> Decay with imprecision ....[17]

The modernist dilemma as regards language is summed up by Gabriel Josipovici thus:

> When Nietzsche says: 'I am afraid that we are not rid of God because we still have faith in grammar', this is what he means: that we are not free of God as a kind of transcendental authority, giving meaning to our lives, so long as we imagine the structure of language to correspond to the structure of the world ... That is why modernist art always moves towards silence, away from language towards the annihilation of language ....[18]

And indeed, in the case of many modernist writers, their lack of faith in God was matched by a corresponding unfaith in grammar. The move

towards silence, which was perhaps to find its apotheosis in Beckett, had begun. The complexity of the world had outstripped the ability of language to describe it. MacDiarmid, however, found no ambiguity in dispensing with God whilst retaining a belief in the power of language 'to correspond to the structure of the world'.

Of course the Scottish poet was fortunate in having access to the expressive potentialities of the Scots tongue. Three years before A Drunk Man was published, MacDiarmid was expressing his faith in the vernacular thus:

> We base our belief in the possibility of a great Scottish Literary Renaissance, deriving its strength from the resources that lie latent and almost unsuspected in the vernacular, upon the fact that the genius of our vernacular enables us to secure with comparative ease the very effects and swift transitions which other literatures are for the most part unsuccessfully endeavouring to cultivate in languages that have a very different and inferior bias.[19]

MacDiarmid celebrates language per se, and not just the vernacular, in 'Lament For The Great Music' thus:

> Amid the desolation language rises, and towers
> Above the ruins. (C.P.1, p.474)

And, indeed, In Memoriam James Joyce is a paean to language - all language - unique of its kind. MacDiarmid uses a remark of the Russian apocalyptic thinker, Soloviev, as one of the epigraphs to the poem:

> The true unity of languages is not an Esperanto or Volapuk or everyone speaking French, not a single language, but an all-embracing language, an interpenetration of all languages.
> (C.P.2, p.737)

To MacDiarmid, language was the ultimate consolation, the ultimate hope. His aspirations for consciousness were inseparably bound up with language.

The point could now be made that at the end of A Drunk Man MacDiarmid consoles himself not with language but with silence: 'O I ha'e Silence left' (C.P.1, p.167). Now this 'Silence' can be, and has been, variously interpreted. David Daiches writes, for instance:

> In the superb concluding lyric he [the Drunk Man] falls back on silence, the ultimate eloquence ....[20]

MacDiarmid's silence could also be interpreted in the Taoist manner in which George Steiner tells us:

> the soul is envisioned as ascending from the gross impediments of the material, through domains of insight that can be rendered by lofty and precise language, towards ever deepening silence. The highest, purest reach of the contemplative act is that which has learned to leave language behind it. The ineffable lies beyond the frontiers of the word ....[21]

However, I believe that silence in MacDiarmid's poetry signifies not the ultimately ineffable, but what cannot as yet be said. It has some connection with the artistic function of extending the 'cleared space'. If, as Eliot says (in Four Quartets), 'next year's words await another voice'[22] it is the function of the poet to provide the voice. MacDiarmid, at the end of A Drunk Man, does not surrender to silence - such a surrender would be a negation of the poetic purpose. Silence is to this poet more instinct with hope than either the muse or God - because it is the source of further words. Beyond silence is a vast word hoard which will become available to man in (to borrow a Lawrentian phrase) 'the greater day of human consciousness'.[23]

In the above discussion, I have tried to establish the essentially affirmative note in A Drunk Man within the context of other notable and less sanguine works of the time. However, MacDiarmid's poem undoubtedly has its dark side and this is connected with the poet's occasional near-desperation in the face of the Scottish 'aboulia'. If MacDiarmid's affirmative vision is at the root of the 'sang' in A Drunk Man, the enormity of the task he was undertaking is the source of the 'sermon'. The realisation of the poet's dreams depended on no less than a radical and intellectually-orientated revitalisation of life and literature in Scotland. This would require not only a massive release of Dionysian energy but a Calvinistic rigour and dedication to give it direction. The element of play and the element of purgation ('yank oot your orra boughs, my hert!') are the extremes between which the poem oscillates and (as I hope to show in my discussion of the form of A Drunk Man)

it is to the essentially dramatic articulation that this oscillation takes that we owe the fine balance that is ultimately achieved. Certainly, a notable feature of A Drunk Man is the way in which the 'sang' and the 'sermon' (Dionysus and Calvin) are accommodated in it. In subsequent poems, many of which can be seen as models ('philosophic', political and linguistic) of intellectual growth, the 'sermon' is on occasion too obtrusive: statement and assertion replace dramatic representation and the dynamic interplay of contraries and the poetry suffers in consequence.

Since A Drunk Man introduces the long poem into MacDiarmid's corpus, it represents a major change in direction for the author of Sangschaw (1925) and Penny Wheep (1926). Already, in Penny Wheep, the need for greater scope is beginning to become apparent, as is evidenced by the inclusion of longer poems, such as 'Sea Serpent' and 'Gairmscoile' in the book. However, on the whole the lyrics form a collection of separate but related poetic insights - 'pensées' might be an appropriately descriptive term - whose purpose is essentially consolatory. The articulation of the poetic purpose lends itself to a delicate, tentative and brief expression. The hallmark of the lyrics is a marvellous economy: feelings of immensity are evoked within the scope of a tiny lyric. The use of the irreducible image and of Scots words with multiple significations in the lyrics results in the remarkable compression of meaning which characterises the poems.

However, with the intrusion of the publicman into the poetry in A Drunk Man, the discourse, polemics and reforming zeal, which are central to the public persona, have to be accommodated in the form of the poem. A Drunk Man is, more than any poem in the MacDiarmid corpus, an expression of the whole self of the author. The grandeur of conception of the poem - its rigorous self-exploration and obsessive pre-occupation with 'what there is'; its passionate didacticism; its dramatisation of modes of consciousness - demands a corresponding generosity of scope.

There is a question, though, as to how correct one is in calling A Drunk Man a long poem. Would the work be more accurately described as a poetic sequence? Indeed, how plausibly may one claim a poetic unity for the poem? The actual genesis of A Drunk Man is a complicated and lengthy affair. John Weston, however, in his excellent, well-annotated 1971 edition of A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle, provides illuminating information in this regard. Weston quotes from some material which MacDiarmid sent to the Glasgow Herald 'in the form of advance puffs and excerpts'. In one of these excerpts - which appeared in the paper on 17th December, 1925 - MacDiarmid describes his work in progress as 'a long poem ... split up in several sections' and adds that 'the forms within the sections range from ballad measure to vers libre'. In the other pre-publication piece, which was in the Glasgow Herald on 13th February, 1926, the poet refers to his unfinished work as 'a complete poem' which was, however, 'divided into various sections, affording scope for a great variety of forms'.[24]

In a letter to his friend and one-time tutor, George Ogilvie, dated 6th August, 1926, the poet is obviously concerned to stress that the new work is indeed 'a complete poem':

> There are poems in the book (which is really one whole although many parts are detachable) of extraordinary power, I know - longer and far more powerful and unique in kind than anything in Sangschaw or Penny Wheep; but that's not what I'm after. It's the thing as a whole I'm mainly concerned with, and if, as such, it does not take its place as a masterpiece - sui generis - one of the biggest things in the range of Scottish Literature, I shall have failed ....[25]

Certainly 'the whole', as we now know it, owes something to the collaboration of F. G. Scott, since the Ogilvie letter also contains the following information:

> Scott (the composer) and I afterwards went over the whole thing with a small tooth comb. But we both felt that the section I've been rewriting - which comes about midway in the book and should represent the high water mark, the peaks of highest intensity, could be improved by being recast and projected on to a different

> altitude of poetry altogether - made, instead of a succession of merely verbal and pictorial verses, into a series of metaphysical pictures with a definite progression, a cumulative effect ....[26]

Perhaps the event which militated most against MacDiarmid's concern with 'the thing as a whole' was his own agreement to the sectionalisation of A Drunk Man in Collected Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid (New York: MacMillan, 1962; revised edition, 1967). John Weston, whose own edition of the poem 'follows the undivided text of the first edition (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1926)'[27] writes:

> ... the poet was unwisely persuaded for that book [Collected Poems] to break up the poem into parts and to assign titles to each with the results that the unity of the poem is destroyed by the divisions - many of which obscure the real structure - and the effect of the poem is impaired by the banality of many of the titles.[28]

In coming to actual critical grips with the subject of the unity of A Drunk Man, John Weston isolates 'two central sections' - one about the Drunk Man's 'individual predicament' (ll.121-810) and the other 'about the process of mankind's development' (ll.1004-2243).[29] One questions whether A Drunk Man can be neatly packaged in this way. The Drunk Man's 'own predicament' is surely omnipresent in the poem - the particular from which all speculation about the universal proceeds. To say that there are 'central sections' at all in the poem is, perhaps, to force a logical structure (or at least a logical ground-plan) on to an essentially alogical poem. There are central images, central ideas, a central purpose and a central figure in A Drunk Man. But can it really be held that there are central sections?

John Weston also says, in connection with the ending of A Drunk Man:

> ... we may note that he [the protagonist] is quite sober now (and that, incidentally, the progress of sobering from the drunken opening is another structural aspect of the poem).[30]

It is difficult to see how one may deduce that the Drunk Man 'is quite sober now'. The protagonist has been oscillating between quiet reflection, grotesquerie and wild extravagance all through the poem.

Why should the concluding passage, any more than any other quietly reflective passage in the poem, suggest that he is 'quite sober now'? Everything in A Drunk Man is surely in too much of a state of flux for any line of development to suggest itself unquestionably. Connections and associative links there are, achieved by statement, re-statement and extension of images, but any identifiably linear progression does not seem to be a characteristic of A Drunk Man. The attempt to impose some kind of linear structure on a poem that goes 'counter-airts' at once is perhaps to falsify the experience of this Dionysian rhapsody.

In his discussion of A Drunk Man, Kenneth Buthlay refers to the way in which William Soutar grants the poem, as a whole, only 'a semblance of consistency ... a consistency of emotional tone'. Buthlay continues, and I would concur with his conclusions:

> But it [A Drunk Man] has much more than that. The key-symbols of Thistle and Rose, Moon and Woman, Whisky and Sea-Serpent, are fecund themes on which imagination and fancy alike play variations with a flow of figurative invention unequalled by any other modern poet; and they have a staying-power that ensures that the themes are not lost in the brilliance of the invention ....[31]

In this study of A Drunk Man, I am not going to argue for the unity of the poem - or, rather, I am not going to appeal to the conventional criteria of unity to establish that A Drunk Man operates as 'one whole'. What I am going to argue for is the poem's imaginative coherence - the factor to which I believe A Drunk Man owes its success as an achieved artistic construct. The interaction of the following elements in the poem engages the imagination of the reader in one continuous act of response: the obsessive nature of the poetic purpose; the dramatisation of this purpose; the protean symbols; the dialectical form. The energy and tenacity of the loquacious Drunk Man, in active confrontation with the thistle challenging and questioning it, drawing out all its implications and contradictions - is an ongoing model of the kind of curiosity required for a growth in consciousness to take place.

Ultimately then, A Drunk Man is experienced as 'one whole' because its mode of being is essentially dramatic. The poem is a prolonged self-enactment and a vigorous confrontation with other selves. The protagonist's inspired, inebriated condition allows him, without incongruity, to shed 'a pile of selves',[32] and, in the process, adopt a number of voices. This ability of the Drunk Man to 'speak in tongues', as it were, gives him the widest possible scope of utterance, justifies continuous and sometimes violent changes of tone in the poem and underwrites the continual clash of contraries out of which it is composed.

John Montague writes, in regard to MacDiarmid's poem, and one wholeheartedly agrees with his conclusion:

> Pride, humour, contrariness, patriotism, hatred, nostalgia; love, lust, longing: there is no contemporary poem more varied in mood than A Drunk Man.[33]

One responds to the multi-faceted protagonist and his lightning changes of mood with a willing suspension of disbelief. In the course of the poem the protagonist adopts the following rôles: the ordinary boozer; the extraordinary prophet; the social critic; the sweet singer; the Dionysian dancer; the Calvinist preacher; the importunate youth and the mature lover; the 'philosopher'; the jester; the political commentator. And, proudly parading his myriad selves, the Drunk Man can justifiably deplore the miserly sense of self of his canny contemporaries and exhort them to greater intellectual and imaginative effort. The whole self it seems - and all its modes of consciousness - is dramatised in the display of A Drunk Man, as the protagonist's many voices engage in a continuous, dynamic discourse ad solem, ad hominem.

To measure the success of the dramatisation of psychic material in A Drunk Man, one has only to consider subsequent 'sermons' in which one occasionally becomes irritated by the monotonous drone of MacDiarmid speaking, as it were, 'in propria persona'. The successful blend of the 'sang' and the 'sermon' in A Drunk Man owes much to the poem's dramatic

mode - which so aptly lends itself to the articulation of both.

The protean nature of the symbols is also of major importance in the dramatic monologue of A Drunk Man. The symbols metamorphose continually to reinforce varying contexts in the poem. Yet in each instance of their use, they display a fresh and newly-charged virtuosity. They are, therefore, in themselves exemplary images of effective change and growth. The chain-dance of the symbols is led by the thistle, which is all things to all themes in the poem and hence a powerful unifying device. The versatility and vigour of the thistle underwrite the poetic preoccupation with the need for radical change in Scottish attitudes. In its phallic connotations the thistle reinforces the undoubted dominance of the male ego in the poem.

Whilst the thistle retains its traditional rôle as the Scottish emblem, it assumes throughout the poem a wealth of other significances. It is primarily the existential dilemma: the unending struggle between the soul which aspires and the body which expires - between actuality and potentiality. It is:

> A' the uncouth dilemmas o' oor natur'
> Objectified in vegetable maitter. (C.P.1, p.117)

The thistle is beauty and ugliness, life and death, yin, yang and ygdrasil, a phallus and a phoenix, aspiration and frustration, a rocket and a stick. Aptly, considering the poet's aspirations for consciousness, it symbolises the meagre awareness we can lay claim to and the ultimate in illumination which we long to attain.

Although its connotations can be deeply serious, the thistle is also the jester of A Drunk Man, and its humorous implications are whimsically exploited. The thistle, more than any other of the supporting cast of symbols in A Drunk Man, contributes to the element of play which is so central to this dramatic monologue. It becomes, for example, the subject of a delightful word and image play sequence proceeding from 'Plant what are you then?' to 'the deid and livin''

(C.P.1, p.96). Here are some of the lightning transformations the thistle undergoes in what is a kind of speeded-up version of its more gradual metamorphoses in the course of the poem as a whole:

> Grinnin' gargoyle by a saint,
> Mephistopheles in Heaven,
> Skeleton at a tea-meetin',
> Missin' link - or creakin'
> Hinge atween the deid and livin' .... (C.P.1, p.96)

The thistle also becomes a reflection of the Drunk Man's unshaven self, the inflictor of a painful injury on an unfortunate 'terrier' (territorial) who lands on it with 'naethin on ava aneth his kilt', and, in contexts of sexual bawdy, its phallic connotations are humorously and imaginatively exploited.

If the thistle is the quick-change artist of A Drunk Man, the rôles of moonlight and whisky are complementary symbols of revelation and are fairly constant in the poem. They transmute reality and make all things, even transcendence and the acquisition of the ultimate in consciousness, seem possible. Whisky is the Dionysus who counterpoints Christ - pagan freedom against the bonds of Christian morality. But it seems to bring inspiration only to those of the poet's own intellectual and imaginative worth:

> Ahint the sheenin' coonter gruff
> Thrang barmen ding the tumblers doun.
> 'In vino veritas' cry rough
> And reid-een'd fules that in it droon. (C.P.1, p.89)

Countering the didactic element in A Drunk Man is an elitism which takes for granted the natural aristocracy of the artist - and, perhaps, the lover. As in the early lyrics in Scots, moments out of time are the preserve of artists and lovers. The ambivalent stance of the romantic artist as regards society is occasionally in conflict with the predominantly democratic vision of the poem.

In A Drunk Man, moonlight symbolises freedom and inspiration. It is the unsteady, fluctuating light which makes the Drunk Man question objective reality, in which objective and subjective coalesce in an essentially Heraclitean world. It thus contributes in a major way to

the expression of varying modes of consciousness in the poem, and symbolises the elusive total illumination which is the poet's dream for mankind. The Heraclitean ambience is partly responsible for the fluidity of tone in A Drunk Man and for the poem's shifts in moods, styles and points of view. Moonlight, therefore, subscribes to the move away from fixity to flux considered necessary for growth to take place:

> The munelicht ebbs and flows and wi't my thocht,
> Noo moovin' mellow and noo lourd and rough.
> I ken what I am like in Life and Daith,
> - But Life and Daith for nae man are enough ....
> (C.P.1, p.95)

The combination of positive, creative imagination, the vigour of the language and the fluidity of place, time and tone contribute enormously to the articulation of the poetic purpose. The following is an instance of how MacDiarmid can combine the comic and the cosmic in one Heraclitean quatrain:

> Guid sakes, I'm in a dreidfu' state
> I'll ha'e nae inklin' sune
> Gin I'm the drinker or the drink,
> The thistle or the mune. (C.P.1, p.97)

This, of course, is reminiscent of Yeats's famous cosmic question in 'Among School Children': 'How can we know the dancer from the dance?'. MacDiarmid's cosmic speculations seem to pre-date Yeats's. 'Among School Children' is in Yeats's The Tower, which bears the date 1928. A Drunk Man was published in 1926.

Whilst the rôles of moonlight and whisky are fairly constant in A Drunk Man, the rôles of the rose are more diversified. The rose retains its emblematic rôle as England and, in this specific instance of its use, it is seen as inimical to Scottish growth or autonomy. Paradoxically, it is also transcendence, aspiration, release - the wholeness and hidden harmony the Drunk Man craves, the full realisation of potential. In one memorable moment in the poem, the rose symbolises an intellectual and physical release into fullness of being thus:

> Bite into me forever mair and lift
> Me clear o' chaos in a great relief,
> Till, like this thistle in the munelicht growin'
> I brak in roses owre a hedge o' grief ...
> (C.P.1, p.113)

The rose also represents the rare successes of artistic effort and becomes at one point - the only explicit political statement in the poem - the aborted socialist promise of the General Strike.

Although the appearances of the sea-serpent in A Drunk Man are considerably fewer than those of the rose, it casts a giant shadow over the whole poem. It echoes the sea-serpent of MacDiarmid's earlier collection, Penny Wheep (1926), and prefigures the sea-serpent of To Circumjack Cencrastus (1930). In a letter to Helen Cruikshank regarding the latter poem (in which the symbol reaches its apotheosis), MacDiarmid writes:

> ... that snake represents not only an attempt to glimpse the underlying pattern of human history but identifies it with the evolution of human thought .... [34]

The symbols of moon and sea-serpent interpenetrate in a concise expression of the aspiration and frustration which informs much of the poem:

> - The mune's the muckle white whale
> I seek in vain to kaa! (C.P.1, p.108)

If the sea-serpent's appearances are few in A Drunk Man, Scotland as a symbol is omnipresent in it. It is the maypole around which the symbols dance and the particular from which the Drunk Man gravitates towards the general, and to which he returns again and again for support. In its intrinsic connection with both aboulia and potential growth, it is a unifying device in the poem. At one extreme it is 'THE barren fig' and at the other a kind of ygdrasil that:

> ... yet'll
> unite
> Man and the Infinite! (C.P.1, p.98)

In this most unprovincial of poems, Scotland is used as both myth and model, and hence, far from restricting the poem's scope, it universalises it.

Like Scotland, Woman is a constant symbol in A Drunk Man. She is profoundly ambiguous. Primarily, the rôle of woman in the poem is clearly a supportive one. As the repository of compassionate sexuality, her main function seems to be that of bolstering the male ego. Indeed, she is defined by her sexual function because it is through union that the male achieves a kind of transcendence. She is also seen as an object of mystical reverence and primitive fear and, conversely, as a whore, within whose inner depths lurks 'a fouler sicht' than that of the man in 'the creel' of his 'courage-bag [scrotum] confined' (C.P.1, p.101). Woman, therefore, in the final analysis, is a kind of virgin/whore embodying the contraries of good and evil, of hope and fear.

The dialectical form of A Drunk Man is determined by the nature of the poetic preoccupation with the actual and potential of human consciousness. The dynamic protagonist is committed to flux and eschews all petrifying dogma in the early reaches of the poem thus:

> 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. (C.P.1, p.87)

And Blake's dictum, 'without contraries is no progression', holds good for MacDiarmid in both the form and meaning of A Drunk Man. In his essay 'The Piper On The Parapet' Peter Thirlby writes as follows:

> The fact that each idea is burdened with its recoil [in A Drunk Man], gives episodic excitement, but also ensures that the poem is as a whole formless, for no viable principle emerges to control it .... [35]

However, what Alexander Scott rightly calls 'the creative contradictions'[36] [my underlining] of A Drunk Man surely contribute more than 'episodic excitement' to the poem - they provide momentum and tension and articulate the contraries inherent in the purpose which underlie it.

Given MacDiarmid's natural tendency towards dialectical thought and expression, Gregory Smith's formulation of the 'Caledonian Antisyzygy' was a godsend to the poet since it gave a kind of traditional justification

to his 'routh o' contraries' in A Drunk Man. In his Scottish Literature: Character and Influence, of 1919, Smith employs the strange phrase to describe the combination of opposing qualities which he held to be a distinctly Scottish characteristic. He refers to the 'zigzag of contradictions' in Scots literature, and continues:

> Perhaps in the very combination of opposites - what either of the two Sir Thomases, of Norwich and Cromarty, might have been willing to call 'the Caledonian antisyzygy' - we have a reflection of the contrasts which the Scot shows at every turn, in his political and ecclesiastical history, in his polemical restlessness, in his adaptability, which is another way of saying that he has made allowance for new conditions, in his practical judgement, which is the admission that two sides of the matter have been considered. If, therefore, Scottish history and life are, as an old northern writer said of something else, "varied with a clean contrair spirit", we need not be surprised to find that in his literature the Scot presents two aspects which appear contradictory. Oxymoron was ever the bravest figure, and we must not forget that disorderly order is order after all .... [37]

Certainly, A Drunk Man is 'varied with a clean contrair spirit'. An aspect of MacDiarmid's linguistic medium is also perhaps grist to the poet's dialectical mill. In 1922, he draws attention to an enabling characteristic of Scots:

> Another feature of the Doric ... is the fashion in which diverse attitudes of mind or shades of temper are telescoped into single words or phrases, investing the whole speech with subtle flavours of irony, commiseration, realism and humour which cannot be reproduced in English.[38]

In this introduction to A Drunk Man, I have discussed in a general way the nature of the didactic thrust of the poem and the attitude to the function of the poet which underlies this didacticism. And, I have argued for the imaginative coherence of the poem. In Part Two of this chapter, there is a more detailed discussion of A Drunk Man in all its dynamic plenitude.

Part Two: The Poem

> The haill thing kelters like a theatre claith
> Till I micht fancy that I was alive!

In his illuminating book, The Scots Literary Tradition (1940), John Speirs makes a point about Scottish poetry in general which could well be applied to A Drunk Man in particular.

> Scots poetry has perhaps a more dramatic character than English poetry as a whole has had, at any rate since the seventeenth century; it is more related to speech and action on the one hand as also to song and dance on the other.[39]

I believe that A Drunk Man owes much of its success as an achieved artistic construct to a dramatisation of the poetic purpose, and I hope to demonstrate in the course of this discussion the poem's relation to 'speech and action', as also to 'song and dance'. The element of play and the element of purgation, which between them articulate the Drunk Man's aspiration for Scotland - a radical revision of contemporary Scottish mental attitudes - proceed from, and continually refer back to, a constant and orientating dramatic situation. This still centre of A Drunk Man is the physical presence of the inebriated protagonist himself in an intense engagement with a thistle which undergoes a multitude of metamorphoses at his behest. The controlling consciousness of this Dionysian figure, with his unflagging, creative energy and inventiveness, is firmly at the centre of all the polemical thought-narrative, swirling images and metaphysical speculations which constitute this packed and unusually various poem.

In this discussion of A Drunk Man, I shall concern myself with the way in which 'the sang' and 'the sermon' are accommodated in the form of the poem. The co-presence of Dionysus and Calvin in the poem manifests itself in the gradual unfolding of the main themes - the Scottish 'aboulia', the Man of Destiny and Woman. However, before moving on to a detailed discussion of these themes in the light of the opposing elements (play and purgation) which inform them, I think that it is necessary to

consider matters of structure and texture which are vital in the poem as a whole.

The themes of A Drunk Man manifest themselves in two major ways: by means of discursive, speculative and didactic material through which they emerge and re-emerge throughout the poem; and by means of lyrical episodes or 'sangs' which either condense or crystallise this material or offer an alternative vision to the one expressed in it. These lyrical episodes are both autonomous and integrated: they lie on the page as beautiful artefacts in their own right; and yet they appear in the context of the poem as highly relevant components of it. The relation of the crude, prosaic or polemical discourse and the highly-wrought lyricism of the 'sangs' parallels, in a formal sense, the poetic preoccupation with the actual and the ideal in human consciousness. The abrupt transitions between discourse (or thought-narrative) and 'sang' account for some of the many changes of tone in A Drunk Man. There is one particularly notable example of such transitions as verses expressing a raw, unshaven, hiccuping masculinity give way to a lyric which evokes the delicacy and mystery of the Eternal Feminine. Here is the protagonist being dramatically and belligerently 'drunk'.

> Gurly thistle - hic - you canna
> Daunton me wi' your shaggy mien,
> I'm sair - hic - needin' a shave,
> That's plainly to be seen .... (C.P.1, p.90)

And here is part of the lyrical address to the mysterious muse which follows it:

> I ha'e forekent ye! O I ha'e forekent.
> The years forecast your face afore they went.
> O licht I canna thole is in the lift,
> I bide in silence your slow-comin pace.
> The ends o' space are bricht! at last - oh swift!
> While terror clings to me - an unkent face!
> (C.P.1, p.90)

Such juxtapositions can be seen as dramatisations of a major preoccupation in the poem - the tormenting duality of our nature or 'dog

hank of the flesh and soul'. In A Drunk Man there is a Calvinist assumption of the irredeemable corruption of the flesh – MacDiarmid can be bawdy about sex or he can be mystical – what he cannot be is comfortable with all its implications. The lyrical episodes in the poem often take the form of adaptations of the work of other European poets and hence help to establish MacDiarmid's decidedly unprovincial stance in A Drunk Man.

Lesser structural devices of A Drunk Man include 'Dionysian' dance interludes as the inebriated protagonist, like Henryson's 'Cadgear', 'trippeth on his tais; as he had heard ane pyper play ...'.[40] These dances are often an ironic comment on 'aboulia' as rhythm seems to mock sense. The tripping interlude 'We're outward bound for Scotland' is in fact a denunciation of Scottish complacency as is the Biblically-inspired frenetic jig 'Scotland is The barren fig' although the latter does include a 'measure' of hope. There is also a memorable instance of dance in which the metaphysical and the concrete join forces in a lively pas de deux:

> But I'll dance the nicht wi' the stars o' Heaven
> In the Mairket Place as shair's I'm livin'.
> (C.P.1, p.98)

On a deeper level the poem itself can be seen as a dance with its essentially Heraclitean commitment to flux and cosmic preoccupations. Other structural links in A Drunk Man include repeated leitmotifs (such as the cry for 'Water! Water!' in the waste land of Scotland); recurring Biblical references; and, pre-eminently, the metamorphoses, couplings and interactions of the symbols in the poem. But the ubiquitous thistle and the omnipresent protagonist are the major unifying factors in A Drunk Man.

The texture of A Drunk Man is of a unique richness. MacDiarmid is a master of imagery and analogy and his virtuosity in this respect is one of the poem's most memorable aspects. The thistle's versatility, as

an objective correlative, is considerable as it assumes and sheds image after image with conspicuous ease. The range of formal expression in the poem is also extraordinarily various. In the course of A Drunk Man, and in accordance with continual changes of thematic preoccupations, the poet uses many stanzaic forms: the ballad quatrain, lively rhyming couplets, neat triplets, long sprawling passages of continuous rhyme or assonantal vers libre and even headlong Skeltonics. Interestingly, the metre does not always chime with sense, but in some cases actually seems to counter it. We have seen how this applies in the case of the dance interludes. It is also noticeably so when MacDiarmid uses the kettle-drum rhythm of the Skeltonic to articulate a Calvinistic self-mortification which the poet sees as a precondition of fulfilment of 'election'. Jingle, hymn or 'sermon', this area of the poem has the ring of the true Scots fanatic:

> - Sae I in turn maun gi'e
> My soul to misery,
> Daidle disease
> Upon my knees
> And welcome madness
> Wi' exceedin' gladness
> - Aye, open wide my hert
> To a' the thistle's smert. (C.P.1, p.140)

Rhyme is widely used in A Drunk Man (a not inconsiderable achievement in a poem of this magnitude), although many of the longer, metaphysical passages which occur about half-way through the poem rely on assonance for a musical effect. The poem is also characterised by frequent and dramatic changes of rhythm, as discourse, song, dance, march, expressionist fantasia, humorous aside and ontological speculation make their varied entrances - each demanding a tempo appropriate to its mode of being. The dialectical play of opposites in A Drunk Man produces numerous changes of tone, and is mainly responsible for momentum and tension in the poem. The poet's delight in the energising Scots words is evident throughout A Drunk Man. And there are many instances in which the phonic aspect

of his linguistic medium is enthusiastically foregrounded. Here is a notable example as the poet endures his own particular Gethsemane:

> I maun feed frae the common trough ana'
> Whaur a' the lees o' hope are jumbled up;
> While centuries like pigs are slorpin' owre 't
> Sall my wee' oor be cryin': 'Let pass this cup?'
>
> In wi' your gruntle then, puir wheengin' saul,
> Lap up the ugsome aidle wi' the lave,
> What gin it's your ain vomit that you swill
> And frae Life's gantin and unfaddomed grave?
> (C.P.1, pp.86-87)

This level of Scots is not sustained throughout A Drunk Man (some verses are really in English with a Scots accent), but a dense Scots expression is certainly connected to MacDiarmid's more passionate and dramatic involvement in his subject at different points in the poem.

Ultimately, the impression one is left with as regards matters of form and texture in A Drunk Man is not one of chaotic surfeit but rather of a varied but controlled plenitude. It is a plenitude one comes to terms with only after considerable and loving acquaintance with this major literary achievement. I will now concern myself with the major themes of A Drunk Man in the light of the opposing elements of 'sang' and 'sermon' which inform them.

The theme of 'aboulia' is introduced into A Drunk Man in an indirect manner which has dramatic intent. The local tone and colloquial register which MacDiarmid adopts at the beginning of the poem (which in fact plunders Europe, 'heichts o' the lift' and 'benmaist deeps o' the sea' for its sources - and, indeed, whose essential pre-occupations are cosmic) are employed to lull readers into the false assumption that all their cherished, conventional views will be reinforced in what follows. The pub ambience, the boozing cronies, the kind of dialogue which ensues 'when drouthy neebors neebors meet',[41] all subscribe to the impression that this is an example of provincial verse: 'what's still deemed Scots and the folk expect' (C.P.1, p.83).

But, of course, MacDiarmid's purpose was not to subscribe to intellectual complacency but to replace it by a commitment to growth. The 'lull' of the opening, therefore, (in which a dramatic note is immediately struck by a strongly-felt sense of the direct voice) is a deliberate ploy so that the poet's real intention will, when it becomes apparent, have more dramatic impact. The poet reveals his deceptive approach (appropriately) in a stage whisper, or 'aside':

> ("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.
>
> But aince I get them there I'll whummle them
> And souse the craturs in the nether deeps,
> – For it's nae choice, and ony man s'ud wish
> To dree the goat's weird tae as weel's the sheep's!)
> (C.P.1, p.83)

These verses reveal the poet's attitude to his fellow Scots, and his didactic purpose in their regard. The 'sermon' in A Drunk Man has begun.

The theme of 'aboulia' re-emerges frequently throughout A Drunk Man and is articulated in both polemical discourse and dramatic representation. In the discursive matter, the protagonist denounces (among other 'sins') three major causes of intellectual stagnation in Scotland which are inimical to his goal of an extension in consciousness: Scottish neglect of its own literary heritage; a dour, narrow Presbyterianism; a too easy acceptance of English dominion.

In the context of a Burns Supper in the early part of the poem, the protagonist rails against the phoney internationalism which he sees as characteristic of such functions:

> You canna gang to a Burns supper even
> Wi'oot some wizened scrunt o' a knock-knee
> Chinee turns roon to say 'Him Haggis – velly goot!'
> And ten to wan the piper is a Cockney. (C.P.1, p.84)

However, the preacher's real anger is aroused by the fact that of the many celebrants 'no wan in fifty kens a word Burns wrote'. Since the protagonist's pre-occupations involve a genuine internationalism and a proper appreciation of the Scottish literary tradition, the prevailing

falsity and cheapening of Burns's actual achievements run counter to his high ambitions for his countryman. The English connection is expressed with humour and a diminishing contempt:

> Croose London Scotties wi' their braw shirt fronts
> And a' their fancy freends, rejoicin'
> That similah gatherings in Timbuctoo,
> Bagdad - and Hell, nae doot - are voicin'
>
> Burns' sentiments o' universal love,
> In pidgin English or in wild-fowl Scots,
> And toastin' ane wha's nocht to them but an
> Excuse for faitherin' Genius wi' _their_ thochts.
> (_C_.P.1, p.84)

Later in the poem the protagonist deplores the neglect of the fine 15th century court poet Dunbar (MacDiarmid's own model of an intellectual literary excellence) who has been replaced in Scottish literary tastes by the maudlin provincial numblings of the Kailyard:

> And owre the Kailyard-wa' Dunbar they've flung,
> And a' their countrymen that e'er ha'e sung
> For ither than ploomen's lugs or to enrichen
> Plots on Parnassus set apairt for kitchen.
> (_C.P_.1, p.106)

A critique of a dour Presbyterianism is a central feature of _A Drunk Man_. And indeed there is, at times, a certain dramatic irony in the Drunk Man's 'sermon' because of an entrenched Calvinism in his own mentality and delivery. In the following verse the poet's denunciation is set within an historical context which extends its temporal implications:

> The vandal Scot! Frae Brankston'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. (_C.P_.1, p.106)

In a passionate prayer for enlightenment later in the poem, the Drunk Man pleads, with whatever gods there be, that his people's genius may not be merely

> A rumple-fyke in Heaven's doup.
> While Calvinism uses her
> To breed a minister or twa! (_C.P_.1, p.125)

The authoritative, joyless nature of Calvinism is memorably imaged forth in _A Drunk Man_ as follows:

> ... God passin wi' a bobby's feet
> Ootby in the lang coffin o' the street (C.P.1, p.147)

The critique of Calvinism is broadened in the poem to include Christianity as a whole. As in the early lyrics in Scots, the defection of God is central to the overall vision of A Drunk Man:

> For nocht but a chowed core's left whaur Jerusalem lay
> Like aipples in a heap! (C.P.1, p.112)

Another factor which contributes to the Scottish 'aboulia' in that it represents a kind of 'incrustation over the immortal spirit' of Scotland is English dominion over it. The protagonist rebukes his countrymen for an abject complacency in this regard:

> I micht ha'e been contentit - gin the feck
> O' my ain folk had grovelled wi' less repec',
> But their obsequious devotion
> Made it for me a criminal emotion. (C.P.1, p.107)

The verse seems to mime, in its language and structure, the subservience to England it expresses as the first two lines in Scots 'give way' to English in the latter half of the verse. One can imagine the Southern accent with which the poet might declaim these lines.

Generally, in A Drunk Man, there is regret at the great cultural loss that the union with England represents. The protagonist mourns (and this regret is carried on into To Circumjack Cencrastus and Stony Limits And Other Poems):

> ... the vieve and maikless life that's lain
> Happit for centuries in an alien gloom ...
> (C.P.1, p.108)

There is also a bitter rebuke in the poem concerning the Scots own betrayal of their rich culture and an almost despairing recognition of contemporary mindlessness:

> What are the prophets and priests and kings,
> What's ocht to the people o' Scotland? (C.P.1, p.108)

I shall discuss what I have termed the 'dramatic representation' of 'aboulia' in A Drunk Man in the context of two dance interludes (which I referred to briefly earlier in this study) and two lyrics or 'sangs'.

In 'We're outward bound frae Scotland', which is in fact a dance cum journey (but whose rhythm is essentially dance-like), Scottish complacency is given an ironic uptempo treatment. The ineducable tendency of the Scots and their habit of giving up in the face of difficulty are summarised in an amusing and visual dance metaphor thus:

> Gin you stop the galliard
> To teach them hoo to dance,
> There comes in Corbaudie
> And turns their gammons up! ... (C.P.1, p.101)

The Dionysian protagonist is indisputably 'Lord of the Dance' in A Drunk Man. The ineptitude and lack of foresight of the motley crew/dancers of 'we're outward bound frae Scotland' are summed up in these lines:

> The cross-tap is a monkey tree (mizzen's mast)
> That nane o' us can spiel. (climb) (C.P.1, p.100)

The ability of Scots to express multiple meanings is skilfully demonstrated in the use of 'creel' in the following lines:

> - A' the Scots that ever wur
> Gang ootward in a creel. (C.P.1, p.100)

'Creel', in its meaning of 'basket', aptly describes the craft itself, and in its meaning of 'a state of confusion' describes the mental state of the incompetent voyagers aboard it.

'Aboulia' is set to a lively jig measure in 'O Scotland is The Barren Fig'. The metaphor on this occasion is Biblical - the barren fig was one cursed by Christ (Matthew 21: 19-22). The jaunty rhythm, therefore, is in itself an ironic comment. This jig continues trippingly to its grim conclusion:

> A miracle's
> Oor only chance.
> Up, carles, up
> And let us dance! (C.P.1, p.106)

There is, however, some hope that the barren fig may bear fruit, as the poet/prophet hopes to achieve for Scotland what Moses achieved for the people of Israel:

Auld Moses took
A dry stick and
Instantly it
Floo'ered in his hand. (C.P.1, p.106)

In the lyrics or 'sangs' which I will now consider, the aspects of 'aboulia' are condensed and crystallised in an essentially dramatic way. In an adaptation from the Russian of Zinaida Hippius,[42] 'aboulia' (symbolised by the thistle) is seen as constituting a stranglehold on Scottish movement or growth. Paradoxically, its power is in its impotence. The imagery is largely tactile and kinaesthetic and there is also an onomatopoeic and alliterative appeal to the auditory imagination. Here is an extract from the lyric:

A shaggy poulp, embracin' me and stingin',
And as a serpent cauld agen' my hert.
Its scales are poisoned shafts that jag me to the quick
- And waur than them's my scunner's fearfu' smert!

O that its prickles were a knife indeed,
But it is thowless, flabby, dowf, and numb.
Sae sluggishly it drains my benmaist life,
A dozent dragon, dreidfu', deef, and dumb.
(C.P.1, p.94)

The most powerful dramatisation of 'aboulia', however, is the 'Ballad of the General Strike' (C.P.1, pp.119-122) which MacDiarmid incorporated in A Drunk Man.[43] This ballad condenses all the recurring images and discourse on the theme and represents a passionate belief in a Socialist solution to Scottish ills. The Drunk Man's 'sermon', for the first and only time in the poem, takes on an explicitly political note. The ballad presents in dramatic terms the collapse of the General Strike.

The poem begins with the jubilant hope of vigorous growth in Scotland:

I saw a rose come loupin' oot
Frae a comsteerie plant.
O wha'd ha'e thocht yon puir stock had
Sic an inhabitant? (C.P.1, p.119)

The gradual growth of the rose is exuberantly recounted until it has reached unprecedented proportions:

And still it grew until it seemed
The haill braid earth had turned
A reid reid rose that in the lift
Like a ball o' fire burned. (C.P.1, p.120)

However, the fond hope of the Socialist rose is blighted by all the anti-growth impulses of 'aboulia' and the descent into ignominy for the thistle begins. The now shrivelled rose is attended by Christian imagery as it 'nails itsel to its ain crucifix'. The ballad articulates not only political failure in Scotland, but the failure of Christianity as any kind of viable alternative.

Peter Thirlby, in connection with the 'Ballad of the General Strike', writes (and he quotes the last three verses of the poem to support his point):

> The failure of spirit deplored in the lyrics tends to identify with the political failure of the working-class; and the end of the General Strike (1926), while it might compel the masses to feel, as Christ on the Cross, the weight of their humanity, incidentally confirms the defection of God, who stands aside like any hired critic and forsakes the people ....[44]

If the poet prophet of A Drunk Man denounces the sins of 'aboulia', he also suggests some of the ways in which these can be expurgated - and, indeed, such a purgation is seen as a pre-condition of 'election' to MacDiarmid's Brave New World. The protagonist shows, by his own example, the necessity of a passionate commitment to 'the excruciatingly painful business of thinking'. In contemporary Scotland:

Maist Thocht's like whisky - a thoosan' under proof,
And a sair price is pitten on't even than.
(C.P.1, p.86)

There is also a pre-occupation with the self-abasement and pain which must precede the acquisition of self-knowledge:

For sic a loup towards wisdom's croon
Hoo fer a man maun base him doon,
Hoo plunge aboot in Chaos ere
He finds his needfu' fittin' there,
The matrix oot o' which sublime
Serenity sall soar in time! (C.P.1, p.145)

The Scot must contend with the 'Spirit o' Strife': all complacency and conventionality must be put aside and all false, though comforting dogmas,

eschewed - including (indeed especially) Christianity, which has no real relevance for demythologised Man:

> Christ had never toothick,
> Christ was never seeck
> But Man's a fiky bairn
> Wi' bellythraw, ripples, and worm-i'-the-cheek! ...
> (C.P.1, p.104)

There is a strong suggestion in 'Ballad of the General Strike' that Socialism holds the only genuine promise for 'the fiky bairn'. But, as in all MacDiarmid's poetry from A Drunk Man onwards, Socialism is not an end in itself. Its main function is to get rid of the 'breid and butter problems' or 'brute needs' which stand in the way of the poet's real objective - the extension of consciousness in his beloved native land.

The Scottish 'aboulia' is seen, in the poem as a whole, in the context of a more fundamental and insoluble problem. This problem is the tormenting duality of our nature - the uneasy alliance of the body and the soul. This gives rise to one of the most passionately dramatic and Calvinistic outcries in A Drunk Man:

> 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 insel'
> And Earth upshuddered like a star. (C.P.1, p.126)

MacDiarmid's preoccupation with intellect from A Drunk Man onward seems to be accompanied by an intensifying distaste of and disregard for the physical.

The duality of our nature is perhaps most dramatically demonstrated in the theme of woman in A Drunk Man. Woman seems to embody both Dionysian and Calvinistic aspects: on the one hand she symbolises the principles of freedom and personal growth; on the other she is seen as being, in some sense, the course of Christian conscience, and hence a bar

to an extension in consciousness. In the early lyrics in Scots, the sexual relationship emerges as a powerful source of liberation. Lovers seem to become not just copulating humans but themselves potent cosmic agents, contributing to the sense of consummate order which informs the universe. In A Drunk Man, however, the contradictions inherent in the sexual relationship are more realistically confronted:

> Or dost thou mak' a thistle o' me, wumman? But for thee
> I were as happy as the munelight, withoot care,
> But thocht o' thee - o' thy contempt and ire -
> Turns hauf the warld into the youky thistle there,
>
> Feedin' on the munelicht and transformin' it
> To this wanrestfu' growth that winna let me be.
> The munelicht is the freedom that I'd ha'e
> But for this cursed Conscience thou has set in me.
> (C.P.1, p.91)

Woman does, however, appear in her ideal form in the beautiful 'silken leddy' lyrical episode of A Drunk Man (C.P.1, pp.88-89). The 'leddy' is an extremely important symbol in the poem because she embodies the principle of potential growth. In these verses, MacDiarmid adapts a Deutsch/Yarmolinsky translation from the Russian of Alexander Blok.[45] In 'The Symbolism of A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle', Roderick Watson writes about the significance of the 'silken leddy' in MacDiarmid's poem:

> Blok wrote many poems about ... visionary encounters with a 'beautiful lady'. He identified her with the religious philosopher Solovyov's visions of Sophia, who is the wisdom of God, personifying the pact of love which exists between the creator and the created world. In 'The Stranger', however ... Blok's vision is more realistic and ironic than in his earlier, more mystical verse. Nevertheless, its association with Sophia, and hence with the Ideal, remains relevent to MacDiarmid's purpose in including the silken leddy in the poem. In 1923, for example, he had published a 'Hymn to Sophia', and this poem makes clear his feelings towards 'the eternal feminine', and also acknowledges a debt to Solovyov's belief that both man and the material world are embarked on a physical and spiritual evolution towards the condition of Diety. It is in Sophia that the physical and the spiritual worlds fully realise themselves and meet in a final and perfect unity ...[46]

The lyric in which this instance of the Ideal makes her entrance is pre-eminently Dionysian, with its pub ambience and exuberant affirmation of life and regeneration. Given her embodiment of growth, it is, appropriately, 'Spring's spirit' which rules over the drunken

uproar in the opening verse. The lyric with its hopeful teeming life, both physical and spiritual, counters images of stagnation in the preceding discursive material in which the poet's townfolk 'continue to lead their livan death'. The 'sang' gracefully combines raw sexuality, homely domesticity and spiritual revelation - this latter, of course, being the preserve of the exceptional Drunk Man only.

The imagery of the early verses conjures up rampant sexuality. The alliterative and assonantal 'weet and wild and eisenin' (lusty air) and 'the moochiness' - suggesting a soft, moist atmosphere - seem to set the scene for heightened desire and sexual encounter:

> The hauflins yont the burgh bounds
> Gang ilka nicht, and aa the same,
> Their bonnets cocked; their bluid that stounds
> Is playan at a fine auld game. (C.P.1, p.88)

A Spring-like regeneration is evoked amid all the suggested copulative activity as 'loud and shrill the bairnies cry'. The bairns crying echoes the 'drucken stramash' in the opening verse. The baby clothes, or napkin connotations of 'a' the white-weshed cottons', reinforce the feeling of new life and introduce a note of mundane domesticity into the poem.

Paradoxically, in the midst of all this unleashed desire, the poet's mystical experience takes place, as each night the mysterious 'silken leddy' visits him and pervades his being. It is an extra-marital encounter: (Jean ettles nocht o' this, puir lass) (C.P.1, p.88). But the lady brings a regeneration which is spiritual and hence does not reinforce, but counters, the purely physical one of the early verses. The evening is 'fey' and 'fremt' (fated, lonely). Her movements are languid, yet portentous and deliberate; she 'darkly moves' or 'slowly gangs'. Around the mysterious lady 'a rouky dwaman perfume flits'. Here, the 'misty swooning' perfume and the evanescent 'flits' reinforces the 'silken leddy's' dream-like quality.

The 'silken leddy' brings the protagonist both captivity and a

possible liberation or vision of truth:

> I seek, in this captivity,
> To pierce the veils that darklin fa'
> - See white clints slidin' to the sea,
> And hear the horns o' Elfland blaw. (C.P.1, p.89)

Note how Keatsian echoes of 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' lend traditional support to the silken leddy's air of mystery. However, the leddy's gift of revelation is not available to the 'reid-een'd fules' but to the Drunk Man only. Throughout the poem (and, indeed, the corpus) the natural aristocracy and sensibility of the Romantic protagonist sets him apart from the mainstream of humanity.

If the 'silken leddy' represents a powerful adversary of 'aboulia', woman, in accordance with her contradictory nature in A Drunk Man, is also seen as perpetuating stagnation in Scotland. The ways in which conscience circumscribes consciousness because of its recognition of such concepts as 'guid and ill', 'fear and shame', seem to have a particular, if unexplained, connection with the feminine essence. Woman, in A Drunk Man, certainly seems to bear some responsibility for the 'mind-forged manacles' with which we shackle our consciousness. It is notable, too, that whilst the aspiring protagonist wanders alone, like Ulysses, 'owre continents unkent' (in other words seeks to extend his consciousness by exposing it to the new), the conventional representative of 'aboulia' is 'tethered to a punctual snoran missus'.

On the whole, however, in A Drunk Man, woman's most important role is supportive. Her acute insight into the man (symbolised by her 'piercen een' or 'hawks een') gives her considerable power over the man, yet she exists for him - she has no identity outside her sexual function. She is keenly aware of, and gratified by, the man's sexual dependence on her. Her acuity of vision and feeling of sexual power are expressed as follows:

A wumman whiles a bawaw gi'es
That clean abaws him gin he sees.

Or wi' a movement o' a leg
Shows 'm his mind is juist a geg. (C.P.1, p.101)

This latter idea that instinctual behaviour may be the only reality, whilst mind is a possible deception, is rare in a poet who spent a lifetime extolling the virtues of mind. The considerable power that the poet accords sex, and its relationship to thought, inform this profound couplet:

It's queer the thochts a kittled cull
Can lowse or splairgin' glit annul. (C.P.1, p.101)

Woman and the sexual relation are of their very nature life-affirming, and hence constitute a powerful opposition to 'aboulia':

Whisky mak's Heaven or Hell and whiles mells baith,
Disease is but the privy torch o' Daith,
- But sex reveals life, faith! (C.P.1, p.114)

The beautiful lyric 'O Wha's The Bride' dramatises the contraries inherent in the feminine essence against the vast background of regeneration. The archetypal woman of the ballad is both every individual instance of woman and the feminine essence itself. In her phenomenological instance, the woman is a virgin/bride; in her role as the feminine essence she is a whore because of her multiple connections over the ages with generations of men:

O wha's been here afore me, lass,
And hoo did he get in?
- A man that deed or I was born
This evil thing has din. (C.P.1, p.103)

However, the virgin and the whore join in an instinctive and compassionate self-giving:

But I can gi'e ye kindness, lad,
And a pair o' willin hands,
And you sall ha'e my breists like stars,
My limbs like willow wands,

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 ha'e met ... (C.P.1, p.103)

This mystical view of woman, seen in the context of the multitudinous

copulations of all the generations, is echoed in the lively and coarse couplets addressed to the feminine moon: 'To Luna at the Craidle and Coffin'. These lines brutally express a kind of speeded-up process of generation:

> You pay nae heed but plop me in
> Syne shove me oot, and winna be din
>
> - Owre and owre, the same auld trick,
> Cratur withoot climacteric! ... (C.P.1, p.109)

The protagonist's wife, Jean, although she laughs to see the male 'in the creal o' his courage-bag confined' is yet, like the composite woman of 'O Wha's The Bride', essentially compassionate. Light imagery surrounds Jean on her every appearance in the poem:

> O Jean, in whom my spirit sees,
> Clearer than through whisky or disease,
> Its dernin nature, wad the searchin' licht
> Oor union raised poor'd owre me the nicht.
> (C.P.1, p.146)

It is to this flesh and blood woman that the poet returns at the end of his night-long vigil, and, unlike his literary predecessor, 'Tam O' Shanter', he is assured of a warm welcome:

> But aince Jean kens what I've been through
> The nicht, I dinna doot it,
> She'll ope her airms in welcome true,
> And clack nae mair aboot it ... (C.P.1, p.166)

The idea of the poet as a 'Redeemer' figure, or man of destiny, continues from the early lyrics in Scots. However, the 'Christ' of the later poem is not the gentle 'Redeemer' of the lyrics, as is evidenced by his attitude to the contemporary 'pharisees' of the opening verses of A Drunk Man. His critical attitude and overt didactic purpose signal the intrusion of the 'sermon' into the 'sang', but the 'sang', which is an anthem of affirmation, remains central to the saviour's gospel.

The exceptional nature of the poet/prophet is articulated in two appropriate settings. The poet qua poet is introduced in the Dionysian atmosphere of a dream pub where he communes with the inspirational feminine essence. This is a kind of prologue to his journey to the

hillside, with all the prophetic connotations this holds. After the pub interlude, an appropriately Heraclitean ambience is evoked and the Drunk Man's visionary experience begins. There is an indeterminacy of time, place and event - a coalescence of subjective and objective which evokes the mystical and portentous. The protagonist questions the nature of objective reality in essentially dramatic terms:

> This munelicht's fell like whisky noo I see't.
> - Am I a thingum mebbe that is kept
> Preserved in spirits in a muckle bottle
> Lang centuries after sin' wi' Jean I slept?
>
> ....
>
> Or am I juist a figure in a scene
> O' Scottish life A.D. one-nine-two-five?
> The haill thing kelters like a th eatre claith
> Till I micht fancy that I was alive! (C.P.1, p.92)

However, the protagonist, communing with the thistle on a moonlit hillside, is not just <u>any</u> drunk man hallucinating - but a special individual, an individual with a mission:

> - And yet I feel this muckle thistle's staun'in'
> Atween me and the mune as pairt o' a Plan.
> (C.P.1, p.92)

The Drunk Man's presentation of himself as a Christ, who must 'dee to brak the livin' tomb' of his compatriot's complacency, continues spasmodically throughout the poem. There is a juxtaposition of Montrose (the poet's home town at this time) and Nazareth in <u>A Drunk Man</u> (C.P.1, p.88) which makes the identification clear. In the poem there is a strong sense of man 'growing' into God which is conveyed by metaphors of a painful expansion. A model of growth is presented in the person of the Dionysian protagonist. This is conveyed by vividly kinaesthetic images:

> But let my soul increase in me,
> God dwarfed to enter my puir thocht
> Expand to his true size again ... (C.P.1, p.125)

And the agonies the exceptional individual endures in such a growth are here presented in strongly dramatic terms:

Aye, this is Calvary - to bear
Your Cross wi'in you frae the seed,
And feel it grow by slow degrees
Until it rends your flesh apairt,
And turn, and see your fellow-men
In similar case but sufferin' less
Thro' bein' mair wudden frae the stert! ...
(C.P.1, p.134)

There are other images in A Drunk Man in which Man is seen as 'pregnant' with God. The Drunk Man is, for instance, 'fu' o' a stickit God' (C.P.1, p.134) - or full of a God who is struggling to be born. And, according to John Weston, the 'philosophy of history' in the following verse may be 'MacDiarmid's humanistic adaptation of an idea central to Vladimir Solovyov's cosmic mysticism and doctrine of Sophia: the universal deification of man, the historic realization of Divine-humanity':[47]

Sae God retracts in endless stage
Through angel, devil, age on age,
Until at last his infinite natur'
Walks on earth a human cratur
(Or less than human as to my een
The people are in Aiberdeen):
Sae man returns in endless growth
Till God in him again has scouth. (C.P.1, pp.144-145)

However, there are many affirmations in A Drunk Man which seem to make the protagonist's struggle a worth-while one. There is the hope which the poet sees in Socialism - although in the terms of 'The Ballad Of The General Strike' his compatriots seem as yet unable to take advantage of the promise of the 'reid reid rose'. However, all the contradictions inherent in the Scottish thistle cannot 'daunton' the essentially optimistic Drunk Man, as this vigorous, Dionysian affirmation of life shows:

Shudderin' thistle, gi'e owre, gi'e owre!
A'body's gi'en in to the facts o' life;
The impossible truth'll triumph at last,
And mock your strife.
Your sallow leafs can never thraw,
Wi' a' their oorie shakin',
As doot into the hert o' life
That it may be mistak'n ... (C.P.1, p.105)

Perhaps the most convincing affirmation in A Drunk Man springs from

the poet's confidence in the 'dark underground forces', whether in their political or purely metaphysical connotations. In this humanist hymn the protagonist eschews Calvinism, and indeed Christianity, and places all his faith in Dionysus:

> O rootless thistle through the warld that's pairt o' you,
> Gin you'd withstand the agonies still to come,
> You maun send roots doon to the deeps unkent,
> Fär deeper than it's possible for ocht to gang,
> Savin' the human soul,
> Deeper then God himsel' has knowledge o'
> Whaur lichtnin's canna probe that cleave the warld,
> Whaur only in the entire dark there's founts o' strength
> Eternity's poisoned draps can never file,
> And muckle roots thicken, deef to bobbies' feet.
> (C.P.1, p.147)

And there is, of course, the hope instinct in the poet's 'sang' - the hope from which all the other affirmations in the poem spring. There are many references to the creative process in A Drunk Man, and the principle of growth is relevant here also. The poet lives for those 'aintrin lichtnin's' (rare moments of revelation) by which he grows as an artist and as a human being, and the fruits of which he can pass on to society. The rarity of genuine artistic achievement is a cause for despondency. All the artist's labours seem too often to result in:

> ... an aintrin rose
> Abune a jungly waste o' effort ... (C.P.1, p.116)

A Calvinist dedication is necessary here also. There are moments, however, when the 'sang' takes on a unified life of its own, independent of all human fragmentation, and the poet is blissfully at one with eternity:

> These are the moments when my sang
> Clears its white feet frae oot amang
> My broken thocht, and moves as free
> As souls frae bodies when they dee. (C.P.1, p.142)

The early lyrics in Scots are informed by a conflict deep within the poet's psyche, which stems from a harrowing dichotomy between the unparalleled value MacDiarmid places on human consciousness and a strong attraction towards an at-oneness with the universe. The dichotomy

continues into A Drunk Man. The poet seems, on occasion, to deplore his lone stance as a separate human being - the curse of individual identity. Indeed, in A Drunk Man, although the poet is committed to the promotion of a high level of collective human consciousness never has he in fact been more lonely:

> And O! I canna thole
> Aye yabblin' o' my soul,
> And fain I wad be free
> O' my eternal me,
> Nor fare mysel' alane ... (C.P.1, p.142)

There comes a point in A Drunk Man when the protagonist is at his most despondent - when the burdens of the flesh seem almost too much to bear. His dejection is expressed in neat triplets. The rhythm does not, as one might expect, trivialise the emotion and it does prepare us for the vision of the Great Wheel to which it is entirely appropriate:

> I ken hoo much oor life is fated
> Aince its first cell is animated,
> The fount frae which the flesh is jetted.
>
> I ken hoo lourd the body lies
> Upon the spirit when it flies
> And fain abune its stars 'ud rise. (C.P.1, p.158)

As the poet endures this Gethsemane, he has a vision of the Great Wheel - a vision which tests the strength of his commitment to his people, and, indeed, to 'the sang itself'. All the poet's main preoccupations in A Drunk Man - 'aboulia', the quarrel with England, Christianity and the function of the artist - come together within the terms of this universal vision. The poet's first reaction to the Great Wheel is his own utter impotence in the face of it:

> It maitters not my mind the day,
> Nocht maitters that I strive to dae,
> - For the wheel moves on in its ain way. (C.P.1, p.158)

And not only does he see his fellow Scots ride helplessly in the wheel's grooves, but God himself as helplessly as they. All his life, and the various forms of knowledge he has acquired in it, seem as nothing in the face of cosmic reality. His own art is viewed in the context of the

absolute power of the wheel, and is found to be inadequate to its redemptive function:

> Nae verse is worth a ha'et until
> It can join issue wi the Will
> That raised the Wheel and spins it still ...
> (C.P.1, p.160)

And yet, as always in A Drunk Man, the affirmation comes - the role of the poet in society is entirely vindicated. Only in the poet's unique ability to combine subjective and objective in a kind of Heraclitean whole can there be any hope for mankind.

> Oor universe is like an e'e
> Turned in, man's benmaist hert to see,
> And swamped in subjectivity.
>
> But whether it can use its sicht
> To bring what lies withoot to licht
> To answer's still ayont my micht.
>
> But when that inturned look has brocht
> To licht what still in vain it's socht
> Ootward maun be the bent o' thocht.
>
> And organs may develop syne
> Responsive to the need divine
> O' single-minded humankin'.
>
> The function, as it seems to me,
> O' Poetry is to bring to be
> At lang, lang last that unity ... (C.P.1, p.163)

Although MacDiarmid has reaffirmed the function of the poet in society, he fails to rise to the other test with which the vision of the Great Wheel confronts him. As saviour of his people, should he not ride with them to their eventual deification? The protagonist watches as all the Scots that ever were squat apathetically in the wheel, and he asks despairingly:

> 'But in this huge ineducable
> Heterogeneous hotch and rabble,
> Why am I condemned to squabble?' (C.P.1, p.165)

The poet has a choice - either he ride with the despised rabble, or he 'maun tine his nationality!'. Ironically, that aspect of the despised Scottish 'aboulia' the 'nerve owre weak for new emprise' is demonstrated in the poet's own behaviour at this point. He cannot choose, so he defers

decision. It is a very human betrayal, with a touch of humour - and the poet is reduced from God to man in the process:

> And I look at a' the random
> Band the wheel leaves whaur it fand 'em.
> 'Auch, to Hell,
> I'll tak' it to avizandum'. ... (C.P.1, p.166)

This most articulate of poems ends in 'Silence'. It is the silence which must attend unrealised (but not unrealisable) human potential. In 'The Goal Of All The Arts', a later poem of MacDiarmid's, the poet speaks of the silence of 'a society of people without a voice for the consciousness that is slowly growing within them'. The silence at the end of A Drunk Man is of this kind. But it is, therefore, a silence of hope - because the evolution in consciousness is taking place, even if it cannot as yet be articulated.

The last words are left to woman - to Jean - as the poet moves, characteristically, from the abstract to the concrete situation:

> O I ha'e Silence left,
> - 'And weel ye micht',
> Sae Jean'll say, 'after sic a nicht!'

NOTES

CHAPTER TWO

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27. Weston x

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29. ibid., p. 121.

30. ibid., p. 122.

31. Buthlay, p. 49.

32. I have borrowed the phrase 'a pile of selves' from Norman MacCaig's poem 'Summer Farm'. See The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse (London, 1973), p. 444.

33. See Weston, p. ix

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38. The Scottish Chapbook, vol 1, no. 8, March 1923, p. 212.

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41. See 'Tam O' Shanter' in Poems And Songs Of Robert Burns (London and Glasgow, 1969), p. 202.

42. See Weston, p. 21.

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CHAPTER THREE

Eternity and Eriskay

A Study of _To Circumjack Cencrastus_

In a letter to George Ogilvie, dated December 9th 1926, MacDiarmid reveals his aspirations as regards a poem then in preparation:

> It will be a much bigger thing than the Drunk Man in every way. It is complementary to it really. Cencrastus is the fundamental serpent, the underlying unifying principle of the cosmos. To circumjack is to encircle. To Circumjack Cencrastus - to square the circle, to box the compass, etc. But where the Drunk Man is in one sense a reaction from the 'Kailyaird', Cencrastus transcends that altogether - the Scotsman gets rid of the thistle, 'the bur o' the world' - and his spirit at last inherits its proper sphere. Psychologically it represents the resolution of the sadism and masochism, the synthesis of the various sets of antithesis I was posing in the Drunk Man. It will not depend on the contrasts of realism and metaphysics, bestiality and beauty, humour and madness - but move on a plane of pure beauty and pure music. It will be an attempt to move really mighty numbers ...[1]

The poet's aimsin connection with the successor of A Drunk Man are characteristically ambitious and - predictably, perhaps - they are not realised in the flawed actuality of To Circumjack Cencrastus (hereafter referred to as Cencrastus) which was published in 1930. Few critics would deny that there are many moments of incandescence in Cencrastus, when the poet rises to the top of his lyrical form, but the nature of the structure within which these moments occur is the focus of much adverse critical commentary. Harvey Oxenhorn suggests that the poem 'resembles A Drunk Man in length and format'. 'But now,' he continues

> the structural disarray is imitative, not innovative; the sustaining fiction of drunkenness has disappeared, and with it the humour, vitality and personal warmth which pervade the earlier work ...[2]

Anne Edwards Boutelle also compares Cencrastus to its predecessor and finds the 1930 poem 'much less structured and much more erratic'. She goes on to describe it as 'more of a ragbag collection, tenuously containing the garnerings of ... years ...'.[3] Nancy Gish sees the poem as 'an interesting failure'[4] which exhibits 'a far greater discreteness and discontinuity'[5] than A Drunk Man whilst Kenneth Buthlay provides an interestingly kinaesthetic image of the poem's failure to cohere:

> ... it [Cencrastus] lacks a centre of gravity, so that its parts go flying off in all directions, like a spiritualist séance in a gale ...[6]

Certainly, if one is looking for the logic of sequence and succession one will not find it in Cencrastus - indeed there is no evidence of a preconceived plan. The poem is composed of a collection of fragments which - although they are recognisably part of the prolonged dramatic self-enactment which is MacDiarmid's work in toto - do not in themselves form part of an integrated structure. In the Ogilvie letter, MacDiarmid refers to the embryonic Cencrastus in terms of 'resolution' and 'synthesis' - however, neither applies in the finished product which consists rather of a random play among the old themes. Certainly, the poem does not achieve the very fine but nevertheless decisive balance of its predecessor - A Drunk Man. A measure of the imaginative coherence of the 1926 poem is the way in which lyrical episodes which occur throughout the poem can be seen as both autonomous and integrated. They are, on the one hand, beautiful artifacts in their own right - but they also exist in a meaningful relation to the structure as a whole. The fine parts of Cencrastus do not have this organic connection with the whole. The links between 'sangs' and prosaic 'sermons' are unacceptedly tenuous and often contrived. Another structural characteristic of A Drunk Man is the way in which the relation of discourse and highly-wrought lyricism parallels in a formal sense the conceptual basis of the poem - the poetic preoccupation with the actual and the ideal in human consciousness. But such a dynamic juxtaposition of contraries is not - much to its loss - a feature of the 1930 poem. One recalls the poet's words to Ogilvie in the 1926 letter quoted above in this regard:

> It [Cencrastus] will not depend on the contrasts of realism and metaphysics, bestiality and beauty, humour and madness ...

The unfortunate result of what Alan Bold calls 'the hit and miss'[7] structure of Cencrastus is that the fragments of the poem do not so much cohere as exist in a state of uneasy cohabitation within the many

pages of a poem which is - at least physically - 'a much bigger thing than the Drunk Man ...'.

The failure of the key symbol to integrate the disparate elements of the poem is clearly the central problem which besets MacDiarmid's 'attempt to move really mighty numbers'. But there are others: the linguistic medium employed is neither assured nor inventive enough to articulate the ambitious poetic purpose and the protagonist exhibits an uncharacteristic and disabling lack of confidence in his own ability to transform the world. However, the troubles of Cencrastus can be attributed to a more fundamental cause and one which has a direct bearing on the problems cited above. And that cause - which is peculiar to MacDiarmid's 1930 poem and hence marks it as an area of special interest - is a temporary but radical shift in the ontological basis of the MacDiarmid poetic.

In the MacDiamid corpus, as a whole, the poet is an exuberant celebrant of substance. This is in accordance with a vision of reality which locates value in the material basis of human existence. The poet's vision of the numinous and its relation to matter is expressed in an interview with Walter Perrie:

> The transcendental, if I am right, comes out of the seed of things. It's inherent in the original substance - it's part of the materialism.[8]

This metaphysic is, perhaps, given its most convinced and concise poetic expression in the Stony Limits poem, 'On a Raised Beach'. In the 1934 poem, MacDiarmid writes:

> I will have nothing interposed between my sensitiveness
> And the barren but beautiful reality ... (C.P.1, p.431)

And the 'reality' here is not that of Platonic Ideal Forms but of the materiality of the world as symbolised by stone.

However, in Cencrastus (and the emphasis on 'purity' in the Ogilvie letter is significant) the poet reveals a profound disenchantment with

the material:

> I've tint my amusement at maitter
> The quick-change artist
> Ashamed o' ha'en a'e form insteed o' anither ...
> (C.P.1, p.238)

Matter has become a trap, an obstacle. The poet despairingly contemplates 'the frenzy o' the immaterial soul in maitter droonin' - even Athikte, the poet's muse, drowns. Substance casts a dark shadow on the light. Dark roots clutch. The result of the poet's disaffection is an attempt to achieve transcendence without the mediation of the actual, the contingent. And, in depriving himself of the stuff of experiential reality, the poet surrenders much of his potency as a maker. The consequences for Cencrastus are grave, since - as is evidenced in MacDiarmid's most achieved works i.e. A Drunk Man and 'On a Raised Beach' - it is in dramatic confrontation with the actual that the poetic vision is most successfully articulated.

The ontology which underlies Cencrastus is reflected in the nature of the major symbol and the way it works (or does not work) in the poem. In a letter to Helen Cruikshank (dated Feb., 1939) the poet refers to the inspirational source of the serpent of his 1930 poem:

> ... Cencrastus, the Curly Snake is a Gaelic (or Scottish) version of the idea common to Indian and other mythologies that underlying creation there is a great snake - and that its movements form the pattern of history. In my poem that snake represents not only an attempt to glimpse the underlying pattern of human history but identifies it with the evolution of human thought ...[9]

And in this 'poem of Homage to Consciousness' the protagonist's function is

> to envisage as far as one possibly can all the complex strivings and developments of human thought, and then, having done that, attempt to anticipate the upshot of the whole business (i.e. to 'circumjack' - or enclose - the Serpent ...[10]

However, despite its connection with 'consciousness' and the 'pattern of history', MacDiarmid is at pains to put his serpent at an unreachable remove from all things human and contingent: 'Cencrastus' is 'alien to

the human mind'; there is 'nae movement in the warld' like his; 'a words fail to haud' him. Ironically, having thus successfully distanced his master symbol from all things terrestrial, the poet finds himself hoist by his own pétard. Far from tracing the movements of the snake and successfully enclosing it, MacDiarmid cannot take imaginative possession of his major symbol at all - and hence cannot use it to structural and dramatic advantage in his poem. Thus the opening lines of Cencrastus are addressed to what is (and remains), to all intents and purposes, an abstraction. Unlike the vigorous and very much <u>there</u> snake of <u>Penny Wheep</u>,[11] whose ponderous physicality is evoked in vivid kinaesthetic images, the serpent of Cencrastus remains aloof, uninvolved and unrealised. And, unlike the ubiquitous thistle of <u>A Drunk Man</u> which is all things to all themes, 'Cencrastus' disappears for much of the later poem - until, in fact, MacDiarmid remembers his existence and summonses him from the rarified space he inhabits to support the occasional point. In fact, the fate of 'Cencrastus' is very much that of Lenin in <u>First Hymn</u>: both are initially eulogised and become thereafter mere points of reference in the poems (see Chapter Four of this Study).

The failure of his major symbol to fulfil its unifying rôle in <u>Cencrastus</u> is a sure pointer to the importance of the contactual in the MacDiarmid poetic. A comparison with the poet's use of the thistle in his 1926 poem might prove illuminating in this respect. In <u>A Drunk Man</u>, the initial confrontation of the garrulous protagonist and an intensely physical thistle (Gurly thistle - hic - you canna/Daunton me wi' your shaggy mien ...) takes place in the aptly shifting light of a moonlit hillside. This dramatic situation - enhanced by a strong sense of the direct voice and a colloquial register - is the still centre of the polemical discourse and wide-ranging metaphysical speculation which constitute the poem. The structural consequence of this introductory mise-en-scène is that the reader continually refers back to it in his

reading of a very long, difficult and various poem. The sprawling inebriate and the bristling thistle are memorably and inextricably linked.

And, indeed, MacDiarmid's major symbol is a commanding presence in the entire length of A Drunk Man. A central characteristic of the poem is the manic zest of the thistle as it interrelates continually in a unifying cosmic dance with the supporting cast of symbols. Again, the peculiar physical characteristics of this most versatile of key symbols are skilfully exploited in that its jagged leaves, transcendent rose and unification of both are called upon to support thesis, antithesis and synthesis in the poem.

In Cencrastus, however, no fruitful interraction of protagonist and major symbol is established in the opening pages - nor can it be. There is no way that the Platonic snake can be confined to a local habitation. As Nancy Gish has observed:

> Nowhere in the poem, not even in the opening address to Cencrastus, do we see the serpent or sense its physical presence ...[12]

And, because the major symbol of Cencrastus is not rooted in any kind of experiential reality, it cannot interact at a believable level with the other symbols in the poem. The obvious link with the sea is not made until the poem is almost over; no connection is made with the native birds - the 'goldfinches, waxwings and crossbills' which presumably symbolise the best of the modern Scottish literary tradition. Nor is there a link with the poet's muse in the poem - Athikte. Most inexplicably, however, the serpent does not lend its support to that other major exemplary image in Cencrastus, the Edenic Ur-culture. In the poem, Gaeldom is seen as a model of cultural purity and literary excellence which counters the adulteration of contemporary Scotland. The purity of 'Cencrastus' could surely have been invoked in the cause of

> the auld bards wha kept
> Their bodies still their minds alert and clear
> And tholed nae intermingledons between
> Objects o' sense and images o' mind ... (C.P.1, pp.194-5)

In regard to MacDiarmid's failure to use the serpent in the Celtic cause, Kenneth Buthlay writes:

> ... the snake motif in its more familiar Celtic form cries out to be exploited as an imaginative link between his [MacDiarmid's] metaphysical speculations and his exploration of the Gaelic heritage ...[13]

Perhaps, albeit inadvertently, MacDiarmid gives us a clue as to the reason for the failure of his key symbol in Cencrastus when he writes in the poem:

> ... we're no used to snakes in Scotland here ...
> (C.P.1, p.215)

David Jones, always aware of the importance of the contactual to the creative artist, writes:

> You use the things that are yours to use because they happen to be lying about the place or site or lying within the orbit of your tradition ...[14]

The thistle was lying within the orbit of MacDiarmid's tradition. Not only did it have cultural and emblematic connotations, it was a physical familiar with which he could relate on the easiest of terms. So, with its material presence and cultural immediacy, it was ripe for symbolic and dramatic exploitation in the historical and metahistorical cause. It could, of course, be argued that the Celtic snake was also 'lying about the place'. However, in Cencrastus MacDiarmid does not seem to conceive of the snake in a cultural sense. Although in the Cruikshank letter MacDiarmid refers to his serpent as a 'Gaelic (or Scottish) version' of the snake which is common to other mythologies, there is no dynamic transformation of the symbol in the pages of Cencrastus which might establish it as a specifically Celtic presence in the poem. 'Cencrastus' seems to be far above such sublunary considerations. Consequently, the essence of the serpent continually eludes us - and,

indeed, it eludes the poet himself. Towards the end of his 1930 poem MacDiarmid writes:

I ha'ena seen you haill, Cencrastus, and never may ... (C.P.1, p. 256)

And by this time we are, alas, all too ready to concur.

Having said that 'all words fail to haud' the serpent, MacDiarmid now informs us – with characteristic inconsistency – that it can be 'circumjacked' by a chain of revelationary words:

> ... in your ain guid time you suddenly slip,
> Nae man kens hoo, into the simplest phrase,
> While a' the diction'ry rejoices like
> The hen that saw its ugly ducklin' come
> Safe to the shore again ... (C.P.1, p.182)

The poet's function, presumably, is to supply the ensnaring phrase – the 'omnific word' – since it is he who is the mediator between reality and empirical reason. There is, of course, a certain hubris in the poet's extravagant ambition to 'fix' the life force in a 'formulated phrase' – and the penalty the gods seem to exact is that he should proceed to demonstrate his inability to do so. And certainly language is a major problem in Cencrastus.

MacDiarmid's poem is – perhaps more than most poems of the modern period – a demonstration of the linguistic dilemmas of the poet in a divided culture. The poet clearly despises the 'hauf-English' (English with a Scottish accent) which is the predominant medium in the poem; has abandoned – temporarily at least – the 'datchie sesames and names for nameless things' of Scots; and knows so little Gaelic that its introduction into the poem does little to advance the poetic purpose in any way. There is in the poem an obsessive preoccupation with the pure essence of things, and MacDiarmid obviously finds the blatant adulteration of his expressive medium irksome, inappropriate and inadequate.

To compound matters on the linguistic front there is also, at one point in Cencrastus, an uncharacteristic modernist despair as to the

ability of language to express the world at all:

> The trouble is that words
> Are a' but useless noo
> To span the gulf atween
> The human and the highbrow view
> – Victims at ilka point
> O' optical illusions,
> Brute Nature's limitations
> And inherited confusions ... (C.P.1, p.218)

And, in the modernist fashion, Silence is invoked as an alternative to the hopeless 'fecht wi' words':

> Silence is the only way
> Speech squares aye less wi' fact ... (C.P.1, p.219)

However, unlike the silence at the end of A Drunk Man which is instinct with hope (as the repository of more and better words), the silence in Cencrastus seems to suggest not what cannot as yet be said but what cannot be said at all.

The affirmative tone of the work preceding Cencrastus was – to a great extent – a consequence of MacDiarmid's trust in the ability of language to rise to its expressive function. However, in the 1930 poem, the protagonist is only too painfully aware of the unbridgeable gap which his confusion in relation to his linguistic medium creates between him and the truth of 'Cencrastus' which he aspires to. And his lack of assurance reveals itself in the poem as a whole. A comparison between the soothsaying tongue of the serpent and the poet's own imperfect instrument emerges in the course of Cencrastus. The 'double tongue' of the serpent represents not division but the ultimate synthesis – the quiddity of language which no poet has managed to reproduce:

> The dooble tongue has spoken and been heard.
> What poet has repeated ocht it said?
> There is nae movement in the world like yours ...
> (C.P.1, p.182)

The poet's own 'dooble tongue', however, represents something irredeemably divided in essence:

Curse on my dooble life and dooble tongue
- Guid Scots wi' English a' hamstrung
Speakin' o' Scotland in English words
Like it were Beethoven chirped by birds ...
(C.P.1, p.236)

However, if MacDiarmid does not speak of Scotland in Scottish words in Cencrastus he does - at one point in the poem - imply that Scots is the 'true language' of his thoughts and makes unconvincing noises in regard to its future and his own part in the enterprise:

Scots is a thing o' the Past
Maist folk say: and there's nae
Pittin' back the hands o' the clock
And History nane can undae'
- Can they no'. In the darkness here
My coorse, either way, is fell clear. (C.P.1, p.239)

MacDiarmid's true position, though, in regard to Scots around this period is revealed in letters to William Soutar, a fellow poet of the Scottish Renaissance. In 1931, the poet writes:

> ... I am quite clear that I am not now nor likely to become - whatever potentialities I may have had in the past - the man to ... repopularize Scots ...[15]

His solitary position in the mainstream of Scottish letters is again stressed in a 1932 epistle:

> ... I do feel, that on the whole I have been in regard to Scots a thoroughly bad influence on you and others and ... my own practice in regard to the synthetic business is so purely individual and inimitable that it justifies in my case alone - so far - what in other cases clutters up the verse with unvivified and useless words ...[16]

In the early thirties, therefore, MacDiarmid seems to concede the unlikelihood of the successful re-introduction of Scots into modern Scottish Literature. Although the 'datchie sesames' had succeeded - magnificently - in articulating the poet's own highly individual vision, he had not (as he had hoped) initiated a movement which would have far-reaching effects.

Certainly, the loss of Scots has - in terms of image, texture, tonality, register and unity of form - grievous consequences in Cencrastus. The exuberance and resilience of the Drunk Man and his intoxication by

the power of the Scots Shibboleth have been replaced in much of Cencrastus by a middle-aged angst and a recourse to uninspired assertion rather than spirited and inventive image-making. Harvey Oxenhorn's conclusions in relation to the problem of language in Cencrastus are, characteristically, apt:

> In technical terms, Cencrastus suffers from an inattention to language in general and the loss of Scots in particular. Without the resonant metaphoric language that distinguished preceding work, we lose the free associative mood which this method requires to succeed. As a result, pedantic plod supplants imagination. Instead of being asked to 'look at' we are told 'to circumjack'; instead of a personal 'letter' to Dostoevsky, an announcement that 'Tyutchev was right'. Themes are not discovered in images, but forced upon them ... [17]

Paradoxically, the poem in which MacDiarmid hopes to ensnare the life force in words is one of the least linguistically inventive in the corpus. Clearly, as Anthony Burgess has shrewdly observed, MacDiarmid needs 'the stimulus of strange words'[18] and there are - despite MacDiarmid's Gaelic phrases which we will discuss shortly - too few of these in the 1930 poem. The energising and enabling force which exists for MacDiarmid in the exotic signifier is evident in his most achieved works. The poetry of 1925 and 1926, for instance, boldly proclaims its literariness through the poet's confident use of the Scots idiom and image. And, in Scots Unbound (1934), there is a resurgence of the old exuberant spirit in MacDiarmid's recourse to his aggrandised Scots. Again, in the 1934 poem 'On a Raised Beach', the memorable defamiliarisation of stone - upon which the success of the poem largely depends - is achieved by the poet's employment of synthetic English. However, in Cencrastus MacDiarmid has lost confidence in Scots and has not yet unearthed the lexical riches of 'the recondite elements of the English Vocabulary'.[19] Ironically, then, he faces one of the greatest challenges of his poetic career in a state of uncharacteristic verbal impoverishment.

It would seem that MacDiarmid could not see Scots - with its democratic connotations and 'insistent recognition of the body, the

senses'[20] – as the medium through which the aristocratic purity of Cencrastus could be approached. The poet was seeking an Edenic myth of innocence and renewal and he believed that he had found it in Gaeldom – the Ur-culture of the Scots. Hence, the 'strange words' in Cencrastus are in Gaelic, 'the Shibboleths of infinity'.[21] These words were meant, presumably, to give linguistic support to MacDiarmid's 'Gaelic Idea' which he presents, in the 1930 poem, as a counter to the 'Russian Idea' in A Drunk Man. However – and I shall return to this matter shortly – the Gaelic words are too strange, too few and puzzlingly ill-chosen given the ambitious nature of the poetic purpose.

From Cencrastus onwards, MacDiarmid is obsessed with the idea of the universalisation of the imperatives which motivate his work and this has some bearing on his presentation of the 'Gaelic Idea' (which seeks to link Scottish and wider European interests) in the 1930 poem. We are, in fact, witnessing the beginnings of MacDiarmid's Pan-Celticism which informs some of the later work and which can be seen either as an epic image of potential Celtic solidarity or an instance of the poet's passion for synthesis taken to extreme and, indeed, desperate lengths. The 'Gaelic Idea' is introduced into Cencrastus more than a third of the way through the poem and has unfortunate implications for its structure since, as Kenneth Buthlay has observed, the reader

> is very unlikely to perceive its bearing on the scattered mass of Celtic material and allusions with which the poet confronts him ...[22]

The 'Idea' is not imaged forth but expressed in bald, uninspiring near-prose – and, paradoxically – in English:

> If we turn to Europe and see
> Hoo the emergence of the Russian Idea's
> Broken the balance of the North and South
> And needs a coonter that can only be
> The Gaelic Idea
> To mak' a parallelogram o' forces
> Complete the defense of the West
> And end the English betrayal o' Europe ...
>
> (C.P.1, pp.222-3)

In an essay of the time, MacDiarmid expands on the subject:

> Only in Gaeldom can there be the necessary counter-idea of the Russian Idea - one that does not run wholly counter to it, but supplements, corrects, challenges and qualifies it ... the dictatorship of the proletariat is confronted by the Gaelic commonwealth with its aristocratic culture - the high place it gave to its poets and scholars ...[23]

MacDiarmid's interest in Gaelic actually dates back to the early days of the Scottish Renaissance. Indeed, by 1927 he was claiming that

> ... The Scottish Renaissance movement is even more concerned with the revival of Gaelic than of Scots ...[24]

And, in the same year, the poet urges that

> a return must be made [to Gaeldom] before a foundation can be secured for the creation of major forms either in arts or affairs ...[25]

It is very probable that MacDiarmid's interest in all things Gaelic was heightened by his visit to the Tailltean Games in Dublin around this time. In a letter to George Ogilvie (dated 8.1.28), the poet writes:

> I had a splendid Summer holiday which did me a world of good - over in Ireland as the guest of the Irish Nation at the quinquenniel Tailltean Games. All the younger Irish writers are great friends of mine, and above all, the two older figures - Yeats and A.E. ...[26]

In a characteristically enthusiastic way, MacDiarmid ransacked Irish literature in his growing interest in the Ur-Culture. Daniel Corkery's The Hidden Ireland (1925), Aodh de Blácam's Gaelic Literature Surveyed (1925) and The Gaelic Commonwealth (1923), by Father William Ferris, are among the many sources which underlie MacDiarmid's Gaelic material in the poems of the thirties. And, as usual, the poet takes from these books only those ideas which can advance the obsessive poetic purpose. However, even if - as Douglas Sealy tells us - 'MacDiarmid's acquaintance with Gaelic Literature and History is superficial ...'[27] the poet's forays into Gaeldom presented a fresh cultural and linguistic challenge now that the Scots homeymoon was over. Certainly, by 1929 MacDiarmid was describing Scots as merely 'a half-way house'[28] in the

proposed movement back from the dominant and hated English to the Ur-language.

However, if MacDiarmid the proseman displays a vigorous confidence in the idea of 'Gaeldom Regained', the attitude of MacDiarmid the poet, in this regard, seems to oscillate between despair and presumption. This ambivalence is, as we shall see, evident in Cencrastus and indeed in many of the 'Gaelic' poems of the thirties. In 'In Memoriam: Liam Mac'Ille Iosa', MacDiarmid denounces Scotland's betrayal of its cultural and literary heritage and expresses a passionately dramatic commitment to renewal:

> For what mess of pottage, what Southern filth,
> What lack of intricacy, fineness, impossible achievement,
> Have we bartered this birthright, for what hurdy-gurdy
> Exchanged this incomparable instrument?
> O come, come, come, let us turn to God
> And get rid of this degrading and damnable load,
> So set we can give our spirits free play
> And rise to the height of our form ... (C.P.1, p.415)

In the same poem, however, there is a dawning recognition of the onerous nature of the task of carrying 'the supreme song through':

> Lost world of Gaeldom, further and further away from me,
> How can I follow, Albannach, how reachieve
> The unsearchable masterpiece? (C.P.1, p.415)

And, in 'Lament for the Great Music', there is a realistic and anguished admission of the impossibility of the cultural task:

> I am companioned by an irrecoverable past ...
> (C.P.1, p.476)

Yet in 1943 the poet is again urging a return to the classical Gaelic past and linking such a return to the purpose which underlies the entire corpus - the extension of human consciousness:

> ... we must return
> To the ancient classical Gaelic poets. For in them
> The inestimable treasure is wholly in contact
> With the immense surface of the unconscious. That is how
> They can be of service to us now - that is how
> They were never more important than they are today ...
> (C.P.1, p.664)

But how far, in fact, does MacDiarmid's introduction of Gaelic phrases into Cencrastus advance the poetic purpose of the 1930 poem? The positive image of the vision of 'Gaeldom Regained' is actually expressed in 'hauf-English':

> The Gaelic sun swings up again
> And to itself doth draw
> A' kindlin' things, while a' the lave
> Like Rook is blawn awa' ... (C.P.1, p.207)

And the exemplary image of 'the islands' as a little pocket of pre-Renaissance Europe in which the Gaelic spirit has miraculously survived is presented in the dominant English tongue:

> ... the islands
> Where the wells are undefiled
> And folk sing as their fathers sang
> Before Christ was a child ... (C.P.1, p.208)

Paradoxically, however, the instances of the Ur-language which MacDiarmid employs in Cencrastus are in the nature of mournful phrases which seem to run counter to poetic aspirations. In previous works, 'characters' and a myriad selves are employed to promote the poetic purpose. However, when MacDiarmid assumes the role of a 'Bard of Alba', it is not to celebrate a vision of 'Gaeldom Regained' but to lament loved things lost beyond all recovery. Thus, the bard sings of 'Na h-eachta do chuaidh' (the good that is gone) and reiterates the despairing cry of Mahon O'Heffernan as regards the decay of the bardic art: 'Ceist cia chinneochadh dan?' (who would desire a poem?). Another Gaelic phrase from Eochy O'Hosey comments satirically on the simpler poetry which has replaced the more intellectual Gaelic forms: 'Ionmolta malairt bhisigh' (a change for the better deserves praise). The most powerful and memorable image of 'a Bard of Alba', however, is not one of regeneration but of putrefaction: it is that of 'Everyman' as 'a priompallán' - a dung beetle living off dead matter.

Again, Gaelic place names, full of elegiac significance, are used in such a way as to reinforce the general despair as regards the

restoration of Gaelic forms. Thus, the beautiful 'Shaddows that feed on the licht' is sung from the 'Ruigh Bristidh Cridhe' (The Sheiling of the Broken Heart) and the loveliest of the 'twenty sangs' presented at the end of the poem, 'North of the Tweed', is intoned from 'On Rudha nam Marbh' (The Point of the Dead).

As for the reader - he is left (with very little assistance from the poet by way of notes) to make what he can of the Gaelic content of Cencrastus. In relation to MacDiarmid's the 'Gaelic Idea', Douglas Sealy writes:

> MacDiarmid has shown the way, the onus is on the reader to read the classical Gaelic poets and for that the Gaelic language is a sine qua non.[29]

It is unlikely, however, that such advice would be acted upon by those with a non-Celtic background. So if the consequences of MacDiarmid's employment of dense Scots is - on the whole - a triumphant lucidity, the result of his use of terms from the Ur-language is, for the average reader, frustrating mystification. Anne Edwards Boutelle sums up the attitude of perhaps the majority of readers to the Gaelic content of Cencrastus:

> Unless one has been a student of Celtic or has had a Gaelic background, one does not know how to pronounce the line, let alone find its meaning. One cannot recognize a noun, an adjective, a verb or even a participle. One backs away, both humbled and infuriated by MacDiarmid's display of knowledge. Few clues lead into these lines. They remain a mystery, both tantalizing and annoying. One line of Gaelic appears more esoteric than an entire lyric in Lallans.[30]

And even if one does understand the Gaelic phrases one can find no links whatever between their purely local connotations and the internationalism of the 'Gaelic Idea'. The Gaelic words and the bald presentation of the 'Gaelic Idea' are separated not only physically but conceptually in the pages of Cencrastus. And the major symbol of the poem is clearly not concerned with either.

It is, perhaps, not so much what Anne Edwards Boutelle refers to as

MacDiarmid's 'display of knowledge' in regard to Gaelic which should concern the readers of Cencrastus but indications of the poet's considerable limitations in regard to the Ur-language. It is arguable that what the poet is really lamenting in his 1930 poem is not so much the irrecoverability of Gaelic forms but his own inability to undertake the onerous task. And, again, it is a problem of language. Gaelic may well be 'an incomparable instrument' in the hands of a Sorley MacLean, but MacDiarmid's limited knowledge of the language could not provide the dramatic syntax which the poet requires for his ambitious purposes. It is, in the end, not 'Cencrastus' who is 'circumjacked' but the poet himself within the disabling limits of his own linguistic resources. And no one is more aware of this fact than the frustrated MacDiarmid himself:

> O wad at least my yokel words
> Some Gaelic strain had kept
> As in Othello's sobs the oaths
> O' Thames, no' Venice, leapt,
> And aye in puir Doll Tearsheet's shift
> The Queen o' Egypt stept.
>
> The modest daisy like the Rose
> O' a' the Warld repetalled
> - Fain through Burns' clay MacMhaighstir's fire
> To glint within me ettled.
> It stirred, alas, but couldna kyth,
> Prood, elegant and mettled. (C.P.1, p.225)

The main emphasis in Cencrastus, however, is not perhaps on the 'irrecoverable past' but on the unaccommodating present. The Scotsman does not (as predicted in the 1926 letter to Ogilvie) cast off the 'bur o' the world' - indeed, in no other volume in the corpus is one so aware of the crush of the quotidian on the aspiring spirit. The road to 'Cencrastus' is strewn with the impedimenta of the poet's everyday life: the irksome demands of economic necessity; the 'accursed drudgery' of his job 'chroniclin' the toon's sma' beer'; the time-consuming needs of 'the clung-kite faimly'; the complacency and 'silly sociabilities' of 'maist folk'; the comparative popularity and galling prosperity of the loathed purveyors of 'Hokum'. The poet, embittered by a feeling of

rejection and isolation, casts a jaundiced eye on Scotland who remains the same, despite his poetic and political efforts on her behalf:

> A country wi' nae culture o' its ain
> Nae religion, that's contributed nocht
> To human thocht: and hates and fears
> Ideas as nae ither country does
> For centuries on end ... (C.P.1, p.204)

The onerous demands of the local and temporal are compounded by the poet's uncharacteristic lack of confidence in his own ability to transform the world. In the early lyrics in Scots and A Drunk Man, MacDiarmid is 'assured of certain certainties': he has a romantic confidence in the ability of the poet to affect a change in society; he views cultural chaos not with despair but with an eye to the political and philosophic possibilities inherent in it; and he has a confidence in the ability of language - and particularly of Scots - to express the world.

In Cencrastus, however, there is no assured expectation that 'earth's howlin' mobs' will respond to the gospel of 'the sang' - the songbird of Cencrastus is not the 'gorlin' who is confident of 'settin' the heavens alunt' but the lone 'mavis of Pabal' who has no such high hopes for the future; cultural chaos is not instinct with hope, but despair; and even the poet's 'Queen', language, deserts him in his hour of direst need.

The Messianism of A Drunk Man - which contributes to the affirmative vision of that poem and provides memorable kinaesthetic images of the Drunk Man 'growing' into God - is notably absent from Cencrastus. The protagonist clearly does not see himself as a potentially triumphant Saviour taking over where a fickle God has left off - but, at best, as a gènius embodying the aims of history rather than determining it, and, at worst, as an ineffectual poseur without illümination or direction:

> Noo in synoptic lines
> A Scot becomes a God
> - A God in Murray tartan
> To whom nae star's abroad ... (C.P.1, p.246)

It is, of course, impossible to estimate the extent to which incidents in the poet's biography impinge on a work in progress. Perhaps, though, such incidents should at least be taken into account in the course of a general analysis. Certainly, for MacDiarmid, the years between the publication of A Drunk Man (1926) and Cencrastus (1930) were years of hectic public activity and private tragedy. In the interim, MacDiarmid had been appointed Justice of the Peace (1926); had founded the Scottish Centre of PEN (1927); had become a founder member of the National Party of Scotland (1928); and had moved to London to edit the short-lived Radio Magazine, Vox (1929). These years also saw the birth of the poet's son, Walter (1929), and the traumatic break-up with his wife, Peggy, who refused to accompany MacDiarmid when he moved to Liverpool to take up a position as a public relations officer (1930). The overworked, probably underpaid and emotionally stressed poet also suffered a quite serious accident during his stay in London. In a letter to Ogilvie (dated 6th Jan. 1930) MacDiarmid writes:

> My accident was a serious one and in fact I had an almost miraculous escape from death. I was thrown off a double decker motor bus and landed on my head sustaining severe concussion of the skull ...[31]

The poet was also, at this time, feeling rejected, isolated and undervalued by the Scottish public and literati alike. The acclaim which he had expected to follow in the wake of the publication of A Drunk Man did not materialise:

> ... I set out to give Scotland a poem, perfectly modern in psychology, which could only be compared in the whole length of Scots literature with 'Tam o' Shanter' and Dunbar's 'Seven Deidly Sins'. And I felt that I had done it by the time I finished ... the lack of interest in the book on the part of the public and the great majority of reviewers is dulling ...[32]

Although MacDiarmid's confidence in his ability to fulfil his evolutionary rôle seemed to decrease in the early thirties, his desire to be acknowledged as a cultural hero was becoming increasingly urgent.

However, what the poet saw as Scotland's persistent collusion in its own intellectual limitation and its indifference to his plans for cultural regeneration seemed to indicate that he would never be seen in this heroic light. The poet's dejection, as regards the seeming impossibility of the task he had undertaken, is expressed in the beautiful 'Lourd on my hert' - one of those moments of incandescence in Cencrastus which confirm MacDiarmid's still formidable mastery of the lyric cry. The ponderous initial trochée sets the mood of a poem in which Scotland is perceived as determinedly skulking in the shadows of the world. The preponderance of broad vowels helps to convey the heaviness of heart with which the poet regards his complacent homeland. A sure, rhythmic touch (reminiscent of the early lyrics in Scots) and a melancholy alliterative and assonantal music prevail throughout. And in the wintry gloom of Scotland the idea of hope is not imaged forth in terms of light but of 'a lichter shadow than the neist'

Lourd on my hert as winter lies
The state that Scotland's in the day.
Spring to the North has aye come slow
But noo dour winter's like to stay
        For guid,
        And no' for guid!

O wae's me on the weary days
When it is scarce grey licht at noon;
It maun be a' the stupid folk
Diffusin' their dullness roon and roon
        Like soot,
        That keeps the sunlicht oot.

Nae wonder if I think I see
A lichter shadow than the neist
I'm fain to cry: 'The dawn, the dawn!
I see it brakin' in the East.'
        But ah
        - It's juist mair snaw!   (C.P.1, pp.204-5)

MacDiarmid's attempts to 'assume the burden o' his people's doom' may seem admirable on the face of it - yet the actual nature of the poet's cultural heroism needs careful consideration. Douglas Dunn poses some interesting questions in this regard.

> Cultural heroism was a consequence of MacDiarmid's beliefs and practices. To be generally acknowledged as a hero of that culture is another matter. What culture? Who defined it? MacDiarmid did. To what extent then is he a hero of his own definitions? How true are these definitions when tested against reality? Answering that leads to a discovery that his vision is inconvenient. That is it tries to be reality, not to accommodate itself to it ... [33]

It is, perhaps, in Cencrastus that we are most aware of the 'inconvenience' of the MacDiarmid vision - and certainly that inconvenience is highlighted by the poet's approach to his material. In the early lyrics in Scots, MacDiarmid peoples his world with accommodating 'others' as he attempts to domesticate the cosmos to human need. These 'characters' are created to reinforce aspects of the poetic vision and their 'wills' coincide with the poet's own. Again, the myriad selves of A Drunk Man are equally accommodating - they may have varying rôles, but they come together in whole-hearted support of poetic pre-occupations. The world of these poems is not the real world but a construct - a matter of artistic selection and appropriately dramatic utterance.

However, in Cencrastus MacDiarmid the public man (and by now he is very much the public man, anxious to influence matters at a national level) attempts to confront the unruly stuff of life without the support of the transmogrifying selves. It is a world therefore of unaccommodating 'others' - others who are stubbornly out-of-step with poetic pre-occupations. There is now an irreconcilable clash of realities - the Platonic reality of 'Cencrastus' and the sublunary reality of contemporary Scotland. And, in the absence of any dynamic transformations of symbol or self, the protagonist's struggle to articulate the vision becomes impossible and has to be abandoned. The serpent has slipped from his grasp (occasioning the repeated lament 'Oh I hae tint ye') - and so has any chance to unify the disparate elements of his poem. The poet is now trapped in an uncongenial here and now with clogging disabling matter and all those 'others' who frustrate his purposes and thwart his growth:

'maist folk'; the 'apprentice deid'; 'Fower million cretins'; demanding 'wife and weans'; a 'coof' of a boss and an unsympathetic system. The tonality of the poem now oscillates between the denunciatory and the elegiac as MacDiarmid apportions blame and laments lost possibilities. The consequence in structural terms is that all things local and temporal are foregrounded to an undesirable degree at the very heart of a poem which sets out to be an attempted communion with the transcendent.

'Frae Anither Window in Thrums', is a kind of condensation of the concerns of the poem as a whole and reflects its disconcerting mixture of the drab and the golden. There is an implied criticism of contemporary Scots literature in the title itself - Nancy Gish enlightens us as to its source:

> The title is an ironic reference to J.M. Barrie's A Window in Thrums, a heavily sentimental, sticky sweet novel portraying an illusionary Scotland of homely rural virtues. The window at issue is in the kitchen of 'the house on the brae'. Jess, a cripple who sits by it every day, sewing, baking, and stirring porridge, insists despite her inability to walk that she'had a terrible lot to be thankful for' ... [34]

However, MacDiarmid's window is no romantic magic casement opening on to consolatory or liberating possibilities. It is - in accordance with the poet's intellectualism and regard for truth - the point at which 'a' life's fictions disappear'. At a metaphysical level, the window is a visual manifestation of the conceptual image which underlies the MacDiarmid corpus - the limitations of human consciousness, or 'dumfooner'd thocht'. From his window on the world, man has only a frustrating 'keethin' sicht o' a' there is'. At a more immediate level, the window frames the debilitating limits within which the protagonist struggles with the artistic and cultural rôle in an uncaring Scotland.

Characteristically - in this volume of 'shaddows', faint reflections, 'muckle grey mists' and things dimly apprehended - the attempted

confrontation of time and eternity in 'Frae Anither Window in Thrums' takes place in the 'hauf-licht'. The first three verses of the poem stand out as an instance of the finer things in Cencrastus - a crystallisation of the poet's inability to enclose the serpent in the poem as a whole. In tightly controlled visual and conceptual images and appropriate literary allusion, the protagonist is presented as trapped in time and limited to the slight but compelling perspective of 'the winnock'. However, the malcontent journalist's clock-watching takes on metaphysical connotations as in a struggle with the shadow of 'Cencrastus' light seems to probe him and he the light. Reality goams (stares stupidly) or glowers at the wan, ensnared poet. Things flicker ('skimmer'), fade and then assume a deadly unresponsive fixedness as 'stelled een' are locked in a mesmeric image of mutual unseeing. Protagonist and serpent remain at an unreachable remove from one another:

> Here in the hauf licht waitin' til the clock
> Chops: while the winnock
> Hauds me as a serpent hauds a rabbit
> Afore it's time to grab it
> - A serpent faded to a shadow
> In the stelled een its een ha'e haud o'
>
> Here in the daurk, while like a frozen
> Scurl on Life's plumm the lozen
> Skimmers - or goams in upon me
> Wan as Dostoevski
> Glowered through a wudden dream to find
> Stavrogin in the corners o' his mind,
>
> - Or I haud it, a 'prentice snake, and gar
> Heaven dwine to a haunfu' haar
> Or am like cheengeless deeps aneth
> Tho' ice or sunshine, life or death,
> Chequer the tap; or like Stavrogin
> Joukin' his author wi' a still subtler grin ...
>
> (C.P.1, pp.230-31)

Far from 'joukin' his author', however, the protagonist cannot sustain the effort of communion with the serpent, and, apart from the occasional lyrical interlude, the poem collapses into the desultory and discursive.

In Cencrastus, there is much recurring metaphysical speculation -

not notably different in kind to that of A Drunk Man. The major part of this 'philosophic' discussion revolves around the perennial theme - the desperate need for growth in human awareness and the poet's awesome responsibility in this regard. And the mysticism of Soloviev is again apparent in the idea of matter itself becoming conscious.

> But a' the stream o' consciousness
> In maitter as in a tunnel lost
> 'll yet win free and jaw
> Owre the warld's edge tost
> Like a gowden waterfall
> Naething can backward turn,
> Nor spin in a vicious roond
> Like yon apodeictic burn. (C.P.1, p.219)

One feels, perhaps, that this latter idea is of particular significance in Cencrastus given the poet's disenchantment with and, possibly, fear of substance at this time. By becoming conscious, matter would cease to be that alien and threatening 'other' and could more easily be domesticated to human need. There is also in Cencrastus - as is common in the corpus as a whole - much desultory musing on the unique angst of the artist in regard to his 'fricative work'.

A disproportionate amount of the poet's time, though - given the supposedly visionary nature of the poem as a whole - is devoted to sweeping condemnations of those whom he perceives as standing in his own or in Scotland's light. These diatribes are neither 'sangs' nor 'sermons' since the protagonist is not the 'Dionysus' of A Drunk Man attempting to fire his complacent fellows with his own enthusiasm - nor yet the 'Calvin' of that poem exhorting all Scots to unremitting labour and self-abnegation in the interests of 'election'. The denunciations of the 1930 poem are sometimes virulent personal attacks. But more often, perhaps, they are the dispirited rumblings of the malcontent as the Christ-like figure of the 1926 poem dwindles into unaccommodated man crushed by the dead weight of the determinedly uncommitted.

And what Alan Bold aptly describes as MacDiarmid's 'hitlist' is

an extensive one.[35] The Scottish Universities (who provide 'blin' leadership o' the less blin'); the U.P. Kirk; the representatives of 'Whistlebinkie' and 'Kailyard' literature; the poet's boss at The Montrose Review; Harry Lauder; and, predictably, the invasive English Literary tradition and dominant culture are all subjected to MacDiarmid's bitter criticism. Indeed, the whole world is in the dock for being antipathetic to MacDiarmidian aspirations. The world, after all, must accommodate itself to the poet - not he to it:

> 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, the theme o' my sang ...
> (C.P.1, p.285)

At a more personal level, MacDiarmid's boss on The Montrose Review bears the brunt of the poet's many frustrations when he is singled out as principal representative of a corrupt system. At least in the dramatisation of A Drunk Man this role was allotted to the complacent fictional duo, Cruivie and Gilsanquhar:

> Curse on the system that can gie
> A coof like this control o' me
> - No' that he's in the least bit waur,
> Or better, than ither bosses are -
> And on the fate that gars a poet
> Toady to find a way to show it!
>
> Curse his new hoose, his business, his cigar,
> His wireless set, and motor car
> Alsatian, gauntlet gloves, plus fours and wife,
> - A'thing included in his life;
> And, abune a', his herty laughter,
> And - if he has yin - his hereafter. (C.P.1, p.235)

There is, of course, a humorous side to the headlong and wholehearted catalogue of maledictions in the latter verse. And the emphatic enumeration of the capitalist's belongings (including, apparently, his *wife*) is apt. However, although the vigorous flood of invective has some of the characteristics of traditional Scottish 'flyting', taken in its context it lacks the essential playfulness of that genre - the foregrounding of polemical language for its own sake. We have an

uneasy feeling that what underlies MacDiarmid's attack on the boss is not so much the nature of the man himself but the poet's resentment of the trivia with which he must concern himself in his everyday work:

> Pars aboot meetins, weddins, sermon a'
> The crude events o' life-in-the-raw ... (C.P.1, p.234)

And not least of the unaccommodating others who impede this particular pilgrim's progress is the family on whose behalf the 'accursed drudgery' is undertaken. The poet's family, Scotland, and both a crucified and blithely unburdened Christ are all brought together in an expression of the poet's frustrations and despair:

> Thrang o' ideas that like fairy gowd
> 'll leave me the 'Review' reporter still
> Waukenin' to my clung-kite faimly on a hill
> O' useless croftin' whaur naething's growed
> But Daith, sin Christ for an idea died
> On a gey similar but less heich hillside.
> Ech, weel for Christ: for he was never wed
> And had nae weans clamourin' to be fed! (C.P.1, p.237)

Perhaps the main source of MacDiarmid's bitterness in Cencrastus, however, is the lack of recognition from the Scottish public and Literati alike. He who has taken on the onerous task of cultural regeneration through an intellectual and internationally orientated verse lives in dire poverty while the writers of 'pawky' doggerel prosper:

> Thoosands o' writers wi' nae mair brains
> In their heads than I've in my pinkie
> Are rowin' in wealth while I toil for a dole
> - Hoo'sthat accoontit for, thinkee ? (C.P.1, p.252)

And certainly one of the better things in Cencrastus is the bitterly mimetic 'Hokum' in which MacDiarmid ridicules the cheap emotions and facile pandering to popular tastes of the writers of 'pawky', 'hamespun' but highly profitable verse. The preponderance of insistent internal rhyme, mocking nursery rhythms and unsubtle assonantal music all have their own message for the unfortunate poets in question:

> Oh, it's easy, easy accoontit for, fegs.
> I canna gie the folk hokum.
> I can poke 'em and shock 'em and mock 'em,
> But the a'ething needfu' is hokum!
> It pits a'thing else on its legs.

Losh! They'd ha' put me a brass plate up
In Langholm Academy,
And asked me to tak' the chair
At mony a London Scots spree.
They'd a'gien me my portrait in oils
By Henry Kerr, and the LL.D.,
And my wife and weans'ud been as weel aff
As gin I'd been a dominie,

If I'd only had hokum, hokum,
Juist a wee thing common hokum!

A seat on the Bank o' Scotland buird,
And a public for my poetry, ...

If I'd only had hokum, hokum,
A modicum o' hokum! (C.P.1, pp.252-3)

However, underlying the Kailyard's sentimental effusions and false representations of the Scottish psyche is the dominant English culture - the root cause of the sorry state of Scottish Literature. In a fine and spirited satire which, arguably, does more in the Scottish cause than the innumerable tedious expressions in prose of MacDiarmid's anglophobia, the poet considers the many 'benedictions' enjoyed by his homeland in the wake of the fateful Act of Union. The exuberant verses which stand out in the low-keyed mass of Cencrastus have jaunty rhythms and facile rhymes which are in themselves ironic comments on the actual irreparable harm done to the native culture:

Tell me the auld, auld story
O'hoo the Union brocht
Puir Scotland into being
As a country worth a thocht.
England, frae whom a' blessings flow
What could we dae withoot ye?
Then dinna threip it doon oor throats
As gin we e'er could doot ye!
My feelings lang wi' gratitude
Ha'e been sae sairly harrowed
That dod! I think it's time
The claith was owre the parrot! (C.P.1, p.192)

The poem continues with a clever exposition of the sophism by which a self-seeking England would notably enrich herself but reduce the Scot to an abject Harry Lauder type caricature:

Tell me o' Scottish enterprise
And canniness and thrift,
And hoo we're baith less Scots and mair
Than ever under George the Fifth,
And hoo to'wider interests'
Oor ain we sacrifice
And yet tine naething by it
As aye the parrot cries.
    Syne gie's a chance to think it oot
    Aince we're a' weel awaur o't,
    For, losh, I think it's time
    The claith was owre the parrot! (C.P.1, p.193)

The main thrust of 'The Parrot Cry', however, concerns the need to silence the endlessly 'yatterin' beak' of the English Literary Tradition - 'the painted foreigner' - so that, in accordance with the poet's campaign for cultural renewal, the sweet song of the 'native Scottish bird' can be heard in the land. The poem ends with a violent revolutionary image of the fate of the invasive parrot should it continue to dominate the Scottish literary scene:

It's possible that Scotland yet
May hear its ain voice speak
If only we can silence
This endless-yatterin' beak.
The blessing wi' the black
Selvedge is the clout!
It's silenced Scotland lang eneuch,
Gi'e England turn aboot,
    For the puir bird needs its rest -
    Wha else 'll be the waur o't?
    And it's lang past the time
    The claith was owre the parrot!

And gin that disna dae, lads,
We e'en maun draw its neck
And heist its body on a stick
A' ither pests to check.
I'd raither keep't alive, and whiles
Let bairns keek in and hear
What the Balliol accent used to be
Frae the Predominant Pairtner here!
    - But save to please the bairns
    I'd absolutely bar it
    For fegs, it's aye high time
    The claith was owre the parrot! ... (C.P.1, p.194)

However the exuberant defiance of 'The Parrot Cry' is more characteristic of A Drunk Man than Cencrastus. In general, the poet's bitterness and sense of rejection reveals itself not so much in righteous indignation as in the adoption of an isolationist and elitest stance.

And the protagonist's attitude is not reserved for the despised popular poets who 'open sales of work' but is all too obvious in the references to mankind in general:

> The way maist men think
> And feel's beneath contempt ...

The poet can also resort to the peevish tones of a sulky child defying parental authority, as when he disclaims any interest in the trivial pursuits of a wide section of society:

> No '.
> I dinna prefer whippets
> Or a Rotary Club
> Or Kirk Work
> Or 'the Picters'
> Or onything at a'
> To what you ca'
> 'Arid intellectual exercises'. (C.P.1, p.229)

Such castigations of 'maist Folk' are, of course, also characteristic of A Drunk Man. But there is, in that poem, a strong sense of the passionate determination of the poet to carry the complacent Scot along *with* him - to 'whummle' him in the 'nether deeps' of MacDiarmid's own profound world view. There is a kind of impatient camaraderie - the poet may be 'special' but he is a special *Scot*. There is no such reformatory zeal in Cencrastus - if the Scot is not with MacDiarmid, he is against him. There are no efforts to persuade - just out-of-hand condemnations:

> ... We might as weel grieve owre
> Beasts no' bein' able to read, and seek to teach,
> As waste the energies that can address
> Their mental betters on the mass o' men.
> Aye, lower oor standards a fraction o' an inch
> To reach a' men instead o' ane - or nane!
> (C.P.1, p.229)

In most cases of MacDiarmid's contemptuous references to the mindlessness of the majority of men, the impression one is left with is that of a malcontent muttering peevishly *ad solem*. It is arguable that MacDiarmid's lone stance in Cencrastus is yet another unfortunate consequence of the loss of Scots at this time. In a very real sense,

Scots legitimated the poet's cultural campaign and gave him both the assurance and the humility to be not just for but of the people. Neil Corcoran makes an invaluable point about MacDiarmid's abandonment of Scots, and its implications for the corpus as a whole, when he writes:

> ... when MacDiarmid abandoned Scots, he was also abandoning things necessary to his own creativity. Scots socialized him: the philological attentiveness was a humbling of himself before the strategies of his campaign, a gesture instinct with social and cultural value.[36]

If, in Cencrastus, the protagonist's attitude to his fellows is, on the whole, denunciatory, his attitude to the muse is elegiac. Like Gaeldom, the poet's richly creative past (a past which owed so much to the 'datchie sesames') is seen as 'irrecoverable'. Loved things are lost beyond all recovery. The entire MacDiarmid corpus is, in the final analysis, 'about' the creative process itself. And there is a spasmodic intervention of the authorial voice to comment on his own progress. The nature of these interjections in Cencrastus reveals the protagonist's lack of assurance in his own ability to convey the poetic purpose:

> The brilliance o' form nae langer shines
> Upon the subject-maitter o' my poem
> I've let owre muckle in 't no' needfu' to
> The licht that su'd ha'e been my a'e concern ...
> (C.P.1, p.254)

The poetic past and present are continually seen in terms of pure light and defilement. And darkness continually triumphs over the 'licht' which is the poet's 'a'e concern'. Substance is no longer seen as enabling but as a dead weight on the protagonist's spirit:

> I wha aince in Heaven's height
> Gethered to me a' the licht
> Can nae mair reply to fire,
> 'Neth deid leafs buriet in the mire.
> Sib to dewdrop, rainbow, ocean,
> No' for me their hues and motion.
> This foul clay has filed me till
> It's no' to ken I'm water still. (C.P.1, p.234)

The aspiring poet struggles with the chains of the past and the clutch of clogging, disabling matter, but the past will not go away, nor

will matter be subjected to the protagonist's will. Consequently, 'Cencrastus' remains at an unreachable and tantalising remove from MacDiarmid's everyday world:

> Shaddows that feed on the licht for aye
> Hauntin' the waters that canna win free,
> The wild burn loups but you haud it fast
> As the hands o' the past haud me.
>
> A burn may dream o' a warld aince mair
> O' water and licht and nocht beside,
> But has aye as faur to gang as it's gane,
> And a burn in the dark roots' clutch 'll bide
>
> Tint in a windhaw or siller swirl
> Bigger and blacker the roots strike back,
> As whiles through a high-falutin' o' love
> I hear my body mockin' my talk ... (C.P.1, pp.190-1)

The last lines of this lyric are reminiscent of A Drunk Man. However, in the 1926 poem the insistent demands of the flesh are the subject not only of Puritan admonitions but of a balancing, life-affirming, bawdy irreverence. In Cencrastus, in accordance with the Platonic poetic purpose, MacDiarmid, the 'ornate fashioner of bawdy' (it is Anthony Conran's memorable phrase), is entirely absent.[37] Matter is never a cause for joy - it determinedly maims and enslaves ...

In Cencrastus, the poet's engagements with his muse reveal the general sense of insecurity which underlies the 1930 poem. The protagonist's attitude to the visitation of the muse in the early lyrics in Scots is breathlessly child-like and exultant:

> She's seen me - she's seen me - an' straucht
> Loupit clean on the quick o' my hert. (C.P.1, p.24)

And the 'gorlin' is exuberantly assured as regards his ability to produce the 'slee and sliggy sang' which would transform the world. Again, in A Drunk Man, the Dionysian protagonist is in constant confident touch with the inspirational springs of the 'sang':

> But inka enenin' fey and fremt
> (Is it a dream nae wauk'nin' proves?)
> As to a trystin'-place undreamt,
> A silken leddy darkly moves.
> ....
> My soul stores up this wealth unspent,
> The key is safe and nane's but mine ... (C.P.1, pp.88-9)

In Cencrastus, however, the muse is not the least of the unaccommodating others who frustrate poetic aspirations. She is no longer seen sharp and clear with expectant eyes. Her form is only very dimly apprehended; her voice 'faint' and far-away. The poet's invocation of his muse, in the form of Athikte (the sweet dancer of Valéry's L'Ame et la Danse (1921) who achieves transcendence through her dance) provides a lyrical interlude of astonishing beauty. Paradoxically, in the very act of singing lost possibilities MacDiarmid regains them. The musicality, incomparable tenderness, delicate resonances, subtle rhythms and unique atmospheric quality of the early lyrics in Scots are all here:

> Athitkte I dreamt that you were here
> Lyin' by me like a wumman in the daurk.
> I heard the breathin' o' the seven seas
> Faint as the matins o' a licht-lost lark,
> – Or was it my ain happy hert that passed
> My hearin', and was tint in sleep at last ...
> Athikte, I thocht I kent I didna ken
> Which o's was you and which me, then.
> The haill warld pillowed on my shouder, licht,
> As gin I'd been the sun by nicht.
>
> Athikte I dreamt that you were here
> But I am as a man wha's love is deid.
> She comes in a' her beauty to his bed
> But when he wauks, the toom nicht's there instead
> Sae a' the poet's moods I hae
> Look in the cruel licht o' day
> As silly as an effort to
> Cuddle a ghaist my airms gang through.
> And ilka sang is like a moon
> That hings, a bonny aught, at noon ... (C.P.1, p.238)

However, like the poet himself, Athikte does not achieve transcendence and stand in the presence of 'Cencrastus' – but is 'buriet in the mire' of the sublunary world:

> ... even the art o' M'Diarmid
> Leaves her a connached mermaid. (C.P.1, p. 233)

And the poetic engagement with the Platonic muse of Aodhagán Ó Rathaille's aisling – the 'Brightness o' brightness' – occasions not exultation but expressions of doubt as to the authenticity of MacDiarmid's own

creativity:

> ... But tho' I'm blinded in her licht
> The hardy doot's still rife
> That aiblins I am sair beginked
> Thro' sma' experience o' life,
> And favoured here wi' nae King's dochter,
> But juist ... a minister's rinawa wife ...
>
> (C.P.1, p.226)

Unlike A Drunk Man, there is no flesh and blood muse in Cencrastus. With the departure of Dionysus from the MacDiarmid poetic (an impoverishment which is, perhaps, yet another consequence of the abandonment of Scots) sex becomes not a means of spiritual revelation nor an enriching re-establishment of contact with our primordial roots, but one of the 'hauf way stages' which would have no relevance in the poet's 'brave new world'. Woman does, however, inspire one moment of elegiac tenderness in 'North of the Tweed' - the loveliest of the 'twenty sangs' which the poet presents at the conclusion of Cencrastus (presumably as an alternative to the prevailing 'Hokum'):

> And hoo should I forget the Langfall
> On mornings when the hines were ripe but een
> Ahint the glintin' leafs were brichter still
> Than sunned dew on them, lips reider than the fruit,
> And I filled baith my basket and my hert
> Mony and mony a time?
>
> (C.P.1, p.271)

For the most part, however, there is a decided disenchantment as regards the sexual connection. The 'breists like stars and limbs like willow wands' have not retained the inspirational or consolatory magic which was attributed to them in A Drunk Man. Woman, like almost everything in Cencrastus except the immaculate vision, is irredeemably flawed. These lines - again from 'North of the Tweed' - are revealing, and, certainly, memorable for their exquisite use of stress:

> And even your een, beloved, and your hair
> Are like the barley and the sea and Heaven
> That flaw and fail and are defeated by
> The blind turns o' chance.
>
> (C.P.1, p.270)

If, in Cencrastus, the poet discovers that the past is irrecoverable and the present unaccommodating, he also finds that the future - which

had at one time seemed so assured - is indeterminable. And the recognition that he can no longer - single handedly - deliver the millennium, gift-wrapped, to the waiting world is reflected in MacDiarmid's subsequent work. It is now the 'Unconscious goal of history' rather than the 'beautiful violent will' of the poet, or his conscious efforts in the evolutionary cause, which determines the nature and course of human destiny. The poet's extravagant ambitions and the inglorious lives of 'maist men' will be used by history to further its own ends:

> Sae History mak's the ambitions o' great men
> Means to ends greater than themsels could ken,
> - Greater and ither - and mass ignorance yields,
> Like corruption o' vegetation in fallow fields,
> The conditions o' richer increase ... (C.P.1, p.287)

And now, too, the poet's individual 'sang' dwindles to a momentary thread of sound in the context of the age-long, muffled chant of cosmic development:

> Enclosed in silence, Earth's sang, unhurriet
> Dwines through the endless stages it needs
> As 'twere the kind o' life Daith leads
> In the deid aince they are buriet ... (C.P.1, p.232)

However, although in general there is a sober recognition of the pettiness of the poet's own life-span in the context of the time-scale in which evolutionary change actually occurs, there is also a reluctance to relinquish the visionary future. The poet's craving for some return - in his own life time - for the expense of spirit in the cause of progress results in a desperate longing to speed up the process of change:

> Shairly we metaphysical Scots can play
> A pairt in this great enterprise even yet
> - A pairt that aiblins 'll mak' up and mair
> In twa-three years for a' we've left undune
> For centuries ... (C.P.1, p.222)

The Keatsian fear of all that may be 'left undone' after the poet's death possibly motivated the inclusion in Cencrastus of the beautifully-achieved adaptation of Rilke's 'Requiem for Paula Modersohn-Becker'.

The rhythmically-assured and gracefully sustained elegy is in an elegant English which gives the lie to any suggestion that MacDiarmid, like Burns, cannot write well in that medium. The speaker in the elegy speculates on the dead woman's seeming non-acceptance of her transmission to a spiritual plane:

> I have been frequently astonished, letting go
> My dead at last, to see them so at home
> In death, so unexpectedly at rights,
> So in their element that in a trice
> 'Twas ill to fathom they had ever lived ...
> You only, you come back, and seem to try
> To come in touch with something that will ring
> Out suddenly, and show that you are here ...
> (C.P.1, p.197)

However, in this elegant inquisition which concerns the reason for the woman's unease in Eternity there is, surely, an adumbration of the poet's own existential angst:

> What can I do for you? Is something, left
> Behind you inadvertently, crying
> Incessantly to find where you have gone
> And vainly craving to be after you?
> Where is it? Must I seek it in some part
> Of life you never knew you had at all -
> And failed to reckon with before you died? ...
> (C.P.1, p.198)

And again, in these lines, it is not just the untimely demise of Paula Modesohn-Becker that the poet mourns, but the possible non-fulfilment of his own dearest aspirations:

> ... and all
> You wanted was a long day's work, but ah!
> The work was never done - is not done yet!
> (C.P.1, p.202)

In A Drunk Man the exultant protagonist's confidence in the future of the world rests on the possibility of an unprecedented expansion in human consciousness. And, although the bold affirmation of the 1926 poem dwindles in the doubt-laden Cencrastus to a 'vague hope', the poet's commitment to rigorous thought remains undiminished. In the last and one of the loveliest lyrics in Cencrastus the poet pledges himself yet again to the 'insatiable thocht':

My love she is the hardest thocht
That ony brain can ha'e
And there is nocht worth ha'en in life
That doesna lead her way.

My love is to a' else that is
As meaning's meaning, or the sun
Men see ahint the sunlight whiles
Like lint-white water run ... (C.P.1, p.291)

Despite the many fine things in *Cencrastus,* however, the shining vision of the 1926 letter to Ogilvie is not realised. Yet, the poem surely remains of considerable worth. It is a unique representation of the frustrations of the poet in a hybrid culture - and, at a more general level, it illustrates the difficulties inherent in the composition of a long poem in the early decades of the 20th century. And, most importantly perhaps, *Cencrastus* represents (rather like an episode in a Bildungsroman) a necessary and chastening phase in the poet's development - between the youthful exuberance of *A Drunk Man* and the maturity and quiet conviction of 'On a Raised Beach'. And, significantly, in that poem MacDiarmid again, and finally, relocates value in the absolute materiality of the world.

NOTES

CHAPTER THREE

1. *Letters*, p. 91.
2. Harvey Oxenhorn, *Elemental Things* (Edinburgh, 1984), p. 106. Hereafter: Oxenhorn.
3. Ann Edwards Boutelle, *Thistle and Rose* (Loanhead. Midlothian. Scotland, 1980), pp. 155 - 156. Hereafter: Boutelle.
4. Gish, p. 114.
5. ibid., p. 95.
6. Buthlay, p. 57.
7. Bold, p. 124.
8. Walter Perrie, *Metaphysics And Poetry* (Hamilton, Scotland, 1975), pages unnumbered.
9. *Letters*, p. 128.
10. ibid., p. 129.
11. *Complete Poems*, pp. 48 - 51.
12. Gish, p. 99.
13. The Age Of MacDiarmid, pp. 135 - 136.
14. David Jones, *The Anathemata* (London, 1952), p. 34.
15. *Letters*, p. 143.
16. ibid., p. 146.
17. Oxenhorn, pp. 107 - 108.
18. Burgess, p. 9.
19. See Hugh MacDiarmid, *Stony Limits And Scots Unbound And Other Poems.* (Edinburgh, 1956), p. v
20. The Scottish Chapbook, vol 1, no. 7, February 1923, p. 184.
21. See *Complete Poems*, p. 414.
22. *The Age of MacDiarmid*, p. 129.

23. Selected Essays, p. 67.

24. C.M. Grieve, Albyn; or Scotland and the Future (London, 1927), p. 13.

25. See The Age of MacDiarmid, p. 128.

26. Letters, p. 94.

27. A Critical Survey, p. 181.

28. Scots Independent, 3 May 1929, p. 89.

29. A Critical Survey, p. 181.

30. Boutelle, p. 160.

31. Letters, p. 101.

32. ibid., p. 90.

33. Quoted in Times Literary Supplement, 11 December 1981, p. 1451.

34. Gish, pp. 107 - 108.

35. Bold, p. 125.

36. Times Literary Supplement, 26 August 1983, p. 909.

37. Times Literary Supplement, 11 December 1981, p. 1451.

CHAPTER FOUR

Politics, Poetry And The 'Dumfoun'ered Thocht'

The essay 'The Politics and Poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid' from Selected Essays of Hugh MacDiarmid (1969) was published under the pseudonym Arthur Leslie, but is, in fact, as the editor Duncan Glen tells us, 'MacDiarmid on MacDiarmid.' In the essay the poet writes:

> His poetry has always been one of the weapons of his general political fight. It is a mistake to imagine that he came to political poetry late; his poetry was political from the outset as the 'Ballad of the General Strike' in his Drunk Man Looks At The Thistle, and many other poems there and in his earlier books makes clear enough.[1]

MacDiarmid's claim for the 'clarity' of the political element in the poetry which predates A Drunk Man is perhaps exaggerated. One looks in vain for evidence of such an element in the lyrics of Annals of the Five Senses (1923) and, although the vision of the 1925 and 1926 collections is on the whole a democratic one, there are only two poems ('The Dead Liebknecht' and 'Gairmscoile') which deal with explicitly political themes. But a Socialist bias is certainly a feature of A Drunk Man with its memorable 'Ballad of the General Strike' - and, indeed, it is arguable (as has already been suggested in ch. 2) that the Dionysian presence in the poem has ideological connotations.

However, it is surely in the poetry of the early to mid-thirties that the political element is foregrounded in the poetry of MacDiarmid. This is also the period during which the most profound philosophical speculation takes place - indeed 'On A Raised Beach' represents, perhaps, the most concise and convinced expression of the materialist ontology which underlies the greater part of the MacDiarmid corpus. It is, therefore, when one approaches this area of MacDiarmid's work that one is faced, most urgently, with the vexed question of the precise nature of the relationship between the poet's political affiliations and his metaphysical preoccupations.

MacDiarmid still seems to feature in the popular imagination as a political poet - yet, how far may we, justifiably, describe him as such?

In the context of the corpus as a whole such a description seems to fall wide of the mark and seriously misrepresent the purpose which underlies the MacDiarmid poetic. Certainly, the most exhaustive study of the corpus fails to reveal a direct, unambiguous commitment of the poet's art to the cause of the proletariat as that is traditionally defined. If the withering of the state and the emergence of a classless society are important to MacDiarmid, it is not as ends in themselves but as necessary preconditions to the actualisation of a personal poetic vision. Nor does a study of the corpus reveal a Nationalism which would evoke the whole-hearted approval of the purist. In the final analysis it does seem to emerge that the breadth of MacDiarmid's interests, the complexity of his commitments and the extravagance and mystical nature of his aims for the future of the world cannot be contained within the boundaries of any strict ideological position.

The details of the poet's political allegiances reveal a fine disregard for orthodoxy. MacDiarmid was a founder member of the National Party of Scotland in 1928, but in 1933 was expelled from the Party for his Communist inclinations. He joined the Communist Party in 1934, but in 1938 was expelled for Nationalist deviation. And in Lucky Poet (1943) the author reveals that Communism does not, in any case, represent for him a final political position but

> a stage on the way to Anarchism ... a necessary and indispensable stage.[2]

In his valuable study of MacDiarmid, The Terrible Crystal (1983), Alan Bold sums up the idiosyncratic nature of MacDiarmid's political affiliations thus:

> ... his [MacDiarmid's] nationalism offends nationalists, his Marxism appals Marxists. Once again we realise that MacDiarmid selfconsciously thought of himself as being individual enough to soar above any orthodoxy.[3]

And, in her interesting book Thistle and Rose (1980), Ann Edwards Boutelle also touches on the way in which the poetic imagination seems

to transcend all political conformity in the MacDiarmid corpus:

> The paradoxical leap of imagination that joins the present moment to eternity, man to the more than human, permeates all of his [MacDiarmid's] political thought and explains his reluctance to be content with any one restricting mould. It explains the uneasiness felt by the various parties when confronted with a paradoxical identification between their ideology and that of another party. MacDiarmid's central vision can reconcile contraries while the world of party politics stands aghast.[4]

Certainly, MacDiarmid's belief in the positive value of contradiction and inconsistency in the poet's quest for truth is as evident in his political utterances as it is in all other aspects of the corpus. But he is, after all, not a twentieth century ideologue but a post-Einsteinean poet - concerned to express not the political beliefs of a stable self, unchanging in time, but the diverse responses of a myriad selves in a multiplicity of moments.

We should not be surprised then, if, in the course of a prolonged dramatic self-enactment, the political persona is variously represented. Thus, if in a 1952 Essay MacDiarmid proclaims himself 'a man naturally fitted for Communism',[5] in 'Talking with five thousand people in Edinburgh yesterday', he demonstrates that such a 'fitness' does not necessarily entail unconditional, once-for-all commitment to the Socialist cause. Paradoxically, in the following verse from the poem political terminology is employed to express the strength of the poet's allegiance to a literary vision:

> ... I must be a Bolshevik
> Before the Revolution, but I'll cease to be one quick
> When the 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 ... (C.P.2, p.1158)

Again, although we are frequently confronted with MacDiarmid in the rôle of hard-headed Internationalist, the poet can, on occasion, present himself as exclusively (even sentimentally) Nationalist:

The rose of all the world is not for me
I want for my part
Only the little white rose of Scotland
That smells sharp and sweet - and breaks the heart.
(C.P.1, p.461)

If we compare the latter verse with the cosmopolitan sentiments of an extract from A Drunk Man, we find yet another of the contradictions which abound in the MacDiarmid corpus. And, in this case, the contradiction is compounded by the fact that whilst the 'Nationalist' verse is in English, the Internationalist one is in Scots:

He's no' a man ava'
And lacks a proper pride,
Gin less than a' the warld
Can ser' him as a bride ... (C.P.1, p.114)

In 'Ode To All Rebels', we have a further manifestation of the political persona as the poet gives free and mischievous rein to the irrational elements of his complex character in an anarchistic condemnation of

... Believers in ony State or system or creed
A' that expect clear explanations,
Fixed standards and reasonable methods.
A' the rulers and a' the ruled
And a'body else ... (C.P.1, p.508)

Surely, however, in these lines the seriousness of the poet's protestations is called into question by an element of self-parody (such moments occur rarely in MacDiarmid and are therefore to be prized) as the poet seems to stand back and applaud his own perversity.

In Lucky Poet, a more sober voice informs us (and, perhaps, we are now approaching the truth of MacDiarmid's final position as regards the role of politics in his work):

> As a Socialist, of course, I am, it should be obvious, interested only in a very subordinate way in the politics of Socialism as a political theory; my real concern with Socialism is as an artist's organised approach to the interdependencies of life.[6]

The incongruous and baffling co-presence of the materialist and the idealist in the work of MacDiarmid has been the subject of much

interesting critical commentary. In The Real Foundations (1973), David Craig, the Marxist critic, casts an informed eye on the idiosyncratic nature of the poet's political utterances:

> ... if we consider MacDiarmid as a Communist and a Communist poet, some odd things come to light even in the hymns to Lenin. In the second one MacDiarmid confides to Lenin that 'politics is bairns' play' compared with what poetry must be - a claim difficult to reconcile with sseriou [sic] communism ... In the 'Third Hymn', the dialectical materialist is found writing that
>
> Only one in every million men to-day
> Know that thought is reality - and thought alone!
>
> This is the purest idealism - treating the mental processes that well up from material existence as somehow higher than it, more 'real'. ...[7]

And indeed Craig's argument seems to be borne out by the nature of the refrain which recurs, like a clarion call, throughout the corpus and which is inextricably linked with the purpose which underlies the poet's work:

> The supreme reality is visible to the mind alone ...[8]

Alan Bold also speculates on the contradictory nature of MacDiarmid's 'Communism' and shrewdly connects it with the poet's sense of urgency as regards the realisation of his aspirations:

> ... Communism to MacDiarmid is ultimately idealistic. It promises to deliver the future in a revolutionary instant ...[9]

In the context of the MacDiarmid corpus as a whole, it does seem that when all the political selves have been assumed and shed, we are left with one abiding image - stark, lonely and uncompromising - the austere figure of MacDiarmid, the visionary poet. In his recent collection of essays, God And The Poets (1984), David Daiches, long acquainted with the poet's work, writes:

> MacDiarmid, for all his intermittent professions of atheism and materialism, was at heart a visionary and mystic ...[10]

However, the essence of the MacDiarmid poetic is, surely, that the poet is both an atheist and a mystic, as these are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In his book, The Problem of Metaphysics (1974),

D. M. MacKinnon, in a discussion of the 'grave atheism' of MacDiarmid's poem 'On A Raised Beach', throws a most valuable light on the nature of the metaphysic which underlies the poem:

> MacDiarmid writes as an atheist and his poem is eloquent testimony that out of an atheist ontology a great poem may spring. To say this is not intended as the insult so often offered by the religious of claiming that no man is a serious atheist. But it is to remember that atheism and theism have this in common: that both alike are ontologies and that in the relatively loose sense of the term in which it may be applied to a conspectus of Aristotle's metaphysics that includes his theology as well as his anatomy of being.[11]

MacDiarmid is indeed a most 'serious atheist' and the vision which fructifies, sustains and unites the disparate elements of the corpus does seem, in a very real sense, to be a religious one.

Certainly, one important aspect of the MacDiarmid corpus demands consideration in the ontological-ideological debate and it is this: it is not the relationship of man to man within the framework of <u>any</u> political system which is at the heart of the MacDiarmid poetic, but the more fundamental relationship of man to the cosmos. David Daiches homes in on the essence of MacDiarmid when he refers to

> ... the poet's deep sense of the mystery of the cosmos and the strangeness of man's relation to it ...[12]

As the present writer sees it, the three key images in MacDiarmid are surely of an essentially religious nature and portray man in the light of his connection with an uncaring universe. These images - which, perhaps, most truly represent the poetic vision - are: 'the broukit bairn' tearfully confronting the might and mindlessness of the 'haill clanjamfrie'; the protagonist of <u>A Drunk Man</u> 'tearing the soul to rags' in an effort to mediate between reality and empirical reason;[13] the poet prophet of 'On A Raised Beach', humbling himself in the face of the commanding materiality of the world. This vision of man, in a cosmic context, superimposes itself over all phenomenological instances of inequality and deprivation in the poetry of MacDiarmid.

However, although the purpose underlying the corpus may not be primarily a political one, MacDiarmid's verse is didactic and the element of demystification is central to it. The entire MacDiarmid campaign is waged against false and limited consciousness, although it is necessary to approach the political connotations of these concepts with due caution. Political mystification is only one element of a cosmic unawareness which keeps man poor, forked and unaccommodated in the face of overwhelming odds. The precise nature of the poet's attempt at enlightenment (which are conveyed through the 'sang' and the 'sermon' of his work) demands close and continual attention if one is to attempt to resolve the contradictions which abound in MacDiarmid's work.

Underlying the MacDiarmid corpus - and this applies whether the poet employs Christological or political metaphors to convey his purpose - is a preoccupation with the actuality and potentiality of human awareness and a strong conviction that it is man's limited apprehension of 'what there is' which renders him uniquely vulnerable in the cosmos. Man is conscious, but not conscious <u>enough</u>. What the poet is saying repeatedly, in different ways and with increasing passion, throughout his entire work is that the 'mutchkin' of human consciousness must expand to a point at which it can contain the 'ocean' of reality. The positive message in MacDiarmid is that this can be achieved - albeit not without considerable preliminary suffering - and MacDiarmid is at pains to stress the centrality of the poetic function in the implementation of such a goal. Few poets, perhaps, have made such a vast claim for the place of the poetic rôle in the scheme of things. Ultimately then, the gap which MacDiarmid is concerned to bridge is not that between the rich and the poor but between the 'dumfoun'ered thocht' and the poetic vision of the almost boundless potential of the human intellect.

What rôle then does the political actually play in the poetry of MacDiarmid - and specifically in the poetry of the early to mid-thirties?

ideological ends may not be pre-eminent in the corpus, yet there can be no doubt that political reference and rhetoric play a major part in the articulation of poetic purpose. MacDiarmid's dependence on Christological symbols in the representation of the vision has been discussed hitherto, and will be referred to again in the course of this thesis. An equal, if not greater, reliance on the political metaphor is evident in the corpus as a whole, and perhaps especially in the poetry of the thirties. Certainly - and I hope this will emerge in the course of a close engagement with some of the poems of the period - the political is, for MacDiarmid, an enabling, an energising force. It is a fruitful source of metaphor, tonality, terminology and illustrative 'character'. And it provides a 'stage' (notably in poems such as 'The Belly-Grip', 'Song of the New Economics' and 'Genethliacon for the New World Order') upon which the public persona - always an insistent presence from <u>A Drunk Man</u> onwards - can strut and fret. Again, the political, like the religious, is essentially dramatic in nature, and it does seem that the interests of the poetic vision are best served by dramatic representation. The idea of class struggle also contributes, in a very real sense, to the articulation of the MacDiarmid metaphysic in that, like the apocalyptic vision of the Russian mystic Soloviev which continues to influence the poet's work, it provides an appropriate and effective analogue of mankind's slow but sure progress towards ultimate revelation. In short, the political, like the religious, is for MacDiarmid a way of expressing the ineffable, of giving form to the immaterial.

In MacDiarmid's poetry of the twenties, the political element is skilfully underplayed. However, in the poetry of the early to mid-thirties ideological content is more pervasive and more explicit. This change of emphasis could be interpreted as an intensification of the poet's political commitment. But it is arguable that what we are actually seeing is a combination of two factors: a more persistent (and

indeed fashionable) exploitation of the political in the interests of the vision; and a clearer manifestation of the effects of cultural influences on the work of the Scottish poet. MacDiarmid the Calvinist is at least as strong a presence in this poetry as MacDiarmid the radical socialist. Indeed, the two are one and indivisable. The degree to which the poet is influenced by his Border inheritance is particularly evident from *A Drunk Man* onwards as the didactic element becomes more and more central in his work. And this cultural influence reveals itself especially in matters of tone.

A major characteristic of the MacDiarmid corpus - and one which so dramatically separates his work from that of many of his modernist contemporaries - is the poet's vigorous rejection of the angst of late bourgeois society. Certainly, in the verse of MacDiarmid man suffers - but never pointlessly. The poet's background of the radicalism of the Scottish borders contributes to the affirmative nature of the vision - indeed it is one of the two main sources of his essentially optimistic view of the goal of history. The evidence of the corpus seems to suggest that although MacDiarmid's brand of Socialism is unsystematic and idiosyncratic it nevertheless retains at its core a Marxist positivism. The other source of the poet's confidence in the future was his cradle Calvinism. The Calvinist 'election' was certain - the glorious culmination of the class struggle scarcely less so. A combination of these factors produced in the Scottish poet a kind of 'mental set' which predisposed him towards a positive vision of man's destiny. We have seen, in Chapter Two, how MacDiarmid's attitude of mind sets him apart from his contemporaries in the twenties. The richness of the poet's political and religious inheritance and its bearing on his work can perhaps now be interestingly considered in the context of some younger English poets writing in the thirties.

Apparently less happily endowed in a cultural sense than the

Scottish MacDiarmid, the young Auden, writing in the 1927 Volume of Oxford Poetry, describes the 'chaos of values' which he and his colleagues had inherited and reminds the 'intelligent reader' that

> ... no universalised system - political, religious or metaphysical has been bequeathed to us ...[14]

In The Buried Day, the poet's friend, Cecil Day Lewis, also reflects on the lack of 'a reassuring, sustaining metaphysics in the background' of the young poets' lives at that time:

> Inoculated against Roman Catholicism by the religion of my youth, I dimly felt the need for a faith which had the authority, the logic, the cut-and-driedness of the Roman Church - a faith which would fill the void left by the leaking away of traditional religion, would make sense of our troubled times and make real demands on me. Marxism appeared to fill the bill.[15]

Marxism may have 'appeared' to fill the bill, however, but it does seem that, in the final analysis, it is the absence of God, rather than the presence of Marx which is the major determining factor in the poetry of the time. Certainly, the idea of the replacement of a redundant deity by a strong leader figure - a figure who is as likely on occasion to don a fascistic as a communistic mask - is common to the work of Auden, Day Lewis and MacDiarmid.

Another common factor in the poets' work is the thrust towards action. Like MacDiarmid's, the poetry of the younger English poets can be seen as representing 'a revolt against accepted things' and as attempts to reconstruct the toppling world in which they found themselves.[16] In a valuable introduction to his Poetry Of The Thirties, Robin Skelton ponders on the way in which poets such as Auden and Day Lewis and their contemporaries conceived of the function of the poet in society:

> ... reading all the manifestos and symposia, all the letters and analyses and critiques, it seems as if these poets really did believe that a poet could be an effective modern prophet.[17]

However, despite the parables, parodies and purgatorial exuberances which are characteristic of much of the work of Auden and Day Lewis, the 'brave new worlds' of these poets never quite came into focus. Allied

to the poets' undoubted ability to present the contemporary world in starkly effective urban images is an inability to find appropriate objective correlatives for their vision of the new. At best, the alternative worlds of these poets seem to be extrapolations from public school politics and mores which have less to do with the upward struggle of the proletariat than with the desire for an even closer, if reformed, brotherhood of the Bourgeoisie. In an article written in 1955, Auden muses on the actual significance of Marx in his own work and that of his friends:

> Looking back, it seems to me that the interest in Marx taken by myself and my friends ... was more psychological than political; we were interested in Marx in the same way that we were interested in Freud, as a technique of unmasking middle-class ideologies, not with the intention of repudiating our class, but with the hope of becoming better bourgeois.[18]

The vague nature of the frontier towards which poets such as Auden and Day Lewis were ostensibly blazing a trail is considered by Samuel Hynes in his excellent book on the period, The Thirties Generation:

> ... the Enemies and their dead life are fairly explicit - one knows what Day Lewis is against. It is a good deal less clear what he is for. The parabolic journey in his poem is ostensibly a quest for the magnetic mountain, but in fact it is more an escape from than a journey to. This is a quality common to most such journeys in the writings of the time (for example, Auden's 'To throw away the key' in Paid on Both Sides), and it reflects a quite understandable state of mind: in a time of social stagnation and decay, the desire for change manifests itself as an almost physical need to leave the ruins, even though the destination is unclear; rejection is at least a kind of action. And so the particulars of the place left behind may be quite specific, while the place ahead is bound to be vague ...[19]

The almost physical desire to leave the ruins of Scotland must have been felt on many occasions by MacDiarmid - yet poem after poem in the corpus bears witness to the poet's heroic attempts to resist the impulse. In 'Lament for the Great Music' MacDiarmid views his fellow Scots in what he describes as 'the night of our National degradation' - yet he concludes:

> I dare not leave this dark and distracted scene
> I believe in the necessary and unavoidable responsibility
> of man
> And in the ineluctable certainty of the Resurrection ...
> (C.P.1, p.480)

However, MacDiarmid was not as subject to the conflicts which beset the younger English poets writing in the thirties - who were, despite their condemnation of the old order, inextricably linked to it. These poets did not, like their Modernist predecessors, embrace 'angst' - but their rejections of it have the hollow ring of a lack of certitude and conviction. The Scottish poet, on the other hand, had neither attachment to nor vested interest in the status quo to cloud his vision or stay his hand. Unlike the hazy Jerusalems of Auden, Day Lewis and their contemporaries (whose efforts at reform MacDiarmid dismissed variously as 'an impudent bluff'[20] and as attempts to 'light a match on a crumbling wall'),[21] the Scottish poet's 'new world' is clearly envisaged, vigorously fought for and confidently expected. And this world is represented in strong dramatic images of light, of water, of stone, of bog; is peopled by numerous exemplary 'characters' and presided over by the myriad selves of the poet himself. Clearly MacDiarmid knew his 'enemies' (those who colluded in their own intellectual limitation); had laboriously charted his 'frontier' (the 'cleared space' of consciousness); and had complete trust in the ability of his appointed 'leader' - the poet - to head the revolutionary march.

Although the theme of leadership is a commpn one in the work of Auden, Day Lewis and MacDiarmid, the latter's approach to the subject seems altogether more positive than that of the younger English poets. Samuel Hynes considers the difficulties with which the thirties poets were faced as regards the 'leader' image:

> ... uncertain and untried young men were struggling with the problem of Leadership and the nature of right action. For history seemed to have confronted them with a unique challenge - to devise the means by which the Truly Weak Man, the

> introspective neurotic that most young intellectuals take themselves to be, could make himself strong and effective in the public world of crisis ... [22]

However, MacDiarmid had no qualms as to the possibility of combining the 'Truly Weak' and the 'Truly Strong' man in one gifted individual. Was he not, himself, an example of the happy co-existence of both: the man of action on the battle-front and in the political arena - and the neurotic artist who had already proven himself as a lyrical poet of considerable range and sensitivity? MacDiarmid was convinced as to the possibility of a new earth and saw himself, qua poet and militant patriot, as a major instrument in its implementation:

> My task is to be unpopular - a fighter - an enemy of accepted things; not in any captious sense but out of profound conviction, and while I may often mistake the promptings of my heart and be merely factitious, I have reason to know that the best of my work at all events is having a powerful influence because it springs from the deeps of the destined.[23]

Again, in 'Lament for the Great Music', the awesome responsibility of the Scottish genius as leader is vigorously confronted:

> It is now the duty of the Scottish genius
> Which has provided the economic freedom for it
> To lead in the abandonment of creeds and moral compromises
> Of every sort and to commence to express the unity of life
> By confounding the curse of short-circuited thought,
> Circumscribing consciousness, for that is the thought
> Of compromise, the medium of the time-server.
> This must be done to lead men to cosmic consciousness ...
> (C.P.1, pp.480-481)

MacDiarmid's image of himself as 'destined' and his Calvinistic faith in 'the ineluctable certainty of the resurrection' underlies the Scottish poet's work of the early to mid-thirties and sets it apart from any other body of poetry written in Britain at the time. In this poetry, the didactic thrust of the MacDiarmid corpus reveals itself mainly in a presentation of exemplary images - images which take the form of illustrative 'characters', or of the natural object in which MacDiarmid perceives, or to which he ascribes, qualities relevant to the actualisation of the poetic vision. These 'models' are intended to

counter all the aspects of contemporary life which the poet sees as inimical to his purposes: intellectual apathy; grinding poverty which precludes the fulfilment of human potential; continued allegiance to a faith which MacDiarmid considers to be redundant in the context of the contemporary world; the complacency and moral cowardice of the Bourgeois element of society.

In the varied and experimental body of work which comprises the greater part of MacDiarmid's output of the early to mid-thirties (First Hymn To Lenin And Other Poems (1931), 'Second Hymn To Lenin' (1932), Scots Unbound and Other Poems (1932) and Stony Limits and Other Poems (1934; 1956)), many prominent, contemporary figures have their exits and their entrances. These include Lenin, Rilke, Charles Doughty and John MacLean, each of whom - according to his potential as illustrative medium - contributes to the articulation of poetic purpose. However, I shall concern myself mainly with the two major 'characters' as they are presented in these volumes - Lenin and MacDiarmid himself. The poet's presentation of Lenin in First Hymn To Lenin and Other Poems and 'Second Hymn To Lenin' (hereafter referred to as First Hymn and 'Second Hymn') is of considerable importance - not because it represents MacDiarmid at the top of his stylistic form (it clearly does not) but because it throws a particularly interesting light on the relation of the political and the metaphysical in the corpus.

The response of eminent critics of the day to the appearance of the poem 'First Hymn To Lenin' (in Lascelles Abercrombie's New English Poems (1931)) is interesting to those of us who can now judge the poem in the context of the MacDiarmid corpus as a whole. In A Hope For Poetry, Day Lewis places MacDiarmid in the vanguard of the political poets of the thirties:

> Communism did not begin to affect British poetry till some fifteen years after the October revolution. In 1931, 'Hugh McDiarmid' [sic] published his 'First Hymn To Lenin' ...

> The 'First Hymn To Lenin' was followed by a rush of poetry sympathetic to Communism or influenced by it ... [24]

John Lehmann, in New Writing in Europe (1940), also accords MacDiarmid a primacy as regards poetry 'sympathetic to Communism in the thirties':

> ... First Ode to Lenin [sic] preceded all the other literature of outspoken revolutionary sympathies and remained in a place by itself with its eloquence and straightforward vigour.[25]

However, when considered in the light of the MacDiarmid corpus in its entirety, can 'First Hymn' or indeed 'Second Hymn' be seen as actively engagé poems? There is a certain ambivalence in MacDiarmid's presentation of Lenin as 'model'. Despite the adulatory titles of the 'Hymn', it is arguable that when taken together these poems represent not so much an exaltation of the ideologue's stature as a subtle diminishment. Lenin is being put firmly in his place - a place, moreover, which is considerably lower than that of the poet in the scheme of things. Certainly, despite the Christological connotations surrounding the figure of the revolutionary in First Hymn, it does emerge that his actual role is not a leading but a supporting one: he is John the Baptist to MacDiarmid's 'Christ'. Lenin's sphere of operations is quite clearly indicated in both 'hymns' as having to do with 'first things' - and this certainly not in a value but in a chronological sense.

In First Hymn, the actual structure of the volume seems to reflect MacDiarmid's conception of the relative value of the poet and the ideologue in the context of the evolutionary vision. After an initial, as it were, token salute to Lenin in the introductory poem, MacDiarmid himself moves centre stage and occupies that position for the remainder of the volume - since the major part of First Hymn actually consists of a presentation of the poetic self against the background of the home scenes in Langholm. We have, then, a volume in which most of the poems stand in an organic relation to one another, whilst the introductory poem - far from setting the tone of First Hymn as a whole - seems curiously unconnected with what follows.

Many technical factors subscribe to the strange 'apartness' of the opening poem of First Hymn: it has the distinctive register of public poetry whilst most of the companion poems operate on the level of introspective reflection; the mode of articulation of 'First Hymn' is a matter of 'direct statement and particular address' (see ch. 2), rather than, as in many of the other poems, the lyrical employment of the irreducible image; the poem works by assertion, whereas in the remainder of the volume there is a gradual movement towards carefully-thought-out resolutions.

In 'First Hymn', MacDiarmid, given his fulsome praise of Lenin, seems to be presenting himself as a most fervent disciple of the great revolutionary:

> Few even o' the criminals, cravens and fools
> Wha's voices vilify a man they ken
> They've cause to fear and are unfit to judge
>   as they're to stem his influence again
> But in the hollows where their herts should be
>   Forsee your victory.
> Churchills, Locker-Lampsons, Beaverbrooks'll be
> In history's perspective less to you
> (And them!) than the Centurions to Christ
> Of whom, as you at least this muckle's true
>   - 'Tho' pairtly wrang he cam' to richt amang's
>   Faur greater wrangs'.
> Christ's cited no' by chance or juist because
> You mark the greatest turnin'-point since him
> But that your main redress has lain where he's
> Least use - fulfillin' his sayin' lang kept dim
> That whasae followed him things o' like natur'
>   Ud dae-and greater (C.P.1, p.297)

However, the actual nub of First Hymn - and one which connects it with the preoccupations of the corpus as a whole - concerns not Lenin's vision of a new world, but MacDiarmid's. Amid the laudatory rhetoric, the poet, almost by sleight-of-hand, introduces his idée fixe - the preeminence of 'thocht' in the MacDiarmid scheme of things. Lenin may have done 'greater things' than Christ, yet it is in his rôle of 'precursor' that he is presented in the following lines:

> If first things first had had their richtfu' sway
> Life and Thocht's misused poo'er micht ha' been ane
> For a' men's benefit ... (C.P.1, p.298)

The democratic sentiment in the final line should not, however, blind us to the fact that MacDiarmid's real concern is, as always, the one towards which a whole life's work is directed - the full and proper use of the intellectual faculty in man.

And, it seems, that, in the interests of 'thocht', political action of the most reprehensible kind is uncompromisingly endorsed in a stanza whose 'savagery' is, according to Alan Bold, 'unmatched by anything in Western poetry at that period ...'.[26] The poet's approval of the 'Cheka's horrors' certainly takes the element of purgation in MacDiarmid to its absolute limits - yet whatever form the necessary purification may take in the corpus the poet's conception of man's final reward would seem to justify it. The urgency of tone and harsh rhetoric employed in the verse are not connected with the righting of social wrongs but with the obsessive poetic vision of men leading 'real lives'. And by 'real lives' it is more than probable - given the poet's main pre-occupations in the corpus - that MacDiarmid means lives lived in the restless pursuit of intellectual excellence (certainly, as the poet makes clear in 'Second Hymn', such 'authentic' living does not centre on such things 'as sport, love, parentage' or 'trade, politics and law'):

> 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? (C.P.1, p.298)

There is nothing of 'The conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder' in MacDiarmid's purgatorial excesses in the above verse.[27] Indeed, it is interesting to consider the comparative degree of moral scruple which underlies Auden's words from the controversial 'Spain'. No such ethical niceties inform the MacDiarmid verse. The

poet does not baulk at using the uncompromising 'kill' - indeed the word is given further brutal emphasis by its rhyming position.

In a discussion of the way in which literary intellectuals publicly advocated violence in the thirties, George Watson writes - in particular connection with the MacDiarmid stanza quoted above:

> ... in the world of the Marxist intellectual, even to allow oneself the private luxury of choosing victims may be a false delicacy, and to concede a right of choice would be to forget 'that clear distinction between the necessary anarchy of thought and the essential dictatorship of action'.[28]

In the light of MacDiarmid's work as a whole, however, it would seem that the balance is tipped very considerably in the favour of the 'necessary anarchy of thought' - and, of course, the question remains as to whether we can justifiably refer to MacDiarmid as a 'Marxist intellectual'. Certainly, the poet's presentation of Lenin in 'Second Hymn To Lenin' does nothing to endorse such a description.

On reading 'Second Hymn To Lenin', one finds that what is foregrounded in the poem is not Lenin's message but his method; not the enormity of his power, but its limits. And these limits are defined within the context of MacDiarmid's conception of the almost limitless potential of the poetic medium itself. In Cencrastus, MacDiarmid sings of the supremacy and glorious autonomy of the 'gowden' lyric:

> Better a'e gowden lyric
> Than Insurance, Bankin' and Law,
> Better a'e gowden lyric
> Than the Castle's soarin' wa'
> Better a'e gowden lyric
> Than anything else ava! (C.P.1, p.266)

In 'Second Hymn', however, it seems that it is not enough that a poem should 'be', but that it should be an active force in the realisation of poetic goals. The thrust towards action - connected, one feels, with the increasing urgency of the poet's desire to be an acknowledged rather than an unacknowledged legislator of the people - is perhaps most evident in the 1932 poem. The relationship between politics and poetry is explored, and MacDiarmid makes it quite clear where he stands on this

issue:

> ... twixt poetry and politics,
> There's nae doot in the en'
> Poetry includes that and su'd be
> The greatest poo'er amang men. (C.P.1, p.326)

In 'Second Hymn', the poet is never seen in a Marxist light as the producer of a social product, but as a creator of something which transcends all political and economic considerations. The poet's labours are more complex and of infinitely more value in the scheme of things than those of the great revolutionary:

> Unremittin', relentless,
> Organized to the last degree,
> Ah Lenin, politics is bairns' play
> To what this maun be! (C.P.1, p.328)

Given what thus far might seem to be an exercise in MacDiarmidean one-upmanship, what, one might ask, is the exact nature of Lenin's exemplary function in 'Second Hymn'? Paradoxically, the invocation of Lenin in the poem is not in the interests of the ideology he represents but of poetic communication. It is Lenin's popular appeal, his diligence and, above all, his skill as a communicator which is being held up to the poet for emulation. It is in just this field of what could be termed 'public relations' that the poet is weighed in the balance and found wanting.

Appropriately, given the emphasis on communication in 'Second Hymn', the language employed is a discursive, accessible half-Scots. If poetry is to be a power to be reckoned with - and poetry is consistently linked with the concept of power in the poem - it must speak with a strong, clear voice to the hearts and minds of the common people:

> 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. (C.P.1, p.323)

However, unlike the great revolutionary whose name has 'gone owre the haill earth', great poets have

affected nocht but a fringe
O' mankind in ony way. (C.P.1, p.324)

The ineffectuality of the poet in getting his message across is imaged forth in a dramatic and visual way:

They're nocht but romantic rebels
Strikin' dilletante poses;
Trotsky-Christ, no' wi' a croon o' thorns
But a wreath o' paper roses. (C.P.1, p.324)

In 'Second Hymn', then, a poem which, far from being propaganda is perhaps one of the most unpolitical poems of the political thirties, MacDiarmid is concerned not with what the poet can do for Lenin, but what Lenin can do for the poet. He is actually enlisting the ideologue's help in the interest of a literary vision:

Wi' Lenin's vision equal poet's gift
And what unparalleled force was there!
Nocht in a' literature wi' that
Begins to compare. (C.P.1, p.324)

Lenin also figures, as model, in the poem 'The Seamless Garment', although, again, it does not follow from this that the poem is politically prescriptive. In 'The Seamless Garment', the revolutionary is one of three figures who are brought into meaningful juxtaposition by the weaving analogy which runs through the poem. Each is engaged in his own individual way with the creation of a seamless garment. The poem is set in a border mill and addressed to the poet's cousin 'Wullie' - the representative 'worker' figure in First Hymn:

You are a cousin of mine
    Here in the mill.
It's queer that born in the Langholm
    It's no' until
Juist noo I see what it means
To work in the mill like my freen's.

I was tryin' to say something
    In a recent poem
Aboot Lenin. You've read a guid lot
    In the news - but ken the less o'm?
Look, Wullie, here is his secret noo
In a way I can share it wi' you.

His secret and the secret o' a'
    That's worth ocht.
The shuttles fleein' owre quick for my een
    Prompt the thocht,
And the coordination atween
    Weaver and machine.

The haill shop's dumfoonderin'
    To a stranger like me.
Second nature to you; you're perfectly able
    To think, speak and see
Apairt frae the looms, tho' to some
That doesna sae easily come.

Lenin was like that wi' workin' class life,
    At hame wi't a'.
His fause movements couldna been fewer,
    The best weaver Earth ever saw.
A' he'd to dae wi' moved intact
    Clean, clear, and exact.

A poet like Rilke did the same
    In a different sphere,
Made a single reality - a' a'e'oo' -
    O' his love and pity and fear;
A seamless garment o' music and thought
But you're owre thrang wi' puirer to tak' tent o't.

(C.P.1, pp.311-312)

MacDiarmid's tone in this interchange with his worker cousin has been the subject of some interesting critical commentary. In her perceptive and thorough study, Hugh MacDiarmid (1984), Nancy K. Gish writes:

> ... it ['The Seamless Garment'] is couched in a condescending tone almost isolated in MacDiarmid's work, an attempt to speak in language 'Wullie' will understand.

Gish goes on to say that 'MacDiarmid's frequently expressed loathing of talking down to the masses is depressingly belied' by lines such as those of the second stanza of the poem.[29] However, Kenneth Buthlay, in a book which remains one of the most valuable on MacDiarmid's work, writes:

> ... if there is such a thing as a "proletarian poetry" for our time, fit to be compared with the best popular poetry of the past, it is to be found in "The Seamless Garment", where the poet explains to a Langholm mill-worker the significance of Lenin and Rilke in terms of weaver and machine and of the proverbial wisdom of the housewife, ending shrewdly by adopting the weaver's test of good cloth for his own poetry. There is no condescension in all this. It is straight man-to-man stuff, in which the limitation of colloquial Scots - the fact that it is now largely confined to the usage of undereducated working folk - is seen to have its own virtue ...[30]

And in The Socialist Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid (1978), T. S. Law and Thurso Berwick see MacDiarmid's exchange with his millworker cousin as a 'model example of Leninism in practice':

> Lenin could be caustic, scathing, bitingly sardonic and denunciatory - just like MacDiarmid - with his fellow revolutionaries, but with the ordinary worker he used a different approach, patiently explaining, linking his propaganda to the direct experience of the worker, talking to him seriously at his present level of consciousness, not at some arbitrary point ...[31]

However, it is surely not a Marxist conception of the relationship between the economic base and the superstructure which underlies 'The Seamless Garment'. Far from being seen as ultimately dependent on the labours of the 'ordinary worker' on the shop floor, the activities of the ideologue and the poet are seen as of considerably greater importance. Although the machine is seen in a positive light in the poem, the millworker is advised to broaden his horizons to include a consideration of the superior looms of Lenin and Rilke - only in this way can he fulfil his true potential:

> Are you equal to life as to the loom?
>   Turnin' oot shoddy or what?
> Claith better than man? D'ye live to the full,
>   Your poo'er's a' deliverly taught?
> Or scamp a'thing else? Border claith's famous.
> Shall things o' mair consequence shame us?
>
> Lenin and Rilke baith gied still mair skill,
>   Coopers o' Stobo, to a greater concern
> Than you devote to claith in the mill.
>   Wad it be ill to learn
> To keep a bit eye on their looms as weel
> And no' be hailly ta'en up wi' your 'tweel'?
> (C.P.1, pp.312-313)

The central message of the sermonic 'The Seamless Garment' is that Wullie must not just concern himself with his weaving of 'Border claith' but with the generation of 'licht':

> There's a play o' licht frae the factory windas.
> Could you no' mak' mair yoursel? (C.P.1, p.313)

However, the precise nature of the 'licht' which Wullie must generate - if he is to become 'equal to life as to the loom' - remains unclear. Is

the worker figure being encouraged to engage, like Lenin, in political demystification, or, like Rilke, in the spreading of 'licht' through creative endeavour? In the final analysis, it is perhaps neither the ideology of Lenin nor the poetry of Rilke which is being recommended to the millworker as worthy objects of study in themselves - but rather a set of abstract qualities which these exemplars are seen to represent: diligence, expertise, integrity and open-mindedness. Wullie is not really being told what to think - he is being told to think. And he is being advised to bring the Leninist and Rilkean virtues to the 'excruciatingly painful business of thinking' (see ch. 2).

However, the major didactic thrust of First Hymn emerges not in the poet's presentation of Lenin as exemplar but in a dramatised exploration of MacDiarmid's own 'first things' - his roots and the source of his genius. The supreme human image of the thirties - indeed of the entire corpus - is the poet's seeking, striving, suffering self. In the Langholm poems of First Hymn - which constitute the major part of the volume - the protagonist certainly sees himself as 'special' - as destined. Yet the poet's search among the remnants of his past is neither self-congratulatory nor egocentric in nature - it is undertaken with an idea of the practical application of his findings in the general good. In his introduction to The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid, Alan Bold makes a point about the poet which is apposite here:

> Working on the assumption that Everyman (or at least Everyscot) could become a spiritual Superman (and at times MacDiarmid linked his Christian symbolism to a Nietzchean existentialism) he offered himself as an example: the postman's son from the Borders surmounting all obstacles to become the voice of Scotland speaking to the rest of the world.[32]

The importance of the dramatic element - and specifically of setting - to the successful articulation of the MacDiarmid vision has been stressed hitherto and will no doubt be returned to again in the course of this thesis. The self-enactment of the 1931 volume takes place against

the background of the poet's native place, Langholm. And indeed the little Border town, with its 'perfect maze o' waters' is entirely appropriate - given the evolutionary musings of First Hymn.

However, there are, perhaps, other factors - artistic and biographical - which should be considered in relation to the poet's pre-occupation with the home scenes at this time. One of the major causes of the failure of Cencrastus was, as I have attempted to show in Chapter Three of this study, the poet's temporary disenchantment with matter and the consequent shift in the ontological basis of his poetry. It is probable that the subsequent 'return' to his roots in the Langholm poems is motivated, to some degree, by a need to enrich and revivify the poetic faculty by a re-immersion of the self in the beauty of the material world - where that world was, for the poet, at its most inspirational. In Lucky Poet (1943), MacDiarmid describes some of the remembered beauties of the Langholm countryside, and one can imagine how these contributed, in the course of time, to the visual, auditory and conceptual images of the corpus:

> My earliest impressions are of an almost tropical luxuriance of nature - of great forests, of honey-scented heather hills and moorlands infinitely rich in little appreciated beauties of flowering, of animal and insect life, of strange and subtle relationships of water and light ... [33]

In 'By Wauchopeside', written in the early thirties but not included in First Hymn, the poet muses on his debt to the home scenes and his 'return' to them for poetic sustenance:

> O there's nae sayin' what my verses awn
> To memories like these. Ha'e I come back
> To find oot? Or to borrow mair? Or see
> Their helpless puirness to what gar'd them be?
> (C.P.2, p.1083)

It is likely, too, that traumas in the poet's personal life may have had some bearing on his 'return' to Langholm in the poetry of the early thirties. MacDiarmid suffered a crisis of identity at this time, which was, perhaps, to culminate in the serious nervous breakdown of 1935. The poet of First Hymn was a man virtually without familial ties and may

have felt the need to reinforce the sense of self against the background of his native place. In Lucky Poet (1943), MacDiarmid writes, in connection with this stage of his life:

> ... I realised with terrible distress, that against my will, the ties between my wife and two children, Christine and Walter, were about to be broken no less completely than I had allowed the ties between myself and my relatives in Langholm and elsewhere to break ... [34]

However, although the foregoing factors should be taken into account in any discussion of the Langholm poems of First Hymn, I would disagree with Anne Boutelle Edwards when she writes:

> As a whole, First Hymn is a personal autobiographical exorcism, an attempt to re-establish contact with the Langholm relatives, no matter how painful such an attempt may be ... [35]

This is surely to ignore the potent didactic impulse which informs First Hymn and connects it with the rest of the MacDiarmid corpus. In the final analysis, what is enacted in the 1931 volume is not so much the return of the native to the bosom of his family as the re-emergence on the home scenes of a paradigmatic figure - a representative of a new and more enlightened world.

And certainly MacDiarmid's return to his roots in First Hymn cannot be seen (despite what the title of the volume might lead one to suppose) as an attempt to establish a sense of solidarity with the working class of his native place. Indeed, what emerges from First Hymn is not the poet's at-oneness with his Langholm brethren but his essential isolation from them. As a boy, MacDiarmid had lived in a 'different mental world altogether'[36] and in 'Water of Life', a poem which explores the necessity of an openness to change in all areas of life, the complacency and small-mindedness of the 'Waterside folk' is considered thus:

> They were like figures seen on fountains whiles.
> The river made sae free wi' them - poored in and oot
> O' their een and ears (no' mooths) in a' its styles,
> Till it clean scooped the insides o' their skulls
>   O' a' but a wheen thochts like gulls.
>
> (C.P.1, pp.318-319)

Indeed, throughout the corpus, MacDiarmid's attitude to the masses

is a profoundly ambiguous one. On the one hand there is a passionate concern for their intellectual development which is evidenced by a life-long campaign on their behalf both on the page and in the public arena; on the other, there is a sense of deep alienation from his fellows which is part paranoia (caused, one imagines, by some deep actual or imagined hurt inflicted on him in his formative years) and partly the result of a belatedly romantic conception of the inevitable isolation of the poet in society. In 'Third Hymn To Lenin', MacDiarmid claims to be 'of' not 'for' the working class (C.P.2, p.900). Yet in Stony Limits he regretfully admits the enormity of the gap which separates him from the mass of society:

> What endless distance divides me
> From the people yet! (C.P.1, p.407)

Expressions of irritation, anger and contempt in relation to the 'innumerable meat without minds' (C.P.2, p.833) recur throughout the MacDiarmid corpus as the poet berates the Scot in particular and man in general for his intellectual apathy. There is, too, a recurring bitterness for the way in which people reject the exceptional individual in their midst.

MacDiarmid's serious commitment to a re-construction of the world is motivated to some degree, perhaps, by the fact that it would be a world in which (unlike Langholm) he would fit - since every inhabitant would be fashioned in his own intellectual image. Yet there is also a sense of serious, unselfish mission in the poet's work and he is aware that given his self-appointed role of surrogate saviour he must endeavour to love even the most unprepossessing of his flock. In 'Charisma and My Relatives', both the poet's isolation from his fellows and his recognition of the necessity of a Christ-like concern for and contact with them are vividly expressed. Although the poet immediately dispels any idea of a sentimental return to the bosom of the family (indeed he stresses the redundancy of familial ties to the truly destined) the identification with

Christ introduces a sense of redemptive mission which, in fact, informs the poem as a whole:

> No' here the beloved group; I've gane sae faur
> (Like Christ) yont faither, mither, brither, kin
> I micht as weel try dogs or cats as seek
> In sic relationships again to fin'
> The epopteia I maun ha'e - and feel
> (Frae elsewhere) owre me steal. (C.P.1, p.301)

However, the messianic figure of 'Charisma and My Relatives' recognises the necessity of leading his people in a grand confrontation with all that is false and illusory and upon which much of the energy of his people has been dissipated:

> We've focht in a' the sham fechts o' the world.
> But I'm a Borderer and at last in me
> The spirit o' my people's no' content
> Wi' ony but the greatest enemy,
> And nae mair plays at sodgers but has won
> To live battle-grun'. (C.P.1, p.301)

And this 'live battle-grun'' is surely the one upon which the exemplar's campaign on behalf of the laggard Scot is being vigorously fought.

The contradictory nature of the poet's feelings for his fellow men is wonderfully conveyed in a verse which encapsulates both an expansive fatherly embrace and a profound sensual recoil. All senses interpenetrate and exchange functions as poetic compassion and revulsion vie for ascendancy. The high seriousness of the protagonist's intent is evidenced - as so often in MacDiarmid - by the increased density of the Scots employed in the verse. The poet's attitude towards his Langholm kin is revealed in the brief, throw-away but very telling final line:

> Sae to my bosom yet a' beasts maun come,
> Or I to theirs, - baudrons, wi' sides like harps,
> Lookin' like the feel o' olives in the mooth,
> Yon scabby cur at whom the gutter carps,
> Nose-double o' the taste o' beer-and-gin,
> And a' my kin. (C.P.1, p.302)

Finally - in the kind of quietly reflective resolution which is far more characteristic of First Hymn than the bombast and assertiveness of the opening poem - the poet concedes the necessity of compromise if both his own needs and those of his flock are to be satisfactorily

fulfilled:

> And yet - there's some folk lice'll no' live on,
> I'm ane o' them I doot. But what a thocht!
> What speculations maun a man sae shunned
> No' ha'e until at last the reason's brocht
> To view acceptable, as the fact may be
> On different grun's to them and me. (C.P.1, p.302)

In the poem 'The Hole in the Wall', the poet is not specifically a Christ-like figure but he certainly seems to represent some high point in the genealogical continuum. The poem seeks to be a dramatisation of an oft-repeated abstraction in the poetic corpus:

> Mind is the organ through which the Universe reaches
> Such consciousness of itself as is possible now ...
> (C.P.1, p.480)

This seems to reveal the extent to which MacDiarmid is still influenced by the ideas of the Russian mystic Soloviev. The idea that consciousness is trapped in matter and is continually seeking to liberate itself through the medium of the exceptional human mind is central to the poem. Nature's continual experiments to make the breach is viewed in the context of the generational process and the conclusion seems to be arrived at that in the person of the poetic self her continuous labours may, at last, have borne fruit:

> 'Wha's the bairn like? Faither or mither.'
> 'I'd hair like honey at his age tae.'
> 'Juist look at this photo o' Uncle Sam.
> It's no' ill to ken whaur his nose comes frae.'
>
> It means that nature's still seekin'
> In ilka man born a way oot
> Experimentin' again and maist o' us ken
> Failin' again withoot doot.
>
> ....
>
> Even my poetry yet may hint
> The imperious curve or the quiet look
> Through which the haill o' the world'll find
> The ootlet it has sae lang sook. (C.P.1, pp.308-309)

However, any egocentrism in the exemplar's claim is immediately dismissed as the poet stresses the purely mediumistic status of the individual human mind in the process of cosmic development:

> Individual glory is little.
> We're sodgers. Let each
> Dae his duty, not care wha makes
> - Sae lang as it's made - the breach. (C.P.1, pp.308-309)

Ideally, 'The Hole in the Wall' should be read in conjunction with the autobiographical 'Kinsfolk' (written in 1931, but not part of First Hymn) in which the poet also sees his own appearance on the human scene as being of special significance in the generational process (C.P.2, pp.1147-1150).

However, the truly radical nature of MacDiarmid's conception of the 'levelling up', which would result in men leading 'real lives', emerges most forcefully in the poem 'The Burning Passion'. The poet's concern here is clearly not the inequitable distribution of social goods, but the way in which that elusive quality, genius, 'fa's unequally, here and there ...'. Images of the artist's angst in relation to the pursuit of that 'fugitive grace' - inspiration - leads to the conclusion that all men must share in the traumas of artistic creation:

> This thocht o' a' wha haena had a glisk
> And canna understand oor torments syne
> Gi'es courage to us - and the lust to bring
> Like cruelties to them ... (C.P.1, p.304)

'The Burning Passion' is neither rhythmically nor linguistically among the most noteworthy of MacDiarmid's lyrics, yet if the didactic intent which underlies the entire corpus had to be compressed into just two stanzas the concluding verses of this poem might most faithfully fulfil the purpose. Lenin's supporting role in the poetic enterprise is duly acknowledged:

> Wanted a technique for genius! Or, at least,
> A means whereby a' genius yet has done
> 'll be the stertin' point o' a' man's lives,
> No' zero, as if life had scarce begun,
> But to owrecome this death sae faur ben in
> Maist folk needs the full floo'er o' Lenin.
>
> Be this the measure o' oor will to bring
> Like cruelty to a' men - nocht else'll dae;
> The source o' inspiration drooned in bluid
> If need be, owre and owre, until its ray
> Strengthens in a' forever or's hailly gane
> As noo save in an antrin brain. (C.P.1, p.305)

The 'lust' to bring the 'cruelty' of genius to all can indeed be seen as the extravagant purpose which underlies the work of MacDiarmid. And it would, perhaps, be interesting at this point to consider the element of purgation in the Scottish poet's work - an element which is directly related to his aspirations for the future of the race - in the context of the English poets of the thirties.

Although their aims for the new world were less extravagant than those of MacDiarmid and the emphasis was on moral rather than intellectual regeneration, poets such as Day Lewis and Auden also set a high price on the reconstruction of the world. If the modernists were seriously concerned with the 'purification of the dialect of the tribe', their successors were equally seriously committed to the purification of the tribe itself. Robin Skelton refers to the way in which the eradication of unclean elements in society informs many of the poems of the time:

> ... the bourgeois must expect the penance to hurt a little before he can enjoy the state of blessedness ... [37]

Clearly, though, in The Magnetic Mountain (1933) the 'penance' is meant to hurt a lot as Day Lewis's purgatorial zeal is unleashed on a complacent bourgeoisie (Counters of spoons and content with cushions) in the interests of a sanitized world:

> They that take the bribe shall perish by the bribe,
> Dying of dry rot, ending in asylums,
> A curse to children, a charge on the state.
> But still their fears and frenzies infect us;
> Drug nor isolation will cure this cancer:
> It is now or never, the hour of the knife,
> The break with the past, the major operation. [38]

And in 'A Communist to Others', a stream of Audenesque invective is levelled against the pillars of bourgeois society - though one is continually aware of the poet's irrepressible sense of the comic behind lines which are, in fact, curiously akin to traditional Scottish 'flyting':

Let fever sweat them till they tremble,
Cramp rack their limbs till they resemble
    Cartoons by Goya:
Their daughters sterile be in rut,
May cancer not their herring gut,
The circular madness on them shut,
    Or paranoia.[39]

In the MacDiarmid corpus, the 'price o' licht' is invariably a high one and its nature emerges most tellingly from the tragic vision of poems like 'Milk-Wort and Bog-Cotton' and the brief but beautifully achieved 'On the Ocean Floor'. However, in 'Prayer for a Second Flood', the elements of play and purgation come together with delightful results. In the kind of dense Scots and virile kinaesthetic imagery which we associate particularly with 'Gairmscoile', MacDiarmid, as spokesman of a new world, urges a laggard God on to more and more punitive measures against the 'tittlin' craturs' whose bourgeois complacency is inimical to the poetic purpose. The gloriously vigorous dousing of the 'Noahs' of society - who provide for their own future whilst ignoring the needs of others - proceeds at a headlong pace throughout the poem's length. In 'Prayer for a Second Flood' - which Harvey Oxenhorn, in his perceptive study of MacDiarmid, Elemental Things, aptly describes as a 'bit of cheerleading for the apocalypse'[40] - the onomatopoeic frenzy of purgation is indulged in not so much in the interests of a political as a poetic vision. One is reminded here of the resolve of the 'drunk man' to 'whummle' the complacent Scots readers in the 'nether deeps' of his own profound world view:

O arselins wi' them! Whummle them again!
Coup them heels-owre-gowdy in a storm sae gundy
That mony a long fog-theekit face I ken
'll be sooked richt doon under through a cundy
In the High Street, afore you get weel-sterted
    And are still hauf-herted!

Then flush the world in earnest. Let yoursel' gang,
Scour't to the bones, and mak' its marrow holes
Toom as a whistle as they used to be
In days I mind o' ere men fidged wi' souls,
But naething had forgotten you as yet,
    Nor you forgotten it. (C.P.1, p.300)

Certainly, in 'Prayer for a Second Flood', the poet seems to be standing back and gleefully admiring his own verbal inventiveness - yet there is a high seriousness in MacDiarmid's purgatorial exuberance which one cannot really find in the efforts of the English poets quoted above. MacDiarmid's poem is not just a humorously thorough denunciation of the 'haves' but it is also, in the final lines of the poem, a truly compassionate plea on behalf of the 'have-nots'.

> Up then and at them, ye Gairds o' Heaven.
> The Divine Retreat is owre. Like a tidal bore
> Boil in among them; let the lang lugs nourished
> On the milk o' the word at last hear the roar
> O' human shingle; and replenish the salt o' the earth
> In the place o' their birth. (C.P.1, p.300)

However, the interests of the poetic vision (which I believe to be a metaphysical rather than a political one) are perhaps best served not by the presentation of Lenin or the poetic self in First Hymn and 'Second Hymn', but by the poet's engagement with the natural object as model in the linguistically inventive Scots Unbound And Other Poems (1932) and Stony Limits and Other Poems (1934; 1956). These volumes (henceforward referred to as Scots Unbound and Stony Limits) are essentially celebrations of cosmic energy - the energy that goes into the making of a poem, the surge of a river, the abundant growth of a bog, the intense vibration which underlies the seeming motionlessness of stone, the human energy which - redirected - could bring into being a new and better world.

In the exuberant 'Tarras' - one of the 'divertissements philologiques' which are characteristic of this period of MacDiarmid's work - the poetic preoccupation with growth and renewal is imaged forth in a positive embarrassment of Scots riches. The bog, Tarras, part of the familiar Langholm landscape, is seen as a model of diversity-in-unity, a special space in which every small growing and flowing thing is engaged in relentless self-realisation - uninterrupted by society's attempts to impose order, to stratify, to create arbitrary and illusory distinctions.

Tarras is addressed as a 'Bolshevik' bog, and there is an identification between the masses and the numerous 'inhabitants' of the bogland as each group scorns the irrelevant constraints of organised 'polite' Society. The genteel 'Society' of the first stanza is reminiscent of the mindless elite (the haill clanjamfrie) of 'The Bonnie Broukit Bairn' and is similarly defined in terms of opinionated, senseless sound:

> Little the bog and the masses reck
> O' some dainty-davie or fike-ma-fuss.
> Ho for the mother of usk and adder
> Spelderin' here in her coal and madder
> Faur frae Society's bells and bladder. (C.P.1, p.337)

However, although the bog is seen as 'Bolshevik' - and clearly, MacDiarmid's aspirations for each individual member of his ideal society is that, like a bogland plant he may joyfully and without let or hindrance sing his own essence - it is surely not Marx but Dionysus who is the commanding presence in this pastoral poem. The rampant growth of bogland vegetation (a growth which the poet would wish to be reflected in the intellectual affairs of man) is expressed in predominantly kinaesthetic imagery, rich in onomatopoeic, alliterative and assonantal patterning. The element of play is central to 'Tarras' with its lively rhythms and the poet's obvious delight in the employment of his evocative verbal 'finds':

> The fog-wa' splits and a gair is set
> O' corbie oats and corcolet
> And drulie water like sheepeik seeps
> Through the duffie peats, and cranglin' creeps,
> Crowdles like a crab, syne cowds awa',.
> Couthless eneuch, yet cuttedly tae,
> Tho' here and there in a sudden swaw
> Corky-heidit as if in a playsome way,
> But its lichtest kinks are a cowzie sport,
> That nocht can cuddum - nocht can sort
> For't, endless torsion, riddlin' port. (C.P.1, p.338)

Clearly, sexual imagery is central to the expression of poetic purpose in 'Tarras'. However, human sexuality - so often seen in MacDiarmid as the one area of life in which we are still in touch with the primordial - is now seen, in the light of man's relationship with

the essential earth, as a poor thing, a sentimental irrelevance. Outside and away from the social mores and taboos which limit the expression of human sexuality, the bog, like an exultant whore, lies in spreadeagled acceptance of all cósmic comers. The human orgasmic experience is put into perspective in the context of the massive climactic release of energy which results in the teeming life of 'Tarras':

> Ah, woman-fondlin'! What is that to this?
> Saft hair to birssy heather, warm kiss
> To cauld black waters' suction.
> Nae ardent breists' erection
> But the stark hills'! In what dry-gair-flow
> Can I pillow my lowin' cheek here
> Wi' nae paps' howe below?
> What laithsome parodies appear
> O' my body's secrets in this oorie growth
> Wi' its peerieweeries a' radgie for scouth
> And the haill ratch and rive o' a world uncouth?
> (C.P.1, p.338)

Certainly the 'peeriweeries a' radgie for scouth' (very small things ready for freedom) and the painful cosmic expansion so memorably and dramatically expressed as 'the haill ratch and rive o' a world uncouth' (the whole wrench and rend of an uncouth world) could be translated into terms of political struggle. Surely, however, in the context of the poem as a whole, the anarchic bog cannot be seen as a model of any conceivable communist society. It is, rather, an exemplary image by which the poet seeks to convey a personal, poetic vision of a dynamic new world. And, as in so many of MacDiarmid's poems, it is not the poet's relationship with his fellow man (or woman) which is central to the poem, but his relationship with the cosmos itself. MacDiarmid is 'alone with the alone' amid the abundant life of 'Tarras'.

A major characteristic of the MacDiarmid corpus is the way in which the poet 'sings' substance. And in no volume, perhaps, is this more apparent than in the mellifluous Scots Unbound. One remembers the tender 'Milk-Wort and Bog-Cotton' and the verbal enchantment of 'Water Music' in which the poet celebrates the Langholm rivèrs - Wauchope, Esk and Ewes - 'each wi' its ain rhythms till't'. Now, in 'Tarras', there is an ardent re-affirmation of the poet's love of the material world as

he celebrates the wild bogland in all its colourful fecundity. And the poet's song is addressed not only to the flower-mantled, girlish 'Tarras' with 'birds in her hat' but to her alter ego, the wily, predatory old bawd. The imagery of bastardy ('Bycomes o' bogs and gets o' cairns') is employed to reinforce the sense of the unrestricted growth of 'Tarras' - its freedom to follow its own anarchic nature:

> Her cautelles! On cods o' crammasy sundew
> Or wi' antrin sprigs o' butterwort blue,
> Here in a punk-hole, there in a burn,
> She gecks to storm and shine in turn,
> Trysts wi' this wind and neist wi' that,
> Now wi' thunder and syne wi' snaw,
> Bare to the banes or wi' birds in her hat,
> - And has bairns by them a',
> Bairns!
> Bycomes o' bogs and gets o' cairns,
> Ultimate flow of her flosh and ferns ...
> The doup of the world is under you here
> And, fast in her shochles, she'll find ye,
> When you're drawn to where wind and water shear,
> Shuttles o' glaur, and shot-heuch, to wind ye,
> Till you peughle and hoast in the shug-bog there,
> While she lies jirblin' wide to the air
> And now and then lets a scannachin flare.
> (C.P.1, pp.338-339)

However, 'Tarras' is a stern mistress who scorns the flimsy moral and social barriers which man erects between his vulnerable self and the reality which the bog represents. And, it does seem that by the employment of the pun in 'cul-ture' in the penultimate stanza the potential wooer of 'Tarras' is being reminded that the untamed bog represents not only a threat to his manhood (cull: testicle) but to the culture of which he is a part. Paradoxically, in this 'Bolshevik' bog only the strong can hope to survive:

> Come pledge her in a horse-punckin then!
> Loons to a byssim, pock-shakin's o' men,
> Needna come vauntin' their poustures to her.
> Their paramuddle is whey to her heather.
> To gang through her mill they maun pay
> Ootsucken multure to the auld vulture,
> Nor wi' their flauchter-spades ettle to play,
> Withoot thick paikies to gaird their cul-ture!
> What's ony schaftmon to this shud moss?
> Or pooky-hair to her matted boss?
> - Pledge her wha's mou' can relish her floss!
> (C.P.1, p.339)

In the early thirties then, Lenin, the poetic selves and the bogland of 'Tarras' in Langholm are among the models by which the poet seeks to image forth the qualities he considers to be necessary in the reconstruction of the world. However, it is perhaps in the 1934 volume, Stony Limits, that the new world begins to take on a definable shape. The fervent didacticism and programmatic nature of poetic intent could perhaps be summed up by one slogan-like line from the exuberant 'Song of the New Economics': 'On to the New World!' And MacDiarmid's new world had a new extended vocabulary through which its interests could be memorably expressed. Kenneth Buthlay writes in this regard:

> ... MacDiarmid applied himself to the existing scientific terminology of English as offering a possibility of fresh linguistic sustenance that the English poets themselves had barely begun to be aware of. But his lexicophagus habits soon took him beyond the more obvious fields of science to "recondite elements of the English vocabulary" wherever these were to be found; and out of all this came a "synthetic English" on which he began to draw for a new kind of poetic diction.[41]

The political element is well to the fore in Stony Limits as is evidenced by such poems as the afore-mentioned 'Song of the New Economics', 'First Objectives', 'The Belly-Grip' and the joyous 'Genethliacon for the New World Order'. However, it is perhaps in poems such as 'Harry Semen', 'Lament for the Great Music' and 'On a Raised Beach' in which the poet as visionary is the commanding presence that the true nature of the poetic purpose is most successfully conveyed. Certainly the imaginative extravagance of MacDiarmid's manifesto for an alternative world seems to be the stuff of poetic vision rather than practicable political strategy.

MacDiarmid's religious quest - his intense engagement with 'what there is' - reaches its most concise, satisfactory and assured expression in the Stony Limits poem 'On a Raised Beach'. The poet confronts a world stripped of the traditional values and hence of meaning and succeeds in wresting from the primal, unyielding substance of stone a sustaining ontology. And that ontology is expressed in a 'dualism' which replaces

the traditional one of body and soul and is peculiarly MacDiarmid's own: 'All is lithogenesis – or lochia'. In MacDiarmid's new world, Christ is to be replaced by crusta and the 'futile imaginings of men' by a head-on confrontation with the harsh reality of the purely material grounds of our existence.

MacDiarmid's dramatic credo (dramatic in that gesture, pose and a sense of the direct voice are major contributory factors in the articulation of poetic purpose) is set on a raised beach in the Shetlands – a beach that was once below water but now lies aloof and untouched by the action of the tides. The poem is in eleven uneven sections of free verse which rely for patterning on a widespread use of parallelisms, accumulation of associated images and recurring aperçus. However, it is perhaps the poem's linguistic patterning that is mainly responsible for its Structural unity. The opening and concluding passages are in 'synthetic English' and these are balanced out by a short passage in Norn at the centre of the otherwise accessible vocabulary of the poem.

In the opening passage of 'On a Raised Beach', the poet (appropriately, given the invocation of each stone and all stone in the passage and the universal nature of the poetic purpose which underlies the poem) draws on a variety of vocabularies – such as Greek, Latin, French, Old French and Scandinavian. And the lines are also 'larded with learned allusions'[42] from such disciplines as astronomy, crystallography, architecture and, particularly, from Geology. The stone is a major symbol in MacDiarmid's work from the early lyrics in Scots onwards, but it is in Stony Limits that we become aware of a genuinely extensive familiarity with its physical properties. Kenneth Buthlay writes, in connection with MacDiarmid's enthusiasm for Geology and its implications in the poet's work:

> The imaginative penetration into the world of stones proceeds from a solid basis of geological knowledge. This science had a special attraction for MacDiarmid, and when he went to live in

the Shetlands he spent much of his time in the company of a geologist, exploring the little islands around Whalsay. The vast solitude, the audible silence, the sense of the skull beneath the skin of the world, all told him that "there are no twirly bits in this ground bass".[43]

However, despite MacDiarmid's multi-lingual diction and encyclopaedic allusions the poet emerges from the introductory passage of 'On a Raised Beach' as, perhaps, more of a Magus than savant. The poem's initial appeal is not to the intellect but to the auditory imagination since we succumb to the incantatory music of the lines before we comprehend their literal significance. The element of word play is evident even in this most grave of poetic undertakings:

> All is lithogenesis - or lochia,
> Carpolite fruit of the forbidden tree,
> Stones blacker than any in the Caaba,
> Cream-coloured caen-stone, chatoyant pieces,
> Celadon and corbeau, bistre and beige,
> Glaucous, hoar, enfouldered, cyathiform,
> Making mere faculae of the sun and moon
> I study you glout and gloss, but have
> No cadrans to adjust you with, and turn again
> From optik to haptik and like a blind man run
> My fingers over you, arris by arris, burr by burr,
> Slickensides, truité, rugas, foveoles,
> Bringing my aesthesis in vain to bear,
> An angle-titch to all your corrugations and coigns,
> Hatched foraminous cavo-rilievo of the world,
> Deictic, fiducial stones. Chiliad by chiliad
> What bricole piled you here, stupendous cairn?
> What artist poses the Earth écorché thus,
> Pillar of creation engouled in me?
> What eburnation augments you with men's bones,
> Every energumen an Endymion yet?
> All the other stones are in this haecceity it seems,
> But where is the Christophanic rock that moved?
> What Cabirian song from this catasta comes?
>
> (C.P.1, pp.422-423)

MacDiarmid's singular achievement in the difficult opening passage of 'On a Raised Beach' is a defamiliarisation of stone. The exotic and dense vocabulary forces the reader to regard stone, in all its physical variety and traditional implications, as if for the first time. In the passage, stone is invoked, primarily, in the symbolic role which it has traditionally held at the heart of many of the world's great religions: it is the 'petrified' (carpolite) fruit of the Edenic tree

and it is blacker - and hence perhaps, the poet implies, of greater religious significance than the sacred black stone in the Muslim Holy of Holies at Mecca. This implication in the early reaches of the poem signals the poetic intention, which is nothing less than placing the stone at the heart of a materialist ontology for a new world. It is stone as it is in itself that is the repository of real value.

Having suggested the intrinsic value of stone as a thing in itself, the poet now becomes involved in an intense engagement with its physical properties. Primarily, the visual and tactile characteristics of a variety of stones are intoned in a rhythmic and alliterative 'litany' of predominantly paired properties. The stones are seen in terms of colour and light: they are cream-coloured and chatoyant (sparkling); bistre and beige; celadon (a pale shade of green resembling the willow) and corbeau (the black and subtle hues overlaying it of the crow); they are glaucous (sea-green) and hoar (whitish grey). And, in a vivid and evocative image, they are seen as 'enfoundered' (charged with lightning). By this employment of natural imagery, the stones are placed in the context of the cosmos as a whole.

In the poet's invocation of the tactile properties of stone there is a sexual dimension which is reminiscent of his wooing of the essential earth in the Scots Unbound poem, 'Tarras'. In an effort to win through to the essence of the stones, the poet runs sensitive, exploring fingers over a variety of lithic textures: polished stones (slickensides); slippery, trout-like stones (truité); wrinkled (rugas) and pitted (foveoles) stones; stones with teasing 'corrugations and coigns'. However, the stone refuses to yield its selfhood - the poet brings his 'aesthesis in vain to bear' upon it. All the poet can now do is to pose questions which can never be answered. Over all the thousands of years ('Chiliad by chiliad') what 'bricole' (ancient engine for throwing stones) piled you here? What artist is responsible for this 'ecorché' landscape

of the 'flayed' earth displaying the essential hard core of its being? MacDiarmid's inquisition leads up to the overwhelming question which reverberates throughout this atheistic credo: 'But where is the Christophanic rock that moved?'. Where, in this multiform, stupendous, age-old, stoic stone world is the reassuring rock which rolled away from the tomb of Christ - the symbol of the Resurrection? Finally, the poet asks (and the question is a significant one in the light of that biblical cry from the soul in the second section of the poem: 'Bread from stones is my sole and desperate dearth'): What Cabirian song from this catasta comes?' What age-old message of wisdom comes from this stone block with its long and close familiarity with the harsh facts of human bondage? The implication here, perhaps, is that man, deprived of the liberating promise of the Resurrection, desperately needs a reassuring 'gospel' from the stones - if he, unlike the unfortunate slaves of old - is to be released from the chains of thraldom.

MacDiarmid's commitment to the stone as the basis of his materialist ontology is conveyed in a demonstration in language of the stone as exemplary image - an image from which alienated 20th century man has much to learn. The stone is seen in many contexts and emerges from each as being of fundamental relevance in the existential scheme of things. 'On A Raised Beach' is about Faith and Unfaith, and the poetic conclusion is that the material world is <u>all</u> there is and hence any reassurance of meaning in human life must proceed from that - 'All is lithogenesis - or lochia'.

After the opening passage of 'On A Raised Beach', with its strong cadences, exotic vocabulary and hypnotic rhythms, there is a change of register, tone and diction. The insistent beat of the introductory lines, with their emphatic opening trochées, gives way to a rhythm and tone which are, on the whole, those of ordinary reflective speech (although as the poem progresses these are continually replaced by the Sermonic and

the declamatory). The Magus of the introductory passage, with his incantatory invocation of the haecceity of stone, is replaced in the second section by the poet prophet in the desert quietly and pensively speaking ad solem. The poem continues in an accessible English as the poet considers the stone's 'not discommendable' reluctance to give of itself too lightly - the Cabirian song, it seems, must be awaited with patience and resolution:

> Deep conviction or preference can seldom
> Find direct terms in which to express itself.
> Today on this shingle shelf
> I understand this pensive reluctance so well,
> This not discommendable obstinacy,
> These contrivances of an inexpressive critical feeling,
> These stones with their resolve that Creation shall not be
> Injured by iconoclasts and quacks. (C.P.1, p.423)

Paradoxically, however, the unyielding stone - like the one bird who has now intruded on the poet's solitude - is seen as having an openness to experience which man, who has 'lost the grounds of his being', has not. This openness is connected, perhaps, with the quiddity of stone - its knowledge and guardianship of, its individual place in the cosmic scheme of things. The stone, unlike man, is itself 'without interruption':

> The inward gates of a bird are always open.
> It does not know how to shut them.
> That is the secret of its song,
> But whether any man's are ajar is doubtful.
> I look at these stones and know little about them,
> But I know their gates are open too,
> Always open, far longer open, than any bird's can be,
> That every one of them has had its gates wide open far longer
> Than all birds put together, let alone humanity ...
> (C.P.1, p.423)

Clearly man too, if he is to 'open his gates' to the cosmic experience, must look to the 'cold, undistracted, eternal and sublime' stones as a model. He must put off the world, as he knows it, and follow his 'Calvinistic' mentor on a 'pilgrimage' to the stony desert. The images of 'apartness' in this journey of the soul are intoned, in prophetic cadences, in section six of the poem:

> We must reconcile ourselves to the stones,
> Not the stones to us.
> Here a man must shed the encumbrances that muffle
> Contact with elemental things, the subtleties
> That seem inseparable from a humane life, and go apart
> Into a simple and sterner, more beautiful and more oppressive
> world ... (C.P.1, p.428)

Only by 'contact with elemental things' can man have any intimation of the true nature of stone, or of his own relation to it.

The stone is continually seen in 'On A Raised Beach' in the context of appearance and reality - and, indeed, it is in this context that the strength and perdurability of the poet's lithic subject really emerges. The stones, jealous of their selfhood

> ... have dismissed
> All but all of evolution, unmoved by it ...
> (C.P.1, p.424)

On the other hand, the response of animal life to evolutionary change has been continuous - blinding the perceiver of such manifestation to the reality of the unifying principle which underlies them:

> Actual physical conflict or psychological warfare
> Incidental to love or food
> Brings out animal life's bolder and more brilliant patterns
> Concealed as a rule in habitude.
> There is a sudden revelation of colour,
> The protrusion of a crest,
> The expansion of an ornament,
> – But no general principle can be guessed
> From these flashing fragments we are seeing,
> These foam-bells on the hidden currents of being.
> (C.P.1, p.424)

Yet, however dazzling and pleasing to the eye, these transient 'appearances' must 'come back to the likeness of stone'. And 'there are no twirly bits in this ground bass'. The employment of the inconsequential 'twirly bits', with its slender vowels, effectively conveys the comparative irrelevance of evolutionary change in the context of the immutable stone.

The tendency of the human intellect to play on the surface of things is not only observable in our attitude to the passing parade of animal life, but in our igncrance of the true nature of the stone itself

- and, incidentally, in our preoccupation with the illusory stone structures with which we seek to aggrandise ourselves. However, our constructs will vanish, while the stone itself remains inviolate. The relationship of stone as a 'thing-in-itself' and as a material in man-made objects is memorably imaged forth:

> We must be humble. We are so easily baffled by appearances
> And do not realise that these stones are one with the stars.
> It makes no difference to them whether they are high or low,
> Mountain peak or ocean floor, palace, or pigsty.
> There are plenty of ruined buildings in the world but no
> ruined stones ... (C.P.1, p.425)

However, stone is seen in 'On A Raised Beach' as an affirmative image for man cast adrift in the 'Wasteland' of 20th century Europe. MacDiarmid takes Eliot's 'heap of broken images' and reassembles them in the shape of stone. And he offers man not 'fear in a handful of dust' but hope in a handful of stone. The 'consolatory' vision implicit in the stone does not assuage the fear of death (the poet accepts the tragic nature of human life and considers that death must be confronted head-on) but it does offer something which man can be <u>sure</u> of in an age of uncertainty. Like the thistle in <u>A Drunk Man</u> ('The thistle rises and forever will' (C.P.1, p.152)) man can be assured that the stone will rise triumphantly above all this, or any other age, can try to do to it. It will survive even the downfall of civilisations given such vivid, visual, aural and kinaesthetic expression in Eliot's 1922 poem:

> Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air
> Falling towers
> Jerusalem Athens Alexandria
> Vienna London ...[44]

The concern of the stones is ultimate truth, and in this pursuit of the real it will eliminate everything that is vestigial or superfluous. And Man is again, it seems, directed to emulate the rigour and resolve of the stones:

> Their sole concern is that what can be shaken
> Shall be shaken and disappear
> And only the unshakable be left.
> What hardihood in any man has part of parcel in the latter?
> It is necessary to make a stand and maintain it forever.
> These stones go through Man, straight to God, if there is one.
> What have they not gone through already?
> Empires, civilisations, aeons. Only in them
> If in anything, can His creation confront Him.
> (C.P.1, p.427)

And if the stone remains unmoved by evolution and cultural collapse, it is also indifferent to the whims of those erstwhile deities, the sun and moon:

> They [the stones] came so far out of the water and halted forever.
> That larking dallier, the sun, has only been able to play
> With superficial by-products since;
> The moon moves the waters backwards and forwards,
> But the stones cannot be lured an inch farther ...
> (C.P.1, p.427)

The poet's exaltation of stone is reinforced by the diminishment of the sun in the cosmic scheme of things. Like the phrase 'twirly bits', which was referred to earlier in this discussion, the delightful assonantal phrase 'larking dallier' is clearly at odds with the more weighty images of MacDiarmid's grave poem. Yet it is a felicitous choice as employed here. In the 'daily' round of the earth around the sun, that inconsequential playboy of the Eastern and Western world plays (like the intellect of man, perhaps) on the surface of things. The vis comica of the early lyrics in Scots is clearly at work here, and one recalls a similar dismissal of the moon in 'Au Clair de la Lune' as a 'licht-lookin' craw o' a body' who spends her time 'Peerin' a' roon''. In the phrase 'larking dallier' there are also, perhaps, connotations of the lark who dallies in the high, clear air and 'wastes' his light treble on its unpeopled vastnesses.

The stone, however, has no connection with dalliance. And, because of its refusal to be deflected from its cosmic purpose by the sun or the moon or the poet himself as Magus, it is presented as a trustworthy

repository of meaning in the modern world. And indeed this 'meaning' is given a blasphemous sacramental status. In an intensely dramatic moment in the poem, the 'high priest', whose 'mass' is a celebration of matter, whose 'Christ' is crusta and whose vision of 'everlasting life' is an eternity spent not with God but with stone, offers man a kind of petrological 'Eucharist'. The poet's absolute dedication to the stone, as representing Truth, is conveyed in emphatic rhythms, imperatives that broach no contradiction and a tone of complete conviction:

> Listen to me - Truth is not crushed;
> It crushes, gorgonises all else into itself.
> The trouble is to know it when you see it?
> You will have no trouble with it when you do.
> Do not argue with me. Argue with these stones.
> Truth has no trouble in knowing itself.
> This is it. The hard fact. The inoppugnable reality,
> Here is something for you to digest.
> Eat this and we'll see what appetite you have left
> For a world hereafter.
> I pledge you in the first and last crusta,
> The rocks rattling in the bead-proof seas.
>
> (C.P.1, p.430)

The 'pledge' of the final lines quoted has perhaps many interpretations. As I see it, one of the following may be relevant: the seas which contain and recognise the 'truth' of the stones cannot be lured (like primitive tribes) into an alien belief by the traditional gift of baubles; the seas accept the rocks (reality) but are 'proof' against the man-made beads (appearances) which are irrelevant in the cosmic scheme of things; the seas recognise the stones as the beginning and end of the world, and so are 'proof' against meaningless conventional prayer as represented by beads (rosary beads, prayer beads, etc.).

Whilst thus far the poet seems to have been speaking _ad solem, ad hominem_, the final pages of the poem are addressed specifically to the 'Intelligentsia' who are reminded of their duties in relation to the 'humanity no culture has reached, the mob'. The 'impossible and imperative job' of this elite group is, perhaps, to fill 'the empty hand' of the mass of society not with bread but with _stone_ - with an alternative ontology for a new and secular age. And certainly the

poet's direct answer to the central question of the poem 'But where is the Christophanic rock that moved?' is, when it comes, dramatically emphatic and devoid of the traditional religious consolations:

> Detached intellectuals, not one stone will move,
> Not the least of them, not a fraction of an inch ...
> (C.P.1, p.432)

For MacDiarmid, the only significant movement in stones is the 'intense vibration' beneath their apparent lithic immobility. And this movement relates the stones to that poetic vision which is, for MacDiarmid, an intensely satisfying one - a vision of the cosmos as a unity of energies.

There is, perhaps, a kind of affirmation in the penultimate section of 'On A Raised Beach', although MacDiarmid's assurances might prove cold comfort to the mass of men who have been 'weaned' on Heaven:

> But let us not be afraid to die.
> No heavier and colder and quieter then,
> No more motionless, do stones lie
> In death than in life to all men.
> It is not more difficult in death than here
> - Though slow as the stones the powers develop
> To rise from the grave - to get a life worth having;
> And in death - unlike life - we lose nothing that is truly ours.
> (C.P.1, p.433)

In death, we can - like the stones - 'be ourselves without interruption'.

In the final section of the poem, MacDiarmid returns to an obscure vocabulary with the use of predominantly rhetorical terms:

> Diallage of the world's debate, end of the long auxesis,
> Although no ébrillade of Pegasus can here avail,
> I prefer your enchorial characters - the futhorc of the future -
> To the hieroglyphics of all the other forms of Nature.
> Song, your apprentice encrinite, seems to sweep
> The Heavens with a last entrochal movement;
> And, with the same word that began it, closes
> Earth's vast epanadiplosis.
> (C.P.1, p.433)

Clearly, it is necessary to gloss a number of terms here if we are to make sense of MacDiarmid's concluding address to the stones of the raised beach. Drawing on the appropriate definitions and mindful of the poetic preoccupations in the poem as a whole, I read the final section of 'On A

Raised Beach' as follows (my effort has the obvious faults inherent in all paraphrase):

> Centre of the cosmic argument, purpose and conclusion of
> the hyperbole of the ages
> Although I cannot direct my wayward muse towards an
> adequate expression of your essence
> I prefer your demotic characters - the alphabet of the
> new world -
> To the enigmatic signs of all the other forms of nature.
> My song is a mere crinoid in the ocean of your reality
> Yet it reaches from the sea-bed and with a wheel-like
> motion
> Seeks to encompass the Heavens
> As you, in a vast cosmic circle
> Bring together the first word and the last
> The beginning and the end of the world.

NOTES

CHAPTER FOUR

1. Selected Essays, p. 28.

2. Lucky Poet, p. 67.

3. Bold, p. 137.

4. Boutelle, p. 196.

5. Selected Essays, p. 22.

6. Lucky Poet, p. 241.

7. Craig, pp. 248 - 249.

8. See, for example, Complete Poems, p. 475 and p. 888.

9. Bold, p. 138.

10. David Daiches, God and The Poets (Oxford, 1984), p. 189. Hereafter: Daiches.

11. Mackinnon, pp. 167 - 168.

12. Daiches, pp. 193 - 194.

13. I have borrowed the phrase 'Tearin' the soul to rags' from MacDiarmid's 'Ode to All Rebels', Complete Poems, p. 505.

14. Cited in Samuel Hynes, The Auden Generation (London, 1976), p. 32. Hereafter: Hynes.

15. C. Day Lewis, The Buried Day (London, 1960), pp. 209 - 210. Hereafter: Day Lewis.

16. In Lucky Poet (p. 67), MacDiarmid quotes, as one of his 'mottoes', Thomas Hardy's declaration that 'Literature is the written expression of revolt against accepted things'.

17. Poetry of the Thirties, ed. Robin Skelton (London, 1964), p. 36. Hereafter: Skelton.

18. Cited in George Watson, Potitics And Literature in Modern Britain (London, 1977), p. 63. Hereafter: George Watson.

19. Hynes, p. 120.

20. See Lucky Poet, p. 169.

21. Complete Poems, p. 1060.

22. Hynes, p. 127.

23. *Letters*, p. xi

24. C. Day Lewis, *A Hope For Poetry* (Oxford, 1934), pp. 50 - 53.

25. John Lehmann, *New Writing in Europe* (Harmondsworth, 1940), p. 130.

26. Bold, p. 139.

27. See Skelton, p. 136. See also 'A Note On The Texts Used' (p. 41) in which the editor writes:

> W.H. Auden has been monumentally generous in allowing me to use early texts of five poems of which he now disapproves. These poems are 'Sir, No Man's Enemy', 'A Communist To Others', 'To A Writer On His Birthday', 'Spain' and 'September 1, 1939'. I have agreed to make it absolutely clear that 'Mr. W.H. Auden considers these five poems to be trash which he is ashamed to have written'.

28. George Watson, p. 54.

29. Gish, pp. 126 - 127.

30. Buthlay, p. 70.

31. *The Socialist Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid*, p. xviii

32. *Letters*, p. xvi

33. *Lucky Poet*, p. 219.

34. ibid., p. 19.

35. Boutelle, p. 202.

36. *Lucky Poet*, p. 19.

37. Skelton, p. 17.

38. ibid., p. 62.

39. ibid., p. 58.

40. Oxenhorn, p. 153.

41. Buthlay, p. 85.

42. *A Critical Survey*, p. 51.

43. Buthlay, p. 88.

44. See Eliot, p. 77.

CHAPTER FIVE

'The Imperious Gravity Of A New Song'

A Study of _In Memoriam James Joyce_ and _The Kind of Poetry I Want_

MacDiarmid's movement away from the exquisite miniatures in Scots of the twenties to the 'songs without measure or end'[1] of the late thirties onwards has disconcerted, disappointed - and only occasionally impressed - critics of his work. There is a feeling that the poet has not only betrayed his own formidable talent as a lyric poet but has somehow let the literary 'side' down by displaying such scant regard for the formal niceties which smooth the paths of critic and lay reader alike. Yet what MacDiarmid wanted - and was determined to have, even at the expense of conventional literariness - was a generosity of scope which accorded with the increasing complexity of the world and the extravagance of his own vision of the future of mankind. With the inclusion of 'Sea-Serpent' and 'Gairmscoile' in the 1926 volume Penny Wheep, it is already apparent that MacDiarmid wanted 'to break up the unity of the lyric and introduce new material of various kinds on different levels of significance'.[2] And A Drunk Man (published later in the same year) with its enactment of a myriad selves, wide-ranging metaphysical speculation and reformatory zeal marks the beginning of a lasting commitment to the long poem.

And, indeed, the letters of the poet who, in the twenties made the modest claim 'wee bit sangs are a' I need'[3], reveal an almost obsessive preoccupation with magnitude in regard to various works in preparation. In August 1926, MacDiarmid predicts that the completed A Drunk Man will be 'at least six times as big a book as Sangschaw'.[4] In December of the same year he considers that his new project, Cencrastus, 'will be a much bigger thing than the Drunk Man in every way'.[5] And in 1938 the work in progress, Mature Art, is, apparently, already over 'three times as long as Cencrastus'.[6]

MacDiarmid's commitment to larger forms is seen in a specifically political context in the 1936 essay 'Charles Doughty and the Need for Heroic Poetry'. The poet refers to 'the trend of poetic effort towards

epic' and considers this movement to be 'in keeping with the great enterprise afoot' in the U.S.S.R. :

> It is epic - and no lesser form - that equates with the classless society. Everything else ...... belongs to the old order of bourgeois 'values' ... [7]

And in a 1964 epistle we find MacDiarmid still firmly on the side of the monumental in art as he cites some notable and politically orientated instances of epic proportions:

> The grandeur of the time requires grand syntheses - not only in fine arts or music, but also in literature, not only in prose but also in poetry. Mayakovsky's poems 'Vladimir Ilyitch Lenin' and 'Harasho' ('The Poem of October') render in an impressive epic and lyrical synthesis the history of the preparation and carrying out of the first Socialist revolution in the world. The Chilean Pablo Neruda celebrates the fight for national liberation in monumental cycles of poems, such as the well-known _Canto General_ or in the more recent _Canicion de gesta_, devoted to revolutionary Cuba - not unlike the huge mural frescoes painted by the Mexican painters. [8]

MacDiarmid's own contribution to the monumental art which accorded with 'the grandeur of the time' was an enormous, unfinished epic which, with the notable exception of _The Battle Continues_ (1957), occupied him from the late thirties onwards. In the vast work MacDiarmid attempts a synthesis of his Celtic and Internationalist preoccupations in the interests of that 'world consciousness' which he believed to be 'the great function and destiny of Man ...' [9]

MacDiarmid's epic _Cornish Heroic Song for Valda Trevlyn_ was to have been 'a work of around 60,000 lines' which, the poet 'reckoned would make it the longest single poem in world literature'. [10] And, certainly, in MacDiarmid's epistolatory references to the work in progress the emphasis is (as in the case of _A Drunk Man_ and _Cencrastus_) on magnitude. In one 1938 letter, _Mature Art_ (a segment of the huge epic) is described as an 'important long poem' of 'between 4,000 and 5,000 lines' [11] and in another epistle of the same year the length is given as 'over 10,000 lines'.[12] In 1939, the 'big new poem' is 'over 20,000 lines'. [13]

Mature Art was to have been published - at the more moderate length of between 4,000 and 5,000 lines - by the Obelisk Press in Paris in 1939. However, the poem proved to be yet another casualty of war, since MacDiarmid writes, in a 1941 letter, that 'the Fall of France quashed the project.' [14] The same letter reveals that the work we now know as In Memoriam James Joyce was part of Mature Art though 'complete in itself'. The poem, therefore, did not start off as a tribute to Joyce but was adapted to that end and given its present title after the Irish writer's death in 1941.

The extant parts of Cornish Heroic Song for Valda Trevlyn (in so far as one can determine them given a certain inconsistency in MacDiarmid's epistolatory descriptions of the epic) are Poems of the East-West Synthesis (1946); 'Cornish Heroic Song for Valda Trevlyn' (described in a 1938 letter as the 'First Appendix' or 'Cornwall' section of Mature Art and published in A Kist of Whistles (1947)); In Memoriam James Joyce (1955); The Kind of Poetry I Want (1961); Direadh (1974); and Impavidi Progrediamur which was never in fact completed. [15] In the author's note to The Complete Poems (1978) MacDiarmid writes in this regard:

> I have simply abandoned the whole project. There is no proper sequence in which poems I attributed to Impavidi Progrediamur can be presented, but the interested reader will find in the Index of Titles a list of those poems that at one time or another I thought of including in the work. [16]

In the light of MacDiarmid's essentially weak sense of architectonics, the composition of his vast epic must have posed considerable problems. Alan Bold enlightens us as to the way in which MacDiarmid tries to solve them:

> The Celtic connexion provided the structural principle of the epic which was to be read as a pibroch-like improvisation of a theme (or urlar) ... [17]

In this regard, MacDiarmid's description of the nature of 'the pibrochs of the great period' - in the following extract from a 1936 essay - is of particular interest. The passage could be seen as a pre-publication attempt to explain (or explain away) the relative

formlessness of the poems then in preparation:

> These [the pibrochs] knew no "bar". They were _timeless_ music - hence their affiliation with plainsong, with the neuma. Barred music - accented music - finds its ultimate form in symphony. Unbarred music - quantity music - expresses itself in pattern-repetition; hence the idea that the Celt has no architectonic power, that his art is confined to niggling involutions and intricacies - yet the ultimate form here is not symphony; it is epic ... [18]

According to Roderick Watson - in his valuable recent study, _MacDiarmid_ (1985) - 'the free verse structure' of MacDiarmid's long poems 'does not follow the intricate formal patterns of the [pibroch] music itself'. [19] However, Watson's assessment of what the poems actually do owe to 'the spirit of pibroch' is eminently worthy of note:

> What caught the poet's imagination was the concept of an art that ended where it began (with its tail in its mouth), after having gone through ever more elaborate variations on a single theme. Thus, for example, the 'theme' of 'The Kind of Poetry I Want' is quite simply conveyed by its title, while the verses are the 'variations', namely an inexhaustible list of different examples drawn from the most diverse sources. [20]

The sections of _Cornish Heroic Song for Valda Trevlyn_ with which I shall concern myself in this study, and which I shall deal with in chronological order, are _In Memoriam James Joyce_ and _The Kind of Poetry I Want_.

In a 1974 letter to David Daiches, MacDiarmid refers to the degree to which his poem, _In Memoriam James Joyce_, had been 'condemned as worthless and a deplorable waste of' his 'powers'. [21] And, certainly, over the years the 1955 work, with its relentless documentation, numerous extracts from MacDiarmid's omniverous reading and predominantly prose medium, has been the focus of adverse criticism. The _Times Literary Supplement_, for instance, referred to MacDiarmid's practice in the poem as 'dragging in references to all manner of out-of-the-way literatures' and suggested that MacDiarmid's case was that of 'a middle-aged poet in whom his early lyrical impulse had died'. [22] Although critical response to the poem remains mixed, recent discriminating attempts to come to terms with it have produced illuminating

results.

In a characteristically painstaking assessment of the 1955 poem, Nancy Gish refers to what she considers to be a major architectonic weakness in it:

> The real difficulty, I think, is that it lacks a middle ground, the sustaining links that seem essential in a work so large. Small parts are sometimes rich and absorbing; the whole has a massive weight of presence, demanding acknowledgement of a 'complex conception of all things'. But getting from one to the other means wading through pages of catalogues too undifferentiated, technical, and dull to sustain interest and jumping abruptly from idea to idea so often that all become blurred. Constant parenthetical intrusions, often taking up a quarter to a third of a page, break up the flow even more. [23]

However, Gish also reveals the rewards which can be reaped from a determined and patient attention to In Memoriam James Joyce. Her conclusion is one with which the present writer heartily concurs:

> ... in In Memoriam James Joyce, for all its weaknesses there is something fundamental and powerful. If one sticks it out, quantity does become quality. An immense integrity reveals itself, a committed questioning of universal integration that exposes - in all its shabbiness - intellectual provinciality, cultural standardization, and the making of words into mere counters ... [24]

In Edwin Morgan's essay 'Jujitsu for the Educated' (which remains one of the most valuable sources on the poem) the author, like Nancy Gish, has certain reservations about 'what the cataloguer catalogues' [25] The average reader, he concludes, could find himself confronted by calalogues in which 'not even one item rings a bell in the memory'. [26] Yet he views In Memoriam James Joyce 'as undoubtedly MacDiarmid's most remarkable poem so far published, original both in material and in presentation'. [27]

John Baglow's conclusion, as regards In Memoriam James Joyce, is very different from Edwin Morgan's but of considerable interest. After a most thorough engagement with the poem, Baglow concludes that In Memoriam James Joyce is

> a poem of great energy, a courageous facing of dry and intractable material, in which the poet refuses to be distracted from what he sees as his crucial aims, even if at some points he seems aware that his problem is an insoluble one. But as a poem it is a profound failure ..... The construction process is overly intellectualized.

> By making language and poetry ideals, by making the very use of language a subject of conscious scrutiny, he loses his voice.[28]

Alan Scott Riach, who has made a valuable contribution to MacDiarmid criticism by his study of source material and its function in the 1955 work, homes in on an absolutely central and commendable characteristic of In Memoriam James Joyce:

> ... one of the poem's cumulative effects is to yield up a vast panoply of different ways of thinking about language, and by abandoning such fixed constants as 'the ineffable' or 'precision and richness' to range over as many approaches to linguistic events as possible.[29]

Margery Greenshields McCulloch, whose view of the poem is also, on the whole, an affirmative one, concludes that In Memoriam James Joyce is 'an important poem for the 20th Century'. She writes:

> ... his [MacDiarmid's] attempt to grapple with the contemporary artist's dilemma is an essential part of the evolutionary vision of the poem, and one is frequently both intellectually, and, perhaps to one's surprise, emotionally stirred by the insights which it demonstrates.[30]

In my engagement with the 1955 poem, I would like to place a particular emphasis on the rôle MacDiarmid adopts in it since I believe that this has a crucial bearing on the content and form of the work. MacDiarmid's rôle in In Memoriam James Joyce (and, indeed, in the later poetry in general) is a precursory one. His task is not so much the actual writing of the poetry of a new age as the preparation of the ground within which such a poetry could take root and flourish. Indeed, the poetry MacDiarmid wanted could not as yet *be* written since it was

> Poetry of such an integration as cannot be effected
> Until a new and conscious organisation of society
> Generates a new view
> Of the world as a whole
> As the integration of all the rich parts
> Uncovered by the separate disciplines. (C.P.2, p.1025)

MacDiarmid retained a romantic confidence in the ability of the poet to effect change in society - indeed

> ... one of the great triumphs
> Of poetic insight was the way in which
> It prepared the minds of many
> For the conception of evolution ... (C.P.2, p. 1027)

MacDiarmid's preparatory function in _In Memoriam James Joyce_ clearly involved that world consciousness which is a central preoccupation of his from the thirties onwards. Appropriately, given the nature of his aspirations, the main characteristics of the mass of material which MacDiarmid, as pedant, metaphraest and poet, presents in _In Memoriam James Joyce_ are its internationalism, its erudition and its comprehensiveness. Apart from the rare lyrical aside, the poem consists of a vast array of cross-cultural reference presented in lists, litanies and catalogues and (to a lesser degree) in pages of desultory discourse.

And, certainly, for the most part didactic purpose - revealed in an impulse to inform, instruct and exhort on behalf of the vision - seems to take precedence over poetic form. There is a kind of programmatic presentation of what must be known and assimilated if the vision is to be realised:

> Knowledge and, indeed, adoption (_Aneignung_)
> Of the rich Western tradition
> And all the wisdom of the East as well
> Is the indispensable condition for any progress;
> World-history and world-philosophy
> Are only now beginning to dawn ... (C.P.2, p.884)

Thus, _In Memoriam James Joyce_, with its multicultural reference and didactic intent, is _both_ an exemplification and an attempted promotion of the planetary consciousness which MacDiarmid sees as a necessary precondition to the existence of an ideal poetic.

The major structural device of the poem in which MacDiarmid attempts to fulfil his formidable precursory function is the medieval catalogue - used more recently, and to good effect, by Walt Whitman. The catalogues are expository, exhortatory, laudatory, condemnatory and, generally, laden with instances of cultural and linguistic diversity.

They accumulate in the kind of pattern-repetition which MacDiarmid ascribes to the music of the pibroch. The multi referential catalogues successfully convey MacDiarmid's concern with the

> fragmentation of human cultures and the desirability of bringing together ... the knowledge, achievement, and beauty left isolated and sterile in unfamiliar languages and literatures. [31]

'The dangers' of MacDiarmid's 'inclusiveness' are, as Nancy Gish observes, 'weariness and boredom'.[32] Sheer mystification is yet another hazard since many of the catalogues contain abstruse and esoteric lore which is way outside the range of the average reader. However, this is how it should be, perhaps, in a poem which takes such a determined stand against intellectual apathy. Many of the catalogues, as Margery Greenshields McCulloch has pointed out, are 'repetitious or run on too long'.[33] I would certainly agree with Edwin Morgan when he writes:

> These lists undoubtedly have a cumulative comic effect, and MacDiarmid doesn't seem to see this. And this is interesting, because here he and Joyce begin to diverge. Joyce is precisely one of the writers who have taught us to laugh at the very things MacDiarmid is so painstakingly proliferating: all the Alexandrian pedantries and ramifications of modern specialized scholarship ... [34]

Another major feature of the poem - which I would suggest is also another <u>structural</u> device - is the use, on an extensive scale, of the work (acknowledged and unacknowledged) of others. The solitary struggle has been left behind as MacDiarmid seeks to establish a kind of solidarity of the intelligentsia. Thus, instead of the lone voice of the 'drunk man', we have hundreds of erudite voices raised in unison in the interests of the vision. MacDiarmid's continual employment of sources - incorporated into the text, typographically set apart, spilling over into innumerable footnotes - actually becomes a kind of patterning device in the vast poem. The reader comes to <u>expect</u> this continued supplementation of poetic input. Thus, the quotations not only reinforce poetic preoccupations but actually provide a kind of momentum in <u>In Memoriam James Joyce</u>. MacDiarmid

insists that 'The multiplicity of quotations, references and allusions' in his poem 'must be completely understood since they constitute the language in which it is written'.[35] And, one of course recalls the poet's reference (in 'Charles Doughty and the Need for Heroic Poetry') to 'Ezra Pound's use as a language of multifarious references to all periods of history and all phases of human activity.'[36]

And there are other unifying links in *In Memoriam James Joyce* – there is, for instance, the dedication and address to Joyce which provides MacDiarmid with a kind of frame for his poem. The innovative inventive Joyce, seen as one of three articulators of the new (the others are Schoenberg and, predictably, MacDiarmid himself) is not a continual presence in the work but is invoked at intervals to reinforce poetic preoccupations. As in so many of MacDiarmid's poems, the overwhelming presence and major exemplar of *In Memoriam James Joyce* is indisputably MacDiarmid himself.

The main themes of MacDiarmid's 1955 poem – language, silence, cultural diversity, anti-imperialism, fragmentation and evil in the contemporary world, a preoccupation with the East and the nature of the poetic function – emerge in the first, and longest, section of *In Memoriam James Joyce*. Each of the succeeding parts of the poem picks up and focusses upon one aspect of the introductory section. Thus, 'The World of Words' is still concerned with language but its specific emphasis is on individual, psychological responses to verbal stimuli; 'The Snares of Varuna' concentrates on social and political themes; 'The Meeting of the East and the West' gives an account of the way in which Oriental texts have influenced Western scholars; 'England is our Enemy' presents MacDiarmid's anglophobia in a literary context; and 'Plaited Like the Generations of Men' represents the poet's efforts to integrate the diverse elements of his vast poem.

Within this general structure, however, and under the pressure of an obsessional commitment to all-inclusiveness, MacDiarmid allows himself

very considerable freedom of movement. On some occasions he departs from the topic in hand returning many disorientating parentheses, paragraphs or even pages later; on others he goes off briefly at a tangent to interpolate whatever bits and pieces happen to enter his consciousness at any particular time. Thus, the connecting links in In Memoriam James Joyce , although they are real and many, cannot support the massive weight of the poem. The organisation of In Memoriam James Joyce then is, in the last analysis, a loose one.

Another feature of MacDiarmid's 1955 work which has, of course, given rise to adverse critical comment is the radical shift from the finely-honed and polished lyricism of the twenties to what has been termed 'the chopped-up prose' of the later work.[37] In the author's note to the 1955 edition of In Memoriam James Joyce, MacDiarmid explains:

> I did not always do so but it is long now since I ceased to share what the great Jewish poet, Chaim Bialik ... called 'the folly of differentiating between prose and poetry' ...[38]

Certainly, unlike A Drunk Man for instance, in which essentially poetic discourse alternates with highly-wrought lyrical interludes, the 1955 work seems to consist of two quite distinct orders of communication: one which conveys information in lineated prose and in which language is for the most part transparent; and one, employed to a much lesser degree, which is recognisably literary in character. Surely, though, no such line now needs to be drawn between prose and verse expression. And, indeed, after long familiarity with the poem one becomes aware not so much of dichotomy as of fusion.

In a letter from William Carlos Williams to Parker Tyler on 3 October 1948 in connection with his own employment of prose and verse in Paterson (a long poem whose collage composition and medium have some relevance in the context of In Memoriam James Joyce) Williams writes:

> All the prose [in Paterson] including the tail which would have liked to have wagged the dog, has primarily the purpose

> of giving a metrical meaning to or of emphasizing a metrical continuity between all word use. It is not an antipoetic device. ... It is that prose and verse are both writing, both a matter of words and an interrelation between words for the purpose of the art. ...I want to say that prose and verse are to me the same thing, that verse (as in Chaucer's tales) belongs with prose. ...Poetry does not have to be kept away from prose as Mr. Eliot might insist. ... 39

The format and content of the opening page of 'In Memoriam James Joyce' is truly representative of much that is to follow in the work. The poem, for instance, which is heavily dependent on the incorporation of the work of others actually opens with a quotation. And MacDiarmid's contemptuous dismissal of the content (Pape's suggestion that 'English is destined to become the Universal Language ! ') represents not just an instance of MacDiarmid's Anglophobia but of the anti-imperialist stance which the poet adopts in his 1955 work as a whole. 'The adoption of English', as MacDiarmid writes later, 'would imply the acknowledgement of Anglo-Saxon supremacy'. (C.P.2, p.789) And, the poet insists that

> – All dreams of 'imperialism' must be exorcised, (C.P.2, p.790)
> Including linguistic imperialism, which sums up all the rest.

This is the obvious starting point to MacDiarmid's celebration of cultural diversity in In Memoriam James Joyce.

The opening page of the 1955 work also introduces us – in the encyclopaedic format to which we shall become accustomed – to the comprehensive nature of MacDiarmid's commitment to language in the poem. His (and by implication Joyce's) interest will not be confined to one time or one culture:

> We who are concerned with 'the living whole
> Of all the poetry that has ever been written,'
> And the sodaliciis adstricti consortiis
> Of all the authors who have been, are, or will be,
> We remember Jacint Verdaguer whose Atlàntida and Canigó
> Did for Catalonia what Mistral's Mirèio did for Provence,
> And the Italian, Marco Girolamo Vida,
> Who duly figured in Chalmers' collection of British Poets
> (Trust the English to appropriate all they can !)
> An odd fate for an Italian rhetorician
> Who wrote Latin verse in defence of Greek poetics !
> (C.P.2, p.738)

And, indeed, the comprehensive nature of MacDiarmid's literary

interests is referred to directly in the following lines in which MacDiarmid presents the poem as a response to the 'general falling-off of first-hand intellectual effort'. Note how the phonic aspect of the multi-syllabic, hard-to-pronounce words is foregrounded by the use of assonance (this savouring of exotic terms is a central characteristic of the poem). Note, too, the wry, rare self-awareness of the piece:

> Hence this _hapax legomenon_ of a poem, this exercise
> In schablone, bordatini, and prolonged scordatura,
> This _divertissement philologique_,
> This Wortspiel, this torch symphony,
> This 'liberal education,' this collection of _fonds de tiroir_,
> This - even more than Kierkegaard's
> 'Frygt og baeven' - 'dialectical lyric,'
> This rag-bag, this Loch Ness monster, this impact (_C.P_.2, p.755)
> Of the whole range of _Weltliteratur_ on one man's brain, ...

The use of the term 'scordatura' (the deliberate prolongation of a departure from normal tuning) in the above lines from the opening section of the poem 'In Memoriam James Joyce' seems to suggest that MacDiarmid's 1955 work and his purposes are innovative. Schöenberg, with his rejection of tonality and formulation of the twelve-note scheme, is perhaps a presence here. Certainly, later on in this section MacDiarmid and Joyce are seen as abandoning romantic composition and taking

> ... the perhaps 'primrose path'
> To the dodecaphonic bonfire ... (_C.P_.2, p.758)

Later still, in the concluding section of the poem, 'Plaited Like the Generations of Men', Schöenberg is again invoked as a prefigurer of what is to come:

> For Schönberg was right. The problem involved
> In mental vocalisation
> Is not that the evolution of music
> Must wait on the human ear
> But that the human ear must catch up
> With the evolution of music. (_C.P_.2, pp.885-886)

However, the greater part of 'In Memoriam James Joyce' consists of a compilation of catalogues which celebrate language in all its

manifestations. Prominent among these are laudatory lists of those who throughout the world and over time have contributed to the advancement of the word. It is just not possible to do justice to the sheer size and variety of MacDiarmid's international pantheon and one necessarily ends up by being meanly selective. Predictably, poets - especially those noted for their linguistic virtuosity or eccentric contribution to the canon - feature prominently on the rolls of honour. Many of these, such as Joyce and Doughty, and, by implication, MacDiarmid himself are seen as having risked

> ... contemporary misunderstanding, personal obloquy even,
> For the sake of enriching the inheritance ...
> (C.P.2, p.826)

Interestingly, though, and for the first time in the MacDiarmid corpus the contributions of linguists and other wordsmiths to the revitalisation of language are recognised and celebrated. Thus, MacDiarmid opens his arms to

> ... cunning dealers in Zaumny and Skaz
> And workers in dialect and slang
> Multilinguists and grammarians and philologists,
> Orismologists, sematologists, semasiologists
> And epeolators all ... (C.P.2, p.745)

In MacDiarmid's lists then (in which there is considerable scope for name-dropping) the following exemplary figures coexist in multi-cultural harmony: Joyce, Doughty, Barnes, Rilke, Goethe, Mallarmé, Bhartrihari, Mistral, Isaakyan, Marco Girolamo Vida, Padraic O'Conaire, the Persian classical poets and the Moteng Chinese poets, Alan Gardner, Cramesci, Korzbyski, Lindley Murray, Leonard Bloomfield and Saussure. Certain exemplars, whose contribution to language are especially significant, are singled out for special commendation. These include Sholom Jacob

> First consummate literary artist in Yiddish - creator
> Of a polished literary language
> Out of the common witticisms
> And legends of the vernacular
> Current among the people ... (C.P.2, p.791)

And there is, of course,

> ... Sequoyah the Cherokee Indian
> Who, alone, created a written language for his people;
> Johannes Scotus Eriugena, John the Celt as he called himself,
> Who, almost alone in Western Europe then,
> Contrived to learn Greek, and created
> A vast philosophical vision of the spiritual world
> No thinker of today could equal ... (C.P.2, p.793)

As one reads through the lengthy litanies of heroes of the word in 'In Memoriam James Joyce', one wonders how many are actually pressganged into service to keep the MacDiarmid poetic vessel afloat since all are seen in the context of an extravagant vision of the future which they need not, necessarily, have shared. Certainly, as _Finnegans Wake_ amply testifies, Joyce was as fully alive to the expressive possibilities of a multilingual medium as MacDiarmid (and, of course, his actual linguistic resources were far greater). But surely, as Edwin Morgan suggests

> It is very doubtful if Joyce reached the unity of languages for the evolutionary or social or humanistic reasons Solovyov and MacDiarmid put forward ... [40]

And, the title of 'Harbinger of the epical age of COmmunism' sits rather uncomfortably on the head of the conservative Doughty.

However, as is usual in the work of MacDiarmid, much of the praise-singing is directed towards the poet's self. Wildly exaggerated claims to knowledge of all sorts are frequently made. 'There is no language in the world' the poet proclaims 'that has not yielded me delight'. 'A greater interest in Indian thoughts and ideas', he asserts, 'Exists nowhere in the world than in my brain'. And in regard to 'one hundred and fifty grammarians' he informs us confidently, 'I know them all and every detail of their work'. Many passages are prefaced by 'as we know' or 'of course we have read' and 'have we not travelled' in which MacDiarmid seems to be reminding us of his eminent suitability as regards the multicultural task in hand. Yet, if the poet is to be allowed to achieve his objective as regards the promotion of a planetary consciousness in the reader, one must, I suppose, respond to his efforts

with a willing suspension of disbelief. And there is a sense in which In Memoriam James Joyce, though lacking the dramatic potentialities of drunkenness and appropriate mise en scène, is, like A Drunk Man, an enactment. In much of the poem MacDiarmid presents himself as the Rilkean poet who 'must know everything' and as Lenin's 'Communist' who has

> 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 .... [41]

However, when he claims to 'know Greek from Homer to Modern Greek', and later on admits 'Alas I know no Greek' we are forcefully reminded of the gap between the ideal poet and the actual instance. There is a parallel to be drawn between the poetic dilemma of Cencrastus and that of In Memoriam James Joyce. In the 1930 poem, whilst passionately urging a return to the Ur-language of the Scots, MacDiarmid has to confess his own inadequate grasp of the medium:

> O wad at least my yokel words
> Some Gaelic strain had kept ... (C.P.1, p.225)

Inevitably, one is reminded in the 1955 poem of the solid grounding in European languages which underlies Joyce's Finnegans Wake and of the consequent assurance which enables the Irish writer to be playful in regard to his linguistic preoccupations where the insecure MacDiarmid is often pedantic and humourless. In her interesting study, The Language of James Joyce (1973), Margaret Schlauch provides an example of Joyce's polyglot resources in a passage from Finnegans Wake which she quotes and then glosses. The passage 'purports to be a burlesque version of the Aesopic "Ant and the Grasshopper"' and (as Schlauch informs us) 'bristles with entomological terms drawn from several languages'. [42] Here is part of this delightful extract:

> The Gracehoper was always jigging ajog, hoppy on akkant of his joycicity, (he had a partner pair of findlestilts to supplant him), or, if not, he was always making ungraceful overtures to

> Floh and Luse and Bienis and Vespatilla to play pupa-pupa and pulicy-pulicy and langtennas and pushpygyddyum and to commence insects with him, there mouthparts to his orefice and his gambills to there airy processes, even if only in chaste, ameng the everlistings, behold a waspering pot. [43]

Even the following short extract from Schlauch's painstaking gloss of the passage reveals the degree to which Joyce's comic inventiveness rests on considerable linguistic resources:

> ... the author's polglot word-play permits us to make such instantaneous and amusing associations as the German word for "flea" as well as the English girls' names Flo and Flora under the symbol of the word "Floh"; Anglo-Saxon lus (meaning "louse") as well as Lise or Louise under "Luse"; the diminutive of the Latin word for a wasp under "Vespatilla"; Latin pulex ("gnat"), as well as English "police" under "pulicy"; Latin pupa ("chrysalis") as well as German Puppe ("doll") under pupa-pupa ... [44]

Here indeed is linguistic 'braidbinding' of a kind MacDiarmid never manages to achieve in his paean to world language. And here, also, is that 'happy madness of the word' which MacDiarmid commends but gives few instances of in *In Memoriam James Joyce* - language flaunting its own materiality and persuasively pleading its own case. Although some evidence of the influence of the Irish writer can be detected in his early work in Scots, MacDiarmid is, paradoxically, never further from Joycean preoccupations and practice than he is in *In Memoriam James Joyce*.

In 'In Memoriam James Joyce' - and again in accordance with the poet's determination that we become aware of the literary and linguistic output of other cultures - there is a long list of 'suggested reading' running through the entire length of the 1955 poem. The following list is typical - but there are German, Sanskrit, Italian and sources in many other tongues also listed:

> Valéry's *Poésie et Pensée Abstraite*,
> Paulhan's *Les Fleurs de Tarbes*
> And *Jacob Cow The Pirate* or *Whether Words Are Signs*,
> Parain's Traité *sur la Nature et les Fonctions de Langage*,
> Francis Ponge's *Le Parti-pris des Choses*,
> And Sartre's *Aller et Retour*
> And *Recherches sur la Langage* ... (*C.P.*2, p.745)

Predictably, the 1955 poem also includes its quote of the strange

words in which MacDiarmid delights and which generally prove to be so energising in his work. Some of these words are attributed to Charles Doughty who is commended in the poem for 'making language more rich and precise':

> So he writes of a shive of wood, shivers of silex,
> Of a gripe, a thrave, and a strike of corn
> And likes to use words for parts of the body
> Like shanks, chine, neckbone, and the older
> Halse, weasand, chaps, and barme ... (C.P.2, p.740)

Our attention is also drawn to a list of vocables which has, I feel, a decidedly comic ring to it. These must be among 'the funny ones' in which the poet delights, and with which – at one point in the poem – he seems to identify.[45] The words are, paradoxically, from the work of the malcontent, Rolfe. His work, apparently, is

> Hardy with words like lewth, leazes, dumble-dores,
> Spuds, cit, wanzing, and his trained architect's use
> Of adze, cusp, ogee, and the like ... (C.P.2, p.739)

MacDiarmid also lists Norn words illustrating subtle nuances of meaning in the expression of 'the restless movement of the sea':

> Soal, swell occasioned by a breeze,
> Trove, a short, cross, heavy sea,
> Hak, broken water, Burrik, a sharp sea or 'tide lump,'
> Bod, a heavy wave breaking on the shore,
> Brim, sound of sea breaking on the shore,
> Especially when land could not be seen, as in a fog,
> Brimfooster, sea breaking on a sunken rock or baa, ...
> (C.P.2, p.764)

One does, of course, linger a little over these obscure vocables, since each, like Barthes's 'double' sign 'gestures to its own material existence at the same time as it conveys a meaning'.[46] And – as I have remarked before – so much of In Memoriam James Joyce consists of the communication of information in which language is, on the whole, transparent. However, unlike the strange words of the early lyrics in Scots, A Drunk Man and 'On A Raised Beach', those of 'In Memoriam James Joyce' are not embedded in the kind of dramatic syntax in which their productive quality could be recognised and truly appreciated. They are, indeed, oddly neutered by being presented – in accordance

with the form of the poem as a whole - in lists.

MacDiarmid also lists a number of dances, clearly delighting in their exotic titles (Passecaille, chaconne, sarabande, dinka, the naura, the nilotic nanda, the toba of the Gran Chaco) and 'a diversity of musics' ranging from the 'gay rhythm' of Andalusia's 'guitars' to 'Dvořák's Opus 90' to Beethoven's 'in gloria Dei patris' on 'high A'. In connection with the vast range of reference in the encylopaedic <u>In Memoriam James Joyce</u>, Roderick Watson interestingly remarks:

> The extensive lists of words, books, people, things, events and descriptions in the poem, are the product of a mind that has come to see them all, equally and simply, as <u>signs</u>: and the 'creative' poetic task has been reinterpreted as a matter of bearing witness to these signs by enunciating them. [47]

The numerous lists in which MacDiarmid presents his semiotics of world consciousness are interspersed periodically by passages of more sustained discourse in which language is surveyed from a multiplicity of perspectives. The cumulative effect of the insights into language thus provided is of considerable value and interest. One thing that emerges clearly from this material is MacDiarmid's belief that the fulfilment of human destiny depends on a radical change in man's attitude to language. It has always been the poet's contention that man colludes in his own intellectual limitation and that this is most evident in the way he uses (or abuses) language:

> As Dostoevski said, all human organisation tend to stabilize and perpetuate themselves - to become 'a church' and to short circuit human consciousness. This is most marked in our language-habit, our helpless submission to a fraction of our expressive possibilities ... [48]

The entire <u>In Memoriam James Joyce</u> in which MacDiarmid faces the challenge of the exotic, the aboriginal, the recondite and the modish vocable is indeed an impressive representation of the poet's own exemplary attitude to language.

'We must know all the words', the poet insists, since

> There lie hidden in language elements that effectively combined
> Can utterly change the nature of man ... (<u>C.P.</u>2, p.781)

The poet is also preoccupied with the necessity of a system in which such a combination could be effectively achieved. He goes on to speculate about various systems which seem to have arrived at successful combinations of one kind or another - such as 'Patrick Gesses's 'thinking graphics'' and 'Leibniz's De Arte Combinatoria' which consists of

> A general method in which all truths of the reason
> Would be reduced to a kind of calculation.
> At the same time this would be
> A sort of universal language or script
> But infinitely different from all those projected hitherto,
> For the symbols and even the words in it
> Would direct the reason
> And errors, except those of fact, would be
> Mere mistakes in calculation. (C.P.2, p.801)

A central feature of the more sustained passages of discourse in 'In Memoriam James Joyce' is the use - in paraphrase, direct quotation and adapted passages - of the work of others. MacDiarmid does actually acknowledge the source of most of this material in footnotes. But on occasion, though, he gives little indication of the real extent of the borrowing. The Kraus extract, which I shall discuss presently, is a case in point since this actually takes up nine pages in 'In Memoriam James Joyce'. One remembers also the extensive unacknowledged quotations from Sherrington and Busoni which, as I hope to show later, perform valuable functions in the poem. Many of MacDiarmid's sources seem to be obtained not from books but from reviews. The extent of the poet's indebtedness to anonymous reviewers of the Times Literary Supplement is something which emerges, memorably, from Riach's study of sources and function in MacDiarmid. And, in a letter to Walter Perrie (21/7/77), the poet reveals that 'so far as Shestov and Buber are concerned' he had 'derived most of his knowledge of their work from articles, reviews, etc. in a French Philosophical Periodical ...'[49]

MacDiarmid's attitude to source material is expressed in a letter to the TLS (13 May 1965):

> ... As Mr. T.S.Eliot said: 'Minor poets borrow, major poets steal' and my own practice is [sic] much of my later work has been like that of Mr. Ezra Pound who, in one of his essays, says he takes his material from wherever he can find it and endeavours to transform the assemblage into an artistic unity, the test being that in the upshot the whole (i.e. what in sum he makes of these discrete materials) is more than the sum of the parts ...[50]

There can be no doubt, however, that the really successful 'braidbinding' in In Memoriam James Joyce involves the skilful way in which MacDiarmid intergrates foreign material into his own work. And these instances, as I have indicated before, actually help to structure the vast work. In connection with the 'Quotation by one artist of the work of another and the 'straight' use of source material', Margery Greenshields McCulloch writes (and this is surely apposite here):

> The imaginative contribution of the quoting artist has been demonstrated by the perception which isolated the selected material in the first place, and by the context into which he placed it ... [51]

One of MacDiarmid's more controversial borrowings involves the use in the opening section of In Memoriam James Joyce of a passage taken from an anonymous review in the Times Literary Supplement of May 8 1953. [52] The review - which, as it transpired later, had been written by Erich Heller - was of Karl Kraus's Die Dritte Walpurgisnacht. MacDiarmid's employment of the passage was noted by G. Herdan (although he did not refer to Heller) who, in a letter to the TLS of 6 May 1965, wrote:

> In [MacDiarmid's] poem In Memoriam James Joyce in the Section headed "And above all Karl Kraus" (published in Penguin Poets: English Poetry 1940-60) I find an almost word for word copy (except for the last 15 lines) of the review in The Times Literary Supplement, May 8, 1953, of Karl Kraus's book, Die Dritte Walpurgisnacht. [53]

In 'InMemoriam James Joyce' MacDiarmid does in fact give the TLS as his source in a footnote. In a letter to the journal of 13 May 1965 the poet, largely unrepentent, writes:

> ... I acknowledged in my book the source of the passage on Karl Kraus and there may well be differences of opinion about the extent to which, in the 'current drawn from many sources' of an immense poem, I effected aesthetically effective transformation

> of the material. Mr Herdan thinks I did not do so. Professor Kenneth Buthlay thinks I did, going in detail into the changes I made in his book about my work ... [54]

The matter surfaces again in the Preface to the 1975 edition of Heller's The Disinherited Mind in which the author refers, albeit amicably, to MacDiarmid's use of the passage:

> It is only to avoid the suspicion of plagiarism that I should like briefly to relate - apropos, perhaps, the Nietzschean theme of metamorphoses - the following curiosity. Part of my essay on Karl Kraus was originally written for The Times Literary Supplement. It appeared anonymously (as used to be the custom of the journal) on the front page of No. 2,675, dated May 8, 1953. I was surprised as well as flattered to discover much later that with this article I had contributed not only to the TLS but also to the poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid (Dr. C.M. Grieve), the renowned Scots poet. His poem 'And above all, Karl Kraus', from his cycle In Memoriam James Joyce, consists of 157 lines of which 149 are taken from my essay - with their essential identity preserved - even though they suffered a little breakage in the process of being lifted up into the poetic mode. ... [55]

In his study of the work of MacDiarmid, Kenneth Buthlay does indeed consider that MacDiarmid had 'effected aesthetically effective transformation' of the Heller passage. And he is impressed not just by MacDiarmid's adaptation but by the quality of the original text:

> ... The commentary on Kraus is not only an outstandingly perceptive piece of writing, of great interest in its content; it is the work of a fine stylist with a very unusual feeling for rhythm. And MacDiarmid brings out the rhythmical pattern of parts of the prose by cutting them into verse-lines ... Anyone who looks closely at the little changes, including word-substitutions, that have been made in the original, will recognise that the hand of the poet has not lost its old cunning ... [56]

With its sustained and rhythmical discourse, the nine-page interlude 'and, above all, Karl Kraus', is in marked contrast to the encyclopaedic 'busyness' which precedes and follows it. The quotation performs two valuable functions in the opening section of In Memoriam James Joyce: in the midst of an exuberant celebration of language, it introduces the potentially catastrophic consequences of its misuse; and it engages with the profound implications of what lies 'Ever just beyond' the word - Silence.

In his essay on Karl Kraus, Heller observes that the 'inspiration'

of Kraus's 'satirical work' is 'the contrast between his faith in words and the speech of the faithless ...' [57] In his 'exploration of the labyrinths of contemporary verbiage', Kraus was continually being confronted by instances of such 'faithlessness' – by a wide-spread and chillingly portentous misuse of the word. He found this in, for instance, 'the linguistic structure of a diplomatic correspondent's report' and in 'the language spoken and written' by his peers. But it was the 'common talk of the town' which, perhaps, gave Kraus most cause for concern:

> People gossiped about a War; he heard them
> Lament the loss of their souls; at every street corner
> Acts of high treason were committed.
> The shouts of the newspaper boys
> Announcing in mysterious vowels the latest edition
> Became monstrous threats to man's spiritual safety ...
> (C.P.2, p.769)

Kraus made his satirical point about a decadent Viennese society in the period of the First World War by literal quotation of this 'trivial chat' and by 'creating another context' for it. This 'context' involved the assumption of 'the existence of natural states of culture' and of 'self-evidently correct norms of conduct':

> ... He dealt with the practice of the law-courts
> As though they were based on moral convictions,
> With the theatre as though it were concerned
> With the art of drama,
> With journals as though they intended
> To convey correct information,
> With politicians as though they desired
> The promotion of communal prosperity,
> And with the philosophers as though
> They were seekers after Truth ... (C.P.2, p.770)

And 'The satirical effect of these inventions' was, apparently, 'annihilating'.

However, when 'Hitler came to power' and 'truth became truly unspeakable' Kraus realised that the defeat of satire was imminent:

> It is the limitation of the satirical faith
> That its emphasis is on a world
> Whose heart is not safe from total corruption.
> Satire ends at the very point
> Where hatred of the world's abuses
> Becomes irrelevant, because the world itself

> Has ceased to be lovable.
> This point is reached when absurdity
> Gains control of that plane of experience
> At which men form their idea
> Of order and normality;
> When right and wronglose their names ... (C.P.2, p.774)

In the context of Hitler's Germany, Kraus - whose faith in the expressive possibilities of language had been absolute - made the devastating discovery that the word could, on accasion, be impotent. His response to this discovery was expressed in Die Fackel - Kraus's own journal which he started at the age of twenty-four and which ran to 922 issues. In his essay on Kraus, Heller writes:

> On the fourth page [of Die Fackel] was printed a short poetic declaration of silence: 'Ich bleibe stumm,' ending with 'Das Wort entschlief, als diese Welt erwachte' - the word expired with the awakening of that world. 58 [the world of Hitler]

If Kraus's silence seems to be one of despair, there is another silence of a more positive kind in the extract under discussion - a silence which could be 'heard' in the poetry of Hölderlin. The poetry of the essentially traditional Kraus was 'a poetry of speech' but, in his 'later and greatest poems', Hölderlin ('whose genius was to direct, and misdirect, / Distinctively modern trends ... ') achieved the 'miracle of speechlessness' :

> ... Holderlin sought,
> And often miraculously found,
> The word with which silence speaks
> Its own silence without breaking it. (C.P.2, p. 771)

And, in material which he interpolates into the Kraus extract, MacDiarmid conveys his own positive attitude to silence:

> So beyond all that is heteroepic, holophrastic,
> Macaronic, philomathic, psychopetal,
> Jerqueing every idioticon,
> Comes this supreme paraleipsis,
> Full of potential song as a humming bird
> Is full of potential motion, ... (C.P.2, p. 771)

In MacDiarmid, silence signifies (and I have made this point previously in the context of A Drunk Man) not the ultimately ineffable but what cannot as yet be said. It is instinct with hope because it is the

source of further words.[59]

If MacDiarmid is continually aware of the silence which lies 'ever just beyond' the word, he is mindful also - since the extension of human consciousness depends upon it - of the necessity of making inroads into that silence. As mediator between reality and empirical reason, the poet has (in MacDiarmid's opinion) a central rôle to play in the advancement of the word. He alone, perhaps, is fully alive to the primary function that language fulfils in the world. To the poet, the word is 'omnific' - all-creating:

> Instead of language meaning the material of experience
> - Things, ideas, emotions, feelings -
> This material means language. (C.P.2, p.752)

Reality, then, would seem to be accessible to the observer of phenomena in proportion to his linguistic competence. And, hence, the poetic insistence that we know 'all the words'. Mankind must move - through language - from the frustrating limitations of the 'dumfoun'ered Thocht' to the ultimate in human awareness.

In line with the didactic purpose which underlies In Memoriam James Joyce as a whole, MacDiarmid demonstrates, in this opening section of the poem, an exemplary readiness to embrace all manifestations of language. Thus, for instance, (mindful, no doubt, of his own fruitful experimentatin with words which were definately off the beaten track of language) MacDiarmid writes:

> With every language, dialect, usage of words,
> Even any sort of gobbledygook,
> The mode despised, neglected or rejected
> May become the corner stone of a miracle of expression.
> (C.P.2, p. 752)

And, with that determination to be all-inclusive which is so characteristic of In Memoriam James Joyce, he proclaims

> Yes, I will have all sorts
> Of excruciating bruitist music,
> Simultaneist poems,
> Grab-bags and clichés, newspaper clippings,
> Popular songs, advertising copy,
> And expressions of innocence,

And abstract sounds - taking care
That one of them never turns out to be
Merely the Rumanian word for schnapps;
And all dada, merz, fatagaga. (C.P.2, p.796)

The reference to 'schnapps' above, however, alerts us to the fact that, although MacDiarmid may be willing to consider all forms of language, he is not prepared to be indiscriminate. His enterprise is an entirely serious one. 'Whatever language we use', the poet warns, 'we must command its Wesen at its deepest ... '

And, knowing 'all the words' in the terms of In Memoriam James Joyce, involves being familiar with those of a scientific nature since the function of the modern poet (as MacDiarmid sees it) includes the bridging of that gap which had traditionally lain between poetry and science. 'The poetry of the age', MacDiarmid insists, 'should be brought into conformity with its scientific spirit'. 'There are two kinds of knowledge', he writes

... Knowing about things and knowing things,
Scientific data and aesthetic réalisation,
And I seek their perfect fusion in my work. (C.P.2, p.782)

And, there are instances throughout In Memoriam James Joyce of MacDiarmid's determination to include the scientific in his delineations of an ideal poetic. There is, for instance, in the opening section of the poem the discourse on 'the false foundation of the vocal cords theory' in the context of Ernest George White's Sinus Tone Production; and, in the concluding section of In Memoriam James Joyce, we find Sir Charles Sherrington's descriptions of foetal growth employed to brilliant metaphoric effect. One of the most impressive instances of that 'fusion' (between 'scientific data and aesthetic realisation') which MacDiarmid seeks in his work occurs in 'In Memoriam James Joyce'. It concerns that relationship of silence and the word of which MacDiarmid is ever mindful:

Silence supervening at poetry's height,
Like the haemolytic streptococcus
In the sore throat preceding rheumatic fever

But which, at the height of the sickness,
Is no longer there, but has been and gone!
Or as 'laughter is the representative of tragedy
When tragedy is away.' (C.P.2, P.771)

In 'In Memoriam James Joyce' - as in other sections of the 1955 poem(particularly 'The Snares of Varuna') - MacDiarmid engages with the human apathy and social ills in general which militate against the realisation of the vision. Thus he deplores

... 'the lies by which we live,'
The ubiquitious irresponsibility, the general atimy,
L'énorme bêtise, the Thyestean banquet of clap trap,
The monstrous superstructure almost everyone erects
On an incredible ignorance of even the barest facts, ...
(C.P.2, p. 746)

However, the obstacles which stand in the way of the poet's progress are not seen - as in Cencrastus for instance - as virtually insurmountable. On the whole, the mood of In Memoriam James Joyce is a confident one. Indeed, if mankind follows the poetic directives (such as the one which, perhaps, sums up all the others: 'We must respond maximally / To the whole world we can') all will eventually be well. It is confidently expected that man will so respond - and hence this major affirmative moment in 'In Memoriam James Joyce' :

Oceans, mountain barriers, limitless space,
The protean blind obstructions of nature
Within us and without, will not prevail
Against the crystallising will, the ordered, solvent knowledge,
The achieved clear-headedness of an illuminated race.
Amidst the fear and lassitude and ugly darkness
Of our world today I can believe that,
Believe that the specific man in us
Has the power to assimilate, utilise, over-ride and fuse
All our individual divergencies. (C.P.2, p.785)

In the second section of In Memoriam James Joyce, MacDiarmid outlines the task which he believes lies ahead of the Intelligentsia in general:

We must put all our reliance in the intellect
And develop it in everybody ... (C.P.2, p.838)

And, as I see it, the mass of information which MacDiarmid provides in the opening section of the poem (and, indeed, in In Memoriam James Joyce as a whole) is clearly in line with this purpose. Happily,

though, there are moments in the 1955 poem when the reader is released from the passive absorbtion of MacDiarmid's vast range of reference into an active participation in the pleasures of metaphor. And one cannot leave this discussion of the opening section of the poem without a consideration of one such moment - in which the poet engages with the concept of consistency in relation to his own poetry. In this lovely, lyrical interlude which concerns the creative process itself, there is a graceful counterpointing of change and changelessness in terms of the seasonal flux of flower and foliage and the perdurability of gold and jewels. The rich texture of the diction and measured elegence of the lines in the following extracts are in marked contrast to the prosaic and somewhat insistent communication of information which characterises much of the poem:

> Let the only consistency
> In the course of my poetry
> Be like that of the hawthorn tree
> Which in early Spring breaks
> Fresh emerald, then by nature's law
> Darkens and deepens and takes
> Tints of purple-maroon, rose-madder and straw.
>
> Sometimes these hues are found
> Together, in pleasing harmony bound.
> Sometimes they succeed each other. But through
> All the changes in which the hawthorn is dight,
> No matter in what order, on thing is sure
> - The haws shine ever the more ruddily bright !
>
> And when the leaves have passed
> Or only in a few tatters remain
> The tree to the winter condemned
> Stands forth at last
> Not bare and drab and pitiful,
> But a caldelabrum 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.
>
> ....
>
> So I think of you, Joyce, and of Yeats and others who are dead
> As I walk this Autumn and ovserve

The birch tremulously pendulous in jewels of cairngorm,
The sauch, the osier, and the crack-willow
Of the beaten gold of Australia;
The sycamore in rich straw-gold;
The elm bowered in saffron;
The oak in flecks of salmon gold;
The beeches huge torches of living orange. (C.P.2, pp. 756 - 7)

In the second section of In Memoriam James Joyce ('The World of Words'), MacDiarmid's search for 'Le mot juste' to which the whole universe 'gives' continues with unabated (or, perhaps, increased) enthusiasm. In the opening stanza the poet seeks to convey, in predominantly kinaesthetic terms, that ideal linguistic lucidity and facility which is the poetic goal:

Easy - quick - Sure - The exact word
You want - when you want it.
Elusive words easily captured and harnessed.
New ideas spring to your mind.
Your imagination is stirred by this simple
But wonderful Idea and Word Chart.
It puts words and ideas at your finger tips,
It will enable you to open the flood-gates of the mind
And let the torrent of drama and tragedy -
Human strife, flaming love, raging passion,
Fiendish onslaught, splendid heroism -
Flow from your pen, leap into type
And fly to your readers, to grip them and hold them
Enthralled by the fascinating spell of your power.
(C.P.2, p. 805)

But - and, indeed, MacDiarmid in In Memoriam James Joyce is at pains to convey his respect not only for genius but for scholarship - such an enviable vocabulary cannot be achieved without rigorous application to a wide-ranging course of study. Thus, the poet proceeds to list a number of learned works - all of which he himself has 'of course studied thoroughly'. Since in this areas of the poem the focus has shifted somewhat to the point of view of the reader, the emphasis in the listed sources is upon a variety of individual psychological responses to verbal stimuli. The reading list includes:

Myers on 'Individual Differences in Listening to Music,'
And Eleanor Rowland on 'The Psychological Experiences
Connected with Different Parts of Speech,'
Know Plato in 'Cratylus' on the rhetorical value
Of different classes of consonants, and Rossigneus's
'Essai sur l'audition colorée et sa valeur esthétique,'
Jones on the 'Effect of Letters and Syllables in Publicity,'

Roblee and Washburn on 'The Affective Value of Articulate
Sounds,' ... (C.P.2, p. 806)

Of particular interest, perhaps, are the listed instances in 'The World of Words', of ways in which numerous literary figures differ in their use of language (MacDiarmid has returned yet again to the perennial theme of diversity-in-unity - instances of which will also occur in 'The Snares of Varune' and 'England is Our Enemy') :

Acoustic terms in Schiller are twice as frequent as in Goethe
And seven times more frequent than in Shakespeare's sonnets.
The following order represents the success with which
Images of a given kind were aroused
Through direct suggestion - auditory 46.8 per cent.,
Olfactory 39.3, cutaneous 35.5, organic and pain 30.7,
Gustatory 14.2 - certain auditory images
Are particularly easy to arouse - the sound of rain
And of the bugle-note; the sighing of the wind;
The rush of wings; the noise of the surf;
The tolling of a bell are imaged without difficulty.
- Shelley's preoccupation with odour,
Keats' penchant for cutaneous experience,
The fact that Poe induces an optical-kinaesthetic reaction
Much more frequently than a posture or a movement reaction,
Swinburne's tonal vision, Poe's phonism of the night,
Blake's vision, and Keats' 'dazzled lips'
Are due to individual idiosyncrasies,
Where Swinburne's organic toning of phrases
Poe's kinaesthetic analogies, Keats' tactual imagery,
And Shelley's odour and auditive similes
Are literary and imaginative in significance ... (C.P.2, p. 808)

In the following extract from this second section of the 1955 poem, MacDiarmid again pays tribute to the sheer variety of literary achievements and seeks, perhaps, to justify his own frequent use (often unacknowledged) of the work of others:

The goal is that of pure beauty, and in quest of it
All experience, whether one's own or that recorded
By other adventurous spirits, is laid under contribution,
As well as dominant epochal concepts
That pattern the blending ideas. ... (C.P.2, p. 808)

'The World of Words', like 'In Memoriam James Joyce', has its share of exotic vocables - like lishu, feipo and chuanshu, for instance, which describe different types of script. We are also presented with terms from Welsh poetics - such as cywyddau brud, dyfalu and cywydd deuair fyrion. And, as in the opening section of the poem,

MacDiarmid lists mentors and friends ('Chaim Bialik, Theodor Daubler, Dòmhnull Mac na Cèardhaich, Yeats, AE, Dylan Thomas ... ') who shared the poet's own fascination with the word.

Amidst the insistent lists and prosiness of much of 'The World of Words', there are, however, some refreshing moments of humour. In the course of his 'reading list', for example, MacDiarmid - suddenly aware, perhaps, of the unrelieved pedantry of the work in hand - includes the following item:

> ... the 'Vergnügliches Handbuch der Deutschen Sprache'
> Parts of which might well have been written
> By Edward Lear and Wilhelm Busch
> With occasional advice from Lewis Carroll ... (C.P.2, p. 806)

And there is also in the second section of In Memoriam James Joyce an instance of the bawdy which is so characteristic of the Dionysian A Drunk Man:

> One thing sticks out. You must agree
> Poetry apart, as life you scan,
> The whole thing's due, in human terms,
> To woman taking a rise out of man... (C.P.2, p. 818)

Other moments of respite from the crush of the relentlessly encyclopaedic are provided by instances in which the poet's arduous pursuit of the revelationary word is represented in dramatic terms - as in the interludes which involve skiing (p. 826), fencing (p. 827), exploration of the Greenland ice-cap (p. 823) and archery (p. 828).

However, MacDiarmid's serious commitment to a rigorous engagement with all language is never in doubt. As he reminds Joyce, in a plenitude of natural imagery:

> ... this is what our lives have been given to find,
> A language that can serve our purposes,
> A marvellous lucidity, a quality of fiery aery light,
> Flowing like clear water, flying like a bird,
> Burning like a sunlit landscape.
> Conveying with a positively Godlike assurance,
> Swiftly, shiningly, exactly, what we want to convey.
> This use of words, this peculiar aptness and handiness,
> Adapts itself to our every mood, now pathetic, now ironic,
> Now full of love, of indignation, of sensuality, of glamour, of glory,
> With an inevitable richness of remembered detail

And a richness of imagery that is never cloying,
A curious and indescribable quality
Of sensual sensitiveness,
Of very light and very air itself,
– Pliant as a young hazel wand,
Certain as a gull's wings,
Lucid as a mountain stream ... (C.P.2, p. 822)

But, as usual in MacDiarmid, the poet does not lose sight of the considerable obstacles which stand in the way of the fulfilment of his aspirations – and these obstacles are of particular magnitude in the context of the time in which the poem was written, the late thirties:

In these days of ballyhoo, rubber-stamp minds, diabolical clichés,
When universal lies have mankind in their death-grip
And endless impotent and disloyal vility of speech
And the effect of the misuse of familiar words
On the character of men and the fate of nations ...
(C.P.2, p. 825)

The poet also deplores the debilitating 'spiritual sluggishness which is man's besetting sin' and insists that mankind must not remain 'Prostrated before cold altars and departed gods' but must break

... completely with all ready-made, mechanical, conventional conceptions
Of the conglomerate experience of life, accepted gratefully by lazyness and fear ... (C.P.2, p. 824)

After the poet's zealous re-affirmation of his commitment to the extension of human consciousness (p. 87), 'The World of Words' concludes with an exuberant celebration of the word. The poet also looks to a future when literature will be (in accordance with his vision of it in 'Second Hymn to Lenin') 'the core o' a' activity' – a time when language ('my Queen slender and supple') will impart

... with every movement, every look,
Some idea of what the process of literature could be,
Something far more closely related
To the whole life of mankind
Than the science of stringing words together
In desirable sequences. (C.P.2, pp. 839-840)

In the third section of In Memoriam James Joyce ('The Snares of Veruna') there is a dramatic change of focus, tone and register as MacDiarmid moves from the celebration of language to a passionate

condemnation of instances of evil in the contemporary world. The disturbingly visual and tactile image in the opening lines, which involve the Hindu lord of the Universe, represents a kind of entwinement which is the antithesis of the liberating 'braidbinding' which MacDiarmid considers to be the poet's task. Mankind is being ensnared in the webs of evil and repression which are being woven by a widespread abuse of power:

> THE world is fast bound in the snares of Varuna
> – 'Cords consisting of serpents,' according to Kulluka
> (Pasaih sarpa-rajjughih), The winkings of men's eyes
> Are all numbered by him; he wields the universe
> As gamesters handle dice. These are the unexampled days
> Of false witness – a barbarous regime which gives power over
> life and death
> To an oligarchy of brigands and adventurers,
> Without security from vexation by irresponsible tyrants,
> Without protection of the home against the aggression of
> criminal bands,
> Without impartial justice, without dignity. (C.P.2, p. 840)

The first two paragraphs of 'The Snares of Varuna' are noticeably more rhythmical than much of In Memoriam James Joyce as the listed instances of Capitalist dehumanisation, Fascist depravity and a mindless allegiance to the 'authority of the machine' proceed with a drum-beat emphasis. Warming to his recriminatory theme, the poet warns that if man is not prepared to 'pay the cost' of 'developing into anything higher' he will 'go the way of the dodo and the kiwi'. Certainly, in this grim scenario, there seems little likelihood of the realisation of the evolutionary vision:

> Genius is becoming rarer,
> Our bodies a little weaker in each generation,
> Culture is slowly declining,
> Mankind is returning to barbarism
> And will finally become extinct. (C.P.2, p. 842)

Given the poem's celebration of diversity-in-unity, perhaps the most serious charge which MacDiarmid levels against 'The great Gods, Work, Money, Government' is that they 'May require and secure conformity'. And, as MacDiarmid sees it, the welfare of mankind depends on the recognition and, indeed, the 'accentuation' of difference.

And it _is_ such a 'recognition' and 'accentuation' of difference which constitutes the affirmation - when it comes - of 'The Snares of Veruna'. The instances of enforced conformity are now countered by a celebration of images of individuality in a multiform world. The poet rejoices that we are not all 'Joan Thompson's bairns' - that there are 'perhaps countless' types of mind and body in the human domain. But, as so often in the work of MacDiarmid, it is in the poet's engagement with the natural world that his sheer delight in diversity is most evident. After a well-informed consideration of the varying characteristics of different breeds of sheep, there is a lyrical intonation of a multiplicity of botanical manifestations which culminates skillfully in a re-iteration of the credo which underlies the corpus as a whole:

> Everything is different, everything changes,
> Except for the white bedstraw which climbs all the way
> Up from the valleys to the tops of the high passes
> The flowers are all different and more precious
> Demanding more search and particularity of vision.
> Look ! Here and there a pinguicula eloquent of the Alps
> Still keeps a purple-blue flower
> On the top of its straight and slender stem.
> Bog-asphodel, deep-gold, and comely in form,
> The queer, almost diabolical, sundew,
> And when you leave the bog for the stag moors and the rocks
> The parsley fern - a lovelier plant
> Than even the proud Osmunda Regalis -
> Flourishes in abundance
> Showing off oddly contrasted fronds
> From the cracks of the lichened stones.
> It is pleasant to find the books
> Describing it as 'very local.'
> Here is a change indeed !
> The universal _is_ the particular. (C.P.2, p. 845)

Thus far in 'The Snares of Varuna' there has been a reasonably coherent movement between a condemnation of enforced conformity and a celebration of ineradicable difference. However, in the four passages following MacDiarmid's fervent credo we have - as I see it - an example of the architechtonic weakness which detracts from _In Memoriam James Joyce_ as a whole. Inspired, it would seem, by the perusal of _The_

Alexandrian Library by Edward Alexander Parsons (London, 1952), MacDiarmid now includes matter (interesting in itself since it includes recently discovered links between Indian and Greek philosophy) which would be more happily placed elsewhere in the poem. The consequence for the reader is a definite feeling of anti-climax. The discursive material seems like an unnecessary and ill-fitting appendage to the strongly rhythmical and somehow concluded material which precedes it. One is reminded of Kenneth Buthlay's reference to MacDiarmid's 'lust for the encyclopaedic' in In Memoriam James Joyce that 'insists on packing everything in at any cost to the form'.[60]

In the concluding passage of 'The Snares of Varuna', the poet returns to the celebration of a diverse plenitude in nature. He employs the sport of angling to convey something of the riches of river and marine life - from the 'brown trout' to the 'great mako shark'. The passage also acts as an extended metaphor for MacDiarmid's continuing search for 'the seed of things' in the world of phenomena. The 'angling friend' of the passage is the poet, Norman MacCaig:

> I'd remember with Herman Melville
> That behind Leviathan
> There's still the kraken,
> And no end to our 'ontological heroics.'
> And MacCaig has laughed and said
> 'Let me see you catch anything yet
> Big enough not to throw in again.' (C.P.2, p. 851)

The opening section of In Memoriam James Joyce contains the following revelation which is of considerable significance in the context of the MacDiarmid poetic corpus as a whole:

> For unlike you, Joyce, I am more concerned
> With the East than the West and the poetry I seek
> Must be the work of one who has always known
> That the Tarim valley is of more importance
> Than Jordan or the Rhine in world history. (C.P.2, p. 801)

And, certainly, MacDiarmid's pre-occupation with the East is evident at many points throughout his work. In his illuminating thesis on MacDiarmid, Alexander Hutchison Beveridge writes:

> ... we must be absolutely clear about one thing: MacDiarmid tends to have a bias towards the mystical thinking of the East, and therefore, desires to reflect it as fully as possible in his poetry. Unless we recognise this fact, we may well overlook, (and, consequently, miss the important implications of), the many borrowings from Eastern texts which are to be found both in his earlier and later poems. [61]

Disappointingly, however, 'The Meeting of the East and the West' is the shortest and perhaps the least satisfying section in In Memoriam James Joyce. In this purely informative (and, for the most part, flatly prosiac) area of the poem, the would-be 'braidbinder' concentrates specifically on the degree to which Oriental texts have influenced occidental writers, philosophers and musicians.

After the graceful invocation of unity ('heaven' and 'earth' signifying East and West, presumably) with which the section opens, there is an abrupt transition to prosaic discourse concerning the renderings of Oriental texts in Western languages (for the most part, as it transpires, in German). This enterprise involves considerable difficulty for the poet, since he has to pick his way through 'a gigantic maze / Of faulty knowledge, indirections, and distortions of all kinds' and is also limited by the fact that 'actual investigation of Indian literature only began / At the end of the 18th century... '

MacDiarmid gives an instance of one of the 'indirections' referred to above when he outlines the circuitous route taken by Anton von Pforr in his translation of the Panchatantra (Hindu beast fables) into German. Pforr did so, apparently, 'not from the original Sanskrit, but from a Latin version / Itself derived from Hebrew, Arabian, and Pahlavi renderings.... ' The poet also provides an instance of one of the 'distortions' which made his task so onerous:

> ... One of the chief sources
> On which the 18th century relied was a translation of the 'Ezour Veda,'
> Supposed to be a commentary to the Vedas,
> In which Christian occidental monotheism was taught,
> But in fact a forgery used by missionaries for the purpose of conversion. (C.P.2, p. 852)

MacDiarmid then goes on to provide a list of more positive cultural interchange between the East and the West. Starting with those who, apparently, undertook the early investigations of Oriental texts (among whom were Sir Charles Wilkins, Sir William Jones and Sir Henry Thomas Colebrooke) the poet proceeds to give a chronological account of important links which had been forged since that time. Goethe, for instance, who 'especially admired the Meghaduta and the Gitagovinda' treated 'Indian subjects in "Der Gott und die Bayadere"' and also in the 'Pariah-trilogy'. MacDiarmid also draws attention to the contribution of the Schlegel brothers who were indeed pioneers in the field of Sanskrit studies. Thus, Friedrich's "epoch-making treatise / 'Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier: / Ein Beitrag zur Begründung der Altertumskunde'' threw "light on hitherto totally obscure fields of remotest antiquity.' August Wilhelm Schlegel, apparently, 'became the real founder / Of Sanskrit philology on German soil. The impressive work of Franz Bopp (in "comparative philology'), Humboldt (in a'treatise on the Bhagavad-gita') and Friedrich Rückert ('congenial and perfect translations from the Sanskrit') is also noted and celebrated. MacDiarmid's list of sources in 'The Meeting of the East and the West'' is interspersed on occasion by brief (acknowledged) extracts or paraphrase of the work of others (i.e. Stcherbatsky, p. 854 and E. von Hartmann, p. 855). In the section, however, as in 'The World of Words', 'The Snares of Varuna' and 'England is Our Enemy', MacDiarmid's borrowing is notably less extensive than in the opening and closing sections of <u>In Memoriam James Joyce</u>.

In the field of philosophy, too, interesting links between the East and the West have also been discovered. Thus, for instance, 'According to Paul Deussen, Kant may be said / To have 'given the scientific basis for the intuitive doctrines of Shankara' ... '

And, MacDiarmid informs us, "Stcherbatsky calls attention also to similarities between lines of thought / Of Kant and later Buddhistic thinkers like Chandrakirti'. The following element in the work of Fichte must have been of particular interest to MacDiarmid who claims, in Lucky Poet, to be 'an Advaitin, holding Sankara's Vedanta philosophy':[62]

> Fichte in his essay 'Anweisung zu einem seligen Leben'
> Comes near to the Advaita doctrine most amazingly
> – So much so that Otto has even attempted to give
> Whole passages of Fichte in the language of Shankara.
> (C.P.2, p. 854)

MacDiarmid's praise-singing in 'The Meeting of the East and the West' should, perhaps, have included the work of Annie Besant. This lady not only published (in 1904) a translation of 'The Bhagavad-Gita' (dedicated, appropriately, to 'all Aspirants in East and West') but had, in her time, agitated for home rule in India both in that country and later in England. In a Preface she writes:

> My wish, in adding this translation to those already before the public, was to preserve the spirit of the original, especially in its deeply devotional tone, while at the same time giving an accurate translation ...[63]

Perhaps Whitman, too, deserves an honourable mention in 'The Meeting of the East and the West'. In his interesting book, Whitman in the Light of Vedantic Mysticism (1976), V.K. Chari refers to the 'striking kinship in thinking and experience between Whitman and the ancient Hindu scriptures'[64] – despite 'The absence of established evidence'[65] that the American poet 'had any firsthand knowledge of the Hindu books'. Chari writes:

> Both American and Indian readers of the Leaves over these one hundred years have recognized these resemblances. On reading the 1855 Poems, Thoreau remarked that the book was "wonderfully like the Orientals," and Emerson found in it a curious mixture of the Bhagavad-Gita and the New York Herald. Since then, scholars, both American and Indian, have steadily attested to these resemblances. Ananda Coomaraswamy has pointed out parallels in "Song of Myself" to Buddhist ideas.[66]

Chari considers, though, that 'the Vedantic doctrine of self (ātman-brahman) as adumbrated in the mystical verses of the Upanishads and

later developed into a system by ancient Indian logicians such as Sankara' is 'Better than the Gita for interpreting Whitman's "Song of Myself".[67]

Surprisingly, China is only minimally represented in 'The Meeting of the East and the West'. No actual instances of links between China and the West are provided – we are just informed that 'Laloy thinks the union of the music of China and Europe' is 'possible/ Because the scales are constructed upon exactly the same notes'. And one is, of course, baffled (since all the evidence suggests that MacDiarmid thought highly of him) by the off-hand way in which the poet refers to Pound's considerable contribution to East/West literature: 'And in the English-speaking world there is at least Ezra Pound.' Surely Pound deserves some acclaim for his adaptations of the translations by Ernest Fenollosa of the Chinese poet Li Po which were published in _Cathay_ in 1915. He should also be commended for his work on Japanese classical drama _Noh; or, Accomplishment_ (1916). In regard to some of the poems in _Cathay_ (which he considers to be 'masterpieces') George Steiner writes:

> They have altered the feel of the language and set the pattern of cadence for modern verse ... But these are also, at many points, acute transmissions of the Chinese, reconstructions of extreme delicacy and rightness...[68]

In the first section of _In Memoriam James Joyce_, MacDiarmid quotes from a book on Buddhism, and, as I hope to show, this extract has some relevance in the present context:

> It would be possible to write a learned book
> On Buddhism which should recite
> The various facts with scholarly exactness
> Yet leave the reader at the end
> Wondering how intelligent and spiritual men and women
> Of our day could really be Buddhists.
> One must seek to avoid this effect
> And try to enable the reader to understand
> A little _how it feels to be a Buddhist_.
> To give the feelings of an alien religion
> It is necessary to do more than expound
> Its concepts and describe its history.
> One must catch its emotional undertone ... (_C.P._2, pp. 764-5)

I believe that in 'The Meeting of the East and the West' MacDiarmid fails to 'catch' the 'emotional undertone' of the Orient and that this is why the section is so disappointing. One's sensibilities are in no way modified by what one reads. MacDiarmid's inclusion of the 'Sanskrit verse of extreme beauty' does not help in this regard since to most readers (even the competent readers which MacDiarmid's text demands) it signifies nothing. What is required, perhaps, in 'The Meeting of the East and the West' is the incorporation of highly-wrought, lyrical interludes which would crystallise poetic preoccupations and, most importantly, convey memorably and with grace the poet's genuine reverence for, and love of, the East.

If MacDiarmid's love of the East is evident at many points throughout the corpus, his Anglophobia is an almost constant theme. In the fifth section of In Memoriam James Joyce, MacDiarmid (from the Celtic stronghold or 'aonach' in which he and Joyce meet) launches a predictable attack on England and the English literary scene.[69] In the lively satire 'England is Our Enemy' (which begins with considerable support - in a lengthy footnoe - from John Raymond), Anglo-Saxon provincialism and apathy as regards the arts are seen in the context of European sophistication and concern. What MacDiarmid sees as the moribund state of English Literature is attributed to many causes: Governmental indifference; 'the dead weight / Of dead, vested interests'; 'political disingenuousnesses' and the destructive practices of 'English official criticism'. Certainly, there seems to be something wrong with the literature, in that it is not 'a very national or even racial affair'. MacDiarmid quotes from the Preface of Shelley's Prometheus Unbound (in the third and fourth lines) to support his point:

> ... the arts, and particularly the written arts,
> Of Great Britain have been forced
> By the 'highly refined imagination
> Of the more select classes,'
> Have been so forced out of all contact with
> Or inspiratipn from the masses
>
> . . . .

> That, inasmuch as any human manifestation
> That is taken in hand by any coterie
> Or Class of the More Select
> Must speedily die,
> So literature in Anglo-Saxondom
> Has, after growing
> More and more provincial, died. (C.P.2, p. 862)

And, certainly, 'the kind of poetry' MacDiarmid 'wants', as he reminds us in his 1961 poem (and for which he is arduously preparing the ground in <u>In Memoriam James Joyce</u>) must be

> A poetry finding its universal material in the people,
> And the people in turn giving life and continuity
> To this poetry by its collective interest. (C.P.2, p. 1011)

European arts, it would seem, maintain an essential and fructifying contact with the people:

> The Foreigner sees or feels that the national arts
> Are a product of the national voice
> And no Government on the continent of Europe
> Can subsist without
> Paying some attention to that voice. (C.P.2, pp. 860-861)

And this European regard for the arts is of a particularly dynamic kind since, to quote John Raymond (whose help MacDiamrmid enlists on the first page of 'England is Our Enemy'):

> ... The French re-discover their great writers all the time, but with them such rediscovery is a living intellectual process, a continual restatement of the moral "Great Debate" which has to be fought out in each generation... (C.P.2, p.858)

Unfortunately, 'the collective interest' of the people as regards literature seems to be of little consequence to the British Government which is taken to task for not 'spreading broadcast amongst our men in the Forces / The works of Dickens, Thackeray, Tennyson / ... or even those of Shakespeare... ' . The poet also condemns the philistinism and ineffectuality of such members of the Establishment as

> Our blatant vulgarians of business men,
> Our brainless bankers and lawyers
> Our puerile Professors and dud Divines,
> And all our other 'loyal Kikuyu'. (C.P.2, p. 869)

Yet, to be 'utterly ignorant' of the technical skills of outstanding literary figures (MacDiarmid lists French, German, Italian and Spanish

writers) suggests a kind of political ineptitude since it is

> ... to be to that extent ignorant
> Of some of the ways by which humanity
> Can be approached, cajoled, enlightened,
> Or moulded into races ... (C.P.2, p 859)

There are, however, certain characteristic flaws in the logic of 'England is Our Enemy'. One of these concerns the way in which – as Edwin Morgan point out – MacDiarmid blames 'an indifferent officialdom for not building up the idea of 'national writers' who would be one of the glories of their country' whilst on the other hand suggesting 'that there are in fact no axiomatically great names to be built up – not even Shakespeare'.[70] Another interesting contradiction involves MacDiarmid's use of the royal plural in 'England is Our Enemy'. For the most part, I would agree with Alan Bold when he suggests that this usage in In Memoriam James Joyce is 'a signal that MacDiarmid is speaking on behalf of all mankind save the English '.[71] In 'England is Our Enemy', however, the poet reveals, as I see it, the psychic schism which is, perhaps, the inevitable lot of a member of a hybrid society. Thus, on the one hand by the predominant use of 'we' and 'our' he aligns himself with the race he is attacking whilst on the other he firmly detaches himself from it by stressing the exclusivity of 'my' folk and quoting defiantly in Gaelic.

In the section, considerable blame is attached to English official criticism which has, apparently, burdened the unfortunate writer with 'a stone heap – a dead load of moral qualities ...'. Thus

> A Writer must have optimism, irony,
> A healthy outlook,
> A middle-class standard of morality,
> As much religion as, say, St. Paul had,
> As much atheism as Shelley had ...
> And, finally, on top of an immense load
> Of self-neutralising moral and social qualities,
> Above all, Circumspection. (C.P.2, pp. 865–6)

Most seriously, though, the practice of 'English official criticism' seems to involve the perverse denial of just acclaim to the individual literary achievement. English authors (unlike their 'axiomatic' counterparts on the Continent) are not revered for what they are, but damned for what they are not. Thus, in numerous 'instances of depreciation' the 'professional reviewers' complain that, for instance

> 'Trollope has not the humour of Dickens,
> The irony of Thackeray,
> The skill with a plot of Wilkie Collins.
> Jane Austen has not the wit of Meredith,
> The reforming energy of Charles Reade,
> The imperial sense of Charles Kingsley,
> The tender pathos of the author of Cranford.
> And as for Mrs. Gaskell who wrote Cranford,
> Well, she has not the aloofness of Jane Austen,
> And Christina Rossetti had not
> The manly optimism of Browning,
> And Browning lacked the religious confidence
> Of Christina Rossetti, or the serenity
> Of Matthew Arnold... (C.P.2, p 864-5)

Clearly, Anglo-Saxondom's apathy and divisiveness as regards its writers represents the antithesis of the celebration of difference which is central to In Memoriam James Joyce. Such a situation is not characteristic of the Continental literary scene, however:

> The glorious names of all the imaginative writers
> From Homer to the Brothers Grimm,
> From Flaubert back to Apuleius,
> From Catullus to Turgenev,
> All these form the glories of Europe,
> Their works going together to make one whole,
> And each work being one stone
> In a gigantic and imperishable fabric. (C.P.2, p. 870)

And this situation is, of course, in accord with MacDiarmid's vision of the entwinement of diverse literary achievements into one laudable whole. Throughout In Memoriam James Joyce, the poet's cultural and ontological 'braidbinding' is continually in mind. And it is this fact, more than any other, which accounts for such cohesion as there is of the diverse elements of the poem.

In the concluding section of In Memoriam James Joyce ('Plaited

Like the Generations of Men') MacDiarmid attempts to integrate the myriad threads of his vast work - a process which involves, as we shall see, considerable use of borrowed material. In the opening pages, the poet employs an extensive (and unacknowledged) quotation from Ferrucio Busoni's 1910 essay, 'The Realm of Music: An Epilogue to the New Aesthetic'.[72] The Busoni passage performs important functions in 'Plaited Like the Generations of Men'. Music is seen in it, for instance, as the supreme exemplary image of that complexity-in-unity which underlies <u>In Memoriam James Joyce</u> and informs it at every point. The extract also acts as a unifying device in the poem in at least two respects: in the context of 'Plaited Like the Generations of Men', the image of MacDiarmid's entrance into the 'realm of music' (or enlightenment) prefigures Joyce's dramatic breakthrough into Eternity in the closing pages of the poem; and, at a more general level, the Busoni image of 'melodies heard ... and unheard' refers us back to two major themes of the poem, language and silence.

In the course of my discussion of part of the Busoni quotation, I shall draw attention to certain substitutions which MacDiarmid makes as he skillfully adapts Busoni's prose to his own purposes. In the first verse of 'Plaited Like the Generations of Men', mankind is invited to follow the poet through the gateway of eternity:

> COME, follow me into the realm of music. Here is the gate
> Which separates the earthly from the eternal.
> It is not like stepping into a strange country
> As we once did. We soon learn to know everything there
> And nothing surprises us any more. Here
> Our wonderment will have no end, and yet
> From the very beginning we feel at home. (<u>C.P</u>.2, p. 871)

In the opening line of the verse, MacDiarmid substitutes 'gate' for Busoni's 'iron fence' ('Here is the iron fence which separates the earthly from the eternal').[73] MacDiarmid's usage is not only more

aesthetically pleasing, it makes the important point that enlightenment is accessible to all, and provides us with the first of many affirmative moments in the closing section of In Memoriam James Joyce.

In the sixth verse of the Busoni sequence - in which 'sound' and 'harmony' represent a tonal diversity-in-unity - MacDiarmid makes further changes to the original text. Here is the relevant piece of prose as it is presented in Busoni:

> Every tone is the centre of immeasurable circles. And now sound is revealed to you. ... Innumerable are its voices; compared with them, the murmuring of the harp is a din; the blare of a thousand trombones a chirrup. 74

MacDiarmid's adaptation reads:

> Each sound is the centre of endless circles,
> And now the harmany opens out before you.
> Innumerable are its voices, compared with which
> The boom of the harp is a screeching,
> The clash of a thousand trumpets a twitter. (C.P.2, p. 872)

Interestingly, MacDiarmid replaces Busoni's 'sound' with 'harmony' (italicised for emphasis). 'Harmony' was also used in the second verse, but in the present instance of its use I feel that it connotes more. The word may point to 'harmony' as used in the 'braidbinding' passage (p. 876) and may have, therefore, not just musical but political significance. It is more likely, though, that the word represents that unity in the totality of things which is so central a concept in MacDiarmid. This moment out of time is certainly reminiscent of another in 'Au Clair de la Lune' in which 'thunner' (thunder) is apprehended as 'a tinkling bell' and 'Time whuds like a flea'. In the verse, MacDiarmid also replaces Busoni's 'trombones' with 'trumpets' which is more appropriate (especially when coupled with 'harp') in this celestial context.

A notable feature of the first few pages of 'Plaited Like the Generations of Men' is the way in which MacDiarmid breaks up the Busoni passage at intervals to interpolate matter which, for the most

part, returns us abruptly to the encyclopaedic register of much of the rest of the poem. One's immediate response is to dismiss the dry, pedantic phrases (such as the 'masterly and exhaustive / Classification of psychical penetrations and enlacements ...' and 'the stratifications of axiology') as intrusive and incongruous at this point. However, what MacDiarmid is doing here is carefully monitoring our responses and curbing his own tendency to 'irresponsible lyricism'.[75] This text is, in effect, a model of literary 'braidbinding' in which the intellectual matter is seen as not 'other' but at one with the 'poetic' phraseology. Ultimately, then, MacDiarmid's use of the borrowed quotation suggests not just a commendation of Busoni's 'romantic' prose but a critique of it.

After the communal experience of revelation in the 'realm of music', MacDiarmid lists the visionary experiences of solitary mystics. These experiences include that of 'Buddha under the Bo-Tree' and Socrates' communion with 'The Sybil of Mantinaea'. The poet also reminds us, however, that scientists have visions too, including on his list

> ... the 'sudden illumination' that came
> To Benchara Branford one night in his fortieth year:
> 'At once was born into vivid and enchanting consciousness
> A new metaphysical calculus of sixty-four
> Inter-related cardinal categories, of which thirty-six
> Were the transmuted forms of the Geddesian concepts' ...
> (C.P.2, p. 873)

The concept of revelation is now given a political context in the quotation from Malraux's Days of Wrath. Music is again implicated at this point, however, since it is the 'memory of revolutionary songs / Rising from a hundred thousand throats' which enables the Communist leader Kassner to assemble 'The scattered fragments of his personality'.

After the auditory and conceptual image (in the Malraux extract) of 'the imperious gravity of a new song', there is a change of tone and register as instances of spiritual angst succeed those of revelation

and affirmation. MacDiarmid persistently questions his own motives and the language he uses to express them. Is his language, for instance, ('albeit ... infected by positive vision') merely "The reflection of ideas and values / Not yet wholly assimilated by the sensibility.' ? And is he, therefore, 'resolving his conflicts by a kind of verbal self-hypnosis'. ? The poet is not even very confident as regards 'the rôle maximalized 'civilisation'' can ultimately play.

However, the overwhelming question of 'Plaited Like the Generations of Men' concerns MacDiarmid's conception of his rôle as 'braidbinder'. The imagery of weaving, braided hair, entwinement and enlacement is much in evidence in the opening pages of this section and one recalls the poetic promise: 'Svaham aham samharami' which is translated in a footnote as 'I myself will again bind the braids together'. And, in <u>In Memoriam James Joyce</u> the poet not only assumes the 'burden o' his people's doom' but the ills of the whole fragmented world. He now asks, with an uncharacteristic lack of assurance,

> Have I failed in my braid-binding
> At this great crisis
> When the impending task of mankind
> Is to help to bring to a close the 'conflict' stage
> Of the present process of the discontinuous
> And to usher in the 'harmony' stage
> By means of an abandonment
> Of the interlocking and proselytizing technique
> Of 'Warfare' and 'persuasion'?
> At this moment when braidbinding as never before,
> The creation of the seamless garment,
> Is the poet's task? (<u>C.P.</u>2, p. 876)

And in <u>In Memoriam James Joyce</u> MacDiarmid does not, perhaps, succeed in making a 'single reality'

> ... a' a'e'oo' -
> O' his love and pity and fear;
> A seamless garment o' music and thought ... (<u>C.P.</u>1, p. 312)

Indeed, in <u>The Kind of Poetry I Want</u> MacDiarmid suggests that 'poetry of such an integration' could not, as yet, <u>be</u> written. In their interesting 'Foreword' to <u>The Socialist Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid</u>, T.S. Law

and Thurso Berwick write (and I feel their conclusions are apposite here) :

> ... In thousands and thousands of lines and in tens of thousands of quotations and references he [MacDiarmid] built up a veritable treasure-house of poetry material. Poems gave way to longer and longer stretches of poetry in one huge epic effort to cover the totality of human knowledge. There have been many arguments about this later poetry of MacDiarmid but it is not our immediate concern to enter into such discussions except to say that if epic poetry has to be prepared in advance of the epic age of Communism there is no other way to do it. [76]

Much of 'Plaited Like the Generations of Men' involves a celebration of exemplary figures such as, pre-emenently, Joyce and Schoenberg whose innovatory practices are in accord with the poetic purpose. Yet MacDiarmid is continually aware of (to quote from 'Lo ! A Child is Born' which one surely recalls at this point) "a monstrous din of the sterile who contribute nothing / To the great end in view.' (C.P.1, p. 548). Yet, if MacDiarmid's vision of an 'illuminated race' is to be realised the as yet determinedly uncommitted must play their part in the great enterprise:

> Responsibility for the present state of the world
> And for its development for better or worse
> Lies with every single individual;
> Freedom is only really possible
> In proportion as all are free. (C.P.2, p. 884)

However, the instances of spiritual angst in 'Plaited Like the Generations of Men' are followed by a series of affirmations in the closing pages. These on the whole concern the unborn generations who are the especial concern of MacDiarmid in In Memoriam James Joyce. It is for their sakes that the precursor has undertaken the arduous task of preparing the ground for a new poetry - a poetry of 'world consciousness'. Thus, there is, in the final pages of 'Plaited Like the Generations of Men', a preoccupation with preparedness in the interests of the yet-to-be-born:

> ... even as a bed,
> Which is an assembly of frame, mattress, bedding and pillows,

> Is for another's use, not for its own,
> And its several component parts render no mutual service,
> Thence it is concluded that there is a man who sleeps upon
> the bed
> And for whose sake it was made; so this world
> Of words, thoughts, memories, scientific facts, literary arts
> Is for another's use ... (C.P.2, p. 884)

And already 'among the great masses of mankind' silently, unseen and unstoppable the development of human consciousness is beginning to happen:

> With every hour it is growing and emerging.
> Like a mango tree under a cloth,
> Stirring the dull cloth,
> Sending out tentacles.
> – It's not something that can be stopped
> By sticking it away in a zinc-lined box
> Like a tube of radium ... (C.P.2, p. 885)

However, a tribute to the innovative, inventive Joyce who is, of course, seen in the context of MacDiarmid's evolutionary vision, provides, I believe, one of the most memorable and reassuring moments in the entire MacDiarmid corpus. The work of the Irish writer ('vastly outrunning present needs' but 'providing for developments to come') is viewed in the illuminating context of foetal growth. The passage (which is unacknowledged) was taken from the fourth chapter of Sir Charles Sherrington's Man on His Nature. MacDiarmid omitted several lines of the original text – taking only what he required for his immediate purposes. The passage he does quote, however, is taken almost word for word from Sherrington.[77] All MacDiarmid had to do (apart from selecting the piece in the first place – for which, indeed, he deserves some commendation) was to lineate the author's rhythmical prose. The result is a brilliantly apt extended metaphor for the poet's affirmative vision. The insistent and repeated 'will' is not only conceptually significant but ensures an appropriately relentless momentum in the passage:

> ... the bed of which I have spoken will be filled,
> All life's million conflicting interests and relationships,

> Even as nerves before ever they function
> Grow where they will be wanted; levers laid down in gristle
> Become bone when wanted for the heavier pull
> Of muscles which will clothe them; lungs, solid glands,
> Yet arranged to hollow out at a few minutes' notice
> When the necessary air shall enter; limb-buds
> Futile at their appearing, yet deliberately appearing
> In order to become limbs in readiness
> For an existence where they will be all-important;
> A pseudo-aquatic parasite, voiceless as a fish,
> Yet containing within itself an instrument of voice
> Against the time when it will talk;
> Organs of skin, ear, eye, nose, tongue,
> Superfluous all of them in the watery dark
> Where formed - yet each unhaltingly preparing
> To enter a daylit, airy, object-full manifold world
> They will be wanted to report on. Everywhere we find
> Prospective knowledge of needs of life
> Which are not yet but are foreknown.
> All is provided ... (C.P.2, p. 886)

Characteristically, though, MacDiarmid took from Sherrington only what he needed for his immediate purposes - and, in the process, artistic selection took precedence, perhaps, over a strict adherence to scientific fact and, indeed, authorial intention. In this regard, Edwin Morgan writes:

> MacDiarmid's interest centred on the possibilities he saw in the analogy itself, with its striking imagery; he does not, as Sherrington did, probe and question the habit of thought that lies behind these curiously deterministic assumptions, nor does he take into account Sherrington's later reminders that such patterns in nature are both fallible in their action and imperfect in their conception. On the wider view, of course, much of the Sherringtonian speculation on man's evolving nature - eloquently expressed as it often is - would make a strong appeal to the author of In Memoriam James Joyce ... 78

Paradoxically, the penultimate instance of affirmation in 'Plaited Like the Generations of Men' is concerned not with gestation or birth but with death. MacDiarmid has come to Joyce's 'death-chamber' not to mourn but to celebrate the Irish writer's deliverance from 'devouring time'. In a vividly visual and kinaesthetic image, the 'queer bird' (Joyce) transformed to the exotically-plumaged peacock breaks through to eternity and learns at last 'Der Sinn des Schaffens' ('The Meaning of the Creative Act'). The death-chamber interlude ends with a repetition of the Credo which occurs throughout the MacDiarmid

corpus – with a difference , however. The final italicised word 'alone' places Joyce's revelation in the context of those of the lone mystics in the opening pages of the poem.

In Memoriam James Joyce ends, like A Drunk Man, on a colloquial note with MacDiarmid bidding Joyce a light-hearted, multi-lingual 'Farewell'. And the concluding sentences 'Non me rebus subjungere conor ! .' (I won't let things get the better of me'), and Sab thik chha (Everything's O.K.) are, in their way, as determinally life-affirming as Molly Bloom's joyously defiant cry into the outer dark 'yes I said yes I will Yes'.[79]

In connection with the conclusion of In Memoriam James Joyce, Alan Scott Riach writes:

> The close of the poem invites laughter and release, relief from a concentrated and exacting demand and release into an inviting and participatory comedy ...[80]

Margery Greenshields McCulloch is less happy about the ending of the 1955 poem. She writes:

> The abrupt transition to the colloquial cheery "Chau for now of the final movement brings with it a danger of the poet's appearing to dismiss as inconsequential the very problems relating to human existence and the realisation of his vision which the poem as a whole has raised ...[81]

What puzzles me, however, is not the nature of the ending of In Memoriam James Joyce but the fact that MacDiarmid has made any attempt at all to impose a traditional closure on a work whose subject matter and method in general suggest open-endedness. Yet, in his 1955 poem – despite its structural faults and occasional instances of repetitiveness and wearying pedantry – I believe that MacDiarmid has succeeded magnificently in his stand against intellectual apathy. And, in his arduous and prolonged engagement with linguistic and cultural diversity the poet himself exemplifies and possibly helps to promote that 'world consciousness' which he believed to be 'the great function and destiny of Man...'

The opening pages of the third chapter of Lucky Poet contain a number of verses which are recognisably part of the 1961 poem which we now know as The Kind of Poetry I Want. These verses are 'drawn', MacDiarmid informs us, from a 'sequence of defining stanzas ... a sequence which runs, appearing and reappearing at intervals, through the entire immense bulk' of his Cornish Heroic Song.[82] And, certainly, the 1961 open-ended work, with its innumerable analogies, epic similes and occasional extended metaphors, represents a most diligent and enthusiastic attempt to 'define' MacDiarmid's ideal poetic.

As with In Memoriam James Joyce, the form of The Kind of Poetry I Want has been the focus of considerable critical deliberation. Kenneth Buthlay writes, in this regard:

> MacDiarmid wants a poetry that is "above all, controlled", and "organised to the last degree", but what he does in practice in The Kind of Poetry I Want is to list an arbitrary number of individual items, many of them certainly of great interest in themselves, but given a semblance of structural organisation only by a very crude linking device.[83]

And certainly one feels that many readers would concur on this point. Edwin Morgan's conclusions as to the structure of the poem are, characteristically, imaginative and perceptive:

> What MacDiarmid seems to be adumbrating in The Kind of Poetry I Want - it is nowhere made sharp and definite - is a poetry which is highly organised in parts, but not prescriptively with regard to the whole. It is not so much an organism as a colony, a living and in one sense formless association of organisms which share a common experience. Shape and architectonics are not so important as the quick movements of the thought - the feelers in the water, moved partly by the surrounding currents and partly by their own volition and partly in response to the movement of neighbour tentacles - while a succession of images, illustrations, and analogies is presented to it.[84]

Clearly, in The Kind of Poetry I Want 'shape and architectonics' are not 'so important as the quick movements of the thought ... '. MacDiarmid's obsessive all-inclusiveness and instances of random juxtapositions, convoluted syntax and bewildering parentheses certainly result, as we shall see in the course of this discussion, in a degree

of structural disarray. And, although the poet does have some recourse to the work of others (there is at least, as we shall see, _one_ unattributed passage in the poem), the extensive borrowing of _In Memoriam James Joyce_ which acts as a kind of structural device in the work is not a feature of the 1961 poem. Yet there are some unifying links in _The Kind of Poetry I Want_. The cumulative effect of a multiplicity of dynamic and inventive analogies creates, for instance, a real sense of movement in the poem. And the reader is - for the most part - irresistably drawn along in the wake of the poet's unflagging exuberance and passionate purposefulness. Lists - of books, of words and of experts in many fields of human activity - also give a kind of formal cohesion to the poem. Again, since most stanzas commence with a reference to the poet's subject - poetry - one is never really allowed to lose sight of the insistent theme of _The Kind of Poetry I Want_.

In accordance with MacDiarmid's preoccupation with 'world consciousness' the internationalism and cosmopolitan tonality of _In Memoriam James Joyce_ are again evident in the 1961 work. MacDiarmid's ideal poetic must be 'a poetry with the power of assimilating foreign influences' and indeed

> a poetry like the character of Indian culture
> Which is and always has been its universal contacts
> (_C.P._2, p.1013)

In line with the poetic purpose, it must be, above all

> A poetry concerned with all that is needed
> Of the sum of human knowledge and expression,
> The sustaining consciousness,
> The reasonable will of our race,
> To produce this super-individuality, Man,
> In whom we all even now participate
> Is the immediate purpose of the human race. (_C.P._2, p. 1004)

The poet's task in the work is to convey not only the essence of the kind of poetry he wants but also the qualities of intellect and imagination of the kind of reader he wants. And just how assisuously MacDiarmid applies himself to his task can be gleaned from even a

cursory perusal of the extraordinarily energetic poem.

It is arguable that a clear connection exists between the concerns of the 1961 poem and those of 'Second Hymn to Lenin' (1932). The later poem can be seen as an attempt to put into practice the récommendations made to poets in general in 'Second Hymn to Lenin'. In that poem, it is not the political achievement of the eponymous Socialist leader which is foregrounded but the non-achievement - in terms of public relations - of great poets throughout history. The latter are seen as virtually devoid of effect and largely unread:

> A' that's great is free and expansive.
> What ha' they expanded tae ?
> They've affected nocht but a fringe
> O' mankind in ony way. (C.P.1, p. 324)

And certainly a wider readership for poetry is one of MacDiarmid's aims in the 1961 work. In a 1964 letter to The Scotsman, the poet writes:

> The aim of all great poetry is universalisation, but in so far from attaining it, great poetry is known only to a tiny fraction of the population. 85

However, to achieve its aim of universalisation, poetry must capture the 'collective interest' of the people. It must be 'spoken in the factories and fields' - it must be accessible to 'the man in the street' and 'the housewife on the hearth'. It must be

> ... a poetry that stands for production, use and life,
> As opposed to property, profits and death ... (C.P.2, p.1023)

And, most importantly, the poet must - like Lenin - be a skillful communicator. He must 'cut the cackle and pursue real ends'.

The vigorous pursuit of 'real ends' is the motivating force of The Kind of Poetry I Want, as MacDiarmid, with evangelistic zeal, seeks to draw poetry in from the edges of the world - where it affects 'nocht but a fringe' of mankind - to take its rightful place as 'the core o' a' activity'. In the interests of the universalisation of

poetry, the expansionist eye of the poet seeks to scan mankind in the context of a myriad cultural pursuits and of 'áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim'.[86] Through the innumerable analogies which, for the most part, constitute the vast, open-ended poem, MacDiarmid tries to forge links between poetry and these multitudinous pieces of experiential reality - many of which had traditionally lain outside its scope.

<u>The Kind of Poetry I Want</u>, then, represents a determined effort to claim more territory for poetry. And, incidentally, it seeks to reclaim for the poet the central position he once held in an homogenous society. If the people would not come to poetry, then poetry would go to them: in the theatre; the music hall; the cinema and the home. It would move on to the building site and into the hospital - it would even take its bait to the fisherman on the river-bank. In the course of <u>The Kind of Poetry I Want</u>, all these venues are 'visited' and seen as relevant in the context of poetry. The message of the 1961 poem - and ultimately of the MacDiarmid corpus as a whole - is that no area of human experience must be allowed to lie outside the jurisdiction of the poet. Art - and specifically poetry - must be relevant to life, <u>all</u> life.

As usual, MacDiarmid himself, with his 'myriad mindedness' and insatiable intellectual hunger, is the major exemplar of the 1961 poem - although there is an impressive 'supporting cast' of the great and the good. The poet describes himself as 'an omnivorous reader' and declares his interest in 'every creative effort the whole world over'. And, characteristically, he makes the following exaggerated claim:

> ... I pursue my studies in all directions,
> Absorbing and assimilating all that has been achieved
> In politics, in philosophy, in letters, and in science.
> (<u>C.P</u>.2, p. 1032)

Predictably, given the poet's continual recourse to the employment of

illustrative media to convey his didactic purpose (which in this case, as in In Memoriam James Joyce, involves the preparation of the ground for his ideal poetic) numerous instances of expertise in diverse fields of human activity are presented as models for the poetic craft. These can involve such unlikely subjects as 'A wrestling bout on a village green', the terms of the American pastime 'Red Dog' and 'The upward curve of the conveyor' on a construction site. But such subjects are - in accordance with the poetic intention to pursue 'real ends' - also seen as the very stuff of poetry. They are valuable sources of a more extensive subject matter, of new modes of signification, of fresh verbal formulae. So, if The Kind of Poetry I Want is not linguistically inventive in the manner of MacDiarmid's earlier poetry, it is rich in the specialised terminologies of a myriad workplaces and pastimes - and these terms are seen as constituting a necessary and enabling part of the word hoard of an ideal poetic.

MacDiarmid's insistence, in In Memoriam James Joyce, that 'the poetry of the age / Should be brought into conformity with its scientific spirit' is again evident in the 1961 poem. If the poet is to make his 'contribution to the New Order' he must bear in mind that

> ... the era of technology is a necessary fact,
> An inescapable phase in social activity,
> Within which men are to rise
> To ever greater mental and emotional heights... (C.P.2, p. 1029)

MacDiarmid enlists the help of Whitman to redefine the poetic function in the modern age:

> 'In the beauty of poems,' as Whitman said,
> 'Are henceforth the tuft and final applause of science
> ... Facts showered over with light.
> The daylight is lit with more volatile light.
> The poets of the cosmos advance
> Through all interpositions and coverings,
> And turmoils and stratagems
> To first principles ... Beyond all precedent
> Poetry will have to do with actual facts'. (C.P.2, p. 1028)

In The Kind of Poetry I Want it would indeed seem that MacDiarmid has

learned the lesson of Cencrastus (that he cannot throw off 'the bur o' the world') and acknowledges that it is only by a thorough engagement with, and celebration of, substance that he can fulfil his function as mediator between reality and empirical reason.

Certainly, the emphasis on 'facts' in the 1961 poem is tirelessly (and, on occasion, tiresomely) insisted. on. Although predictably, given the poet's intellectual aspirations, the muse is seen in The Kind of Poetry I Want in the congenial company of such beautiful lofty things as Virgil and Voltaire, Homer and Heine, Dhammasenapati and Diaghilev, she is, on many occasions, yoked (and not infrequently with some violence) to the most mundane objects: 'the rev-counter'; the 'excavator'; the 'breadknife'; the 'operating theatre'. And she is seen in the low-life context of 'the fight-in-the-street' and the 'bout of all-in wrestling'. But then, in a real sense, what MacDiarmid is attempting in The Kind of Poetry I Want is a demystification of poetry itself, as he continually swoops from the sublime to the apparently ridiculous to shock us into a re-consideration of what is, or is not, a suitable subject for poetry. And the poet is successful, up to a point. Although we may begin by considering many of MacDiarmid's analogies to be inappropriate, or even bathetic, we may end by deciding that what is ridiculous is the way in which the stuff of ordinary human commerce has been, for so long, virtually excluded from the realms of the poetic.

Certainly, in many of the similes in which MacDiarmid links poetry to ordinary phenomena in the external world, facts are indeed 'showered over with light'. Generally there is an interesting two-way process at work: on the one hand, by coupling the muse with a common object in everyday use, the poet demystifies poetry and makes it accessible to a wide public; on the other hand, the simple fact is revealed in a new

light as it becomes a fitting subject for poetic discourse. In the following instance, the concerns of the poet and 'the man in the street' are brought together in an image which conveys economically but effectively our curiosity about the materiality of the world and the forces at work within it. And man is not seen as merely a passive victim but as an agent of those forces. Scientific knowledge, it would seem, is the ultimate demystifier - and this is indeed one of the major themes of The Kind of Poetry I Want. MacDiarmid's ideal poetry, then, must be:

> A poetry like the hope of achieving ere very long
> A tolerable idea of what happens from first to last
> If we bend a piece of wire
> Backwards and forwards until it breaks ...
>
> (C.P.2, p. 1009)

MacDiarmid also chooses an appropriately scientific image to convey the necessarily universal nature of the language within which the new poetry must be couched. Since such a language must respond with consummate precision to the music of what actually happens in the world, it must be:

> A language like the magnetic needle,
> The most sensitive thing in the world, which responds alike
> To Polar light in the north, electric currents
> Flowing round the equator, the revolutions
> Of the earth on its axis, the annual course
> Of the earth round the sun, the revolution of the sun itself,
> And the mysterious processes in sunspots ...
>
> (C.P.2, p. 1015)

In the following instance, MacDiarmid uses the language of photography to convey his commitment to a poetry of science. And, like so many images in the poem which involve the activities of man (from the dancing of Fred Astaire - a terpsichorean 'braidbinder' in MacDiarmid's view - to the 'integration of the thousands of brush strokes in a Cezanne canvas') the photographic image is also used to re-affirm the ontological underpinnings of the corpus as a whole: the poet's mystical conception of a unity in all diversity. So the poems which

will 'put the skids under the whole of modern consciousness' must be, among other things:

> ... wide-angle poems
> Taking in the whole which explains the part,
> Scientifically accurate, fully realised in all their details ...
> (C.P.2, p.1020)

Predictably, the natural object is invoked in the interests of the poetic discourse of the future, since, as Donald Low has observed:

> MacDiarmid remained by instinct a countryman all his days excited and made eloquent at every stage by natural history ... [87]

In the pace, texture and rhythms of the following passage one can detect this engaging force at work. The universal nature of poetic pre-occupations is again emphasised, as is the commitment to science, since, significantly, the one human figure in the landscape 'is Marya Sklodowski at her laboratory table'. And, perhaps, by the use of the multi-hued lithic images so reminiscent of 'On a Raised Beach' MacDiarmid imports into <u>The Kind of Poetry I Want</u> the ontological implications of stone as it is seen in the 1934 poem. The poetry he wants then is:

> A poetry that speaks 'of trees,
> From the cedar tree that is in Lebanon
> Even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall',
> And speaks also 'of beasts, and of fowl,
> And of creeping things, and of fishes',
> And needs, like Marya Sklodowska at her laboratory table,
> For its open-eyed wonderment at the varied marvels of life,
> Its insatiable curiosity about the mainspring,
> Its appetite for the solution of problems,
> Black fragments of pitch-blende from Saxony and Bohemia,
> Greenish-blue chalcolite from Portugal and Tonkin,
> Siskin-green uranium mica from France,
> Canary-yellow veined carnotite from Utah ...
> (C.P.2, p.1019)

A rural scene is again the background of an interesting extended metaphor of the creative process. The poet's necessarily meticulous attentiveness to his craft is conveyed to the real world in the imagery of the sport of fishing with its highly-selective and patient preparatory procedures:

> For the initial attempt I choose a 3-inch anti-kink
> minnow, brown and gold.
> - First, one or two casts downstream, to make sure
> The tension of the reel is correctly adjusted to the
> weight of the bait,
> That the line is well and truly wound,
> Then out goes the minnow at the correct angle,
> To drop on a circle of foam possibly 50 yards away.
> Minnow, line, and rod are in one straight line.
> The rod-point, dipping low almost to the surface,
> Is slowly moved around, the minnow is bravely spinning
> its way across,
> When a vicious tug sets the reel screaming.
> A salmon is on ... (C.P.2, p.1008)

However, despite the employment of idyllic rural scenes and rustic pursuits as exemplary images in The Kind of Poetry I Want, the poet clearly refuses to 'sanction'.

> The irresponsible lyricism in which sense impressions
> Are employed to substitute ecstasy for information ...
> (C.P.2, p.1021)

Thus, whilst such subjects as 'daffodils and nightingales' are familiar images in a conventional poetic, formulations of such factual particularity as the following (from the world of fishing) must now, apparently, be able to take their place, naturally in the new poetic discourse:

> A sturdy Norsk-Murdoch spinning rod, a 4-inch Silex reel,
> A steel trace, and a box of artificial minnows ...
> (C.P.2, p.1008)

If 'the soul of the commonest object' is 'radiant'[88] to MacDiarmid in the 1961 poem, there are notable occasions on which such objects fail to achieve their 'epiphanies'. And, generally, the fault lies not in the nature of the thing itself but in the way it is presented in the poem. In the more successful similes of The Kind of Poetry I Want the tension created at the initial point of comparison is justified by adequate and satisfactory elaboration. However, since the 1961 poem is characterised by an obsessive commitment to all-inclusiveness, the poet's practice in much of The Kind of Poetry I Want involves a very rapid layering of multitudinous illustrative analogies. 'My subject

matter races to me now' enthuses the poet as he moves with vertiginous speed from one exemplary image to another. And, whilst to some degree one admires the mental energy and wide (if not necessarily deep) erudition of MacDiarmid's breathless catalogues, one is uneasily aware of things incomplete and unrealised - because only superficially engaged with. The following simile, for example, fails because the opportunity to develop its startling but potentially interesting implications in kinaesthetic and conceptual terms is not taken. The poetry MacDiarmid longs for must be 'Alive as a bout of all-in-wrestling ...' The poet could have rendered the particular 'aliveness' of this vigorous human activity concrete by reference to the various 'holds' of the sport, and he could also have employed the concepts of challenge, victory and defeat to his expressive advantage. He does not, however, take advantage of the metaphoric possibilities which are available to him.

Again, in the following comparison, the gap between the poetic and the quotidian remains unbridged since the 'whatness' of the domestic object which MacDiarmid employs - its ordinary, extraordinary essence - is not revealed in a way which sheds light on both the object itself and poetry. MacDiarmid's ideal poems must be

> ... like the bread-knife
> Which cuts three slices at once ... (C.P.2, p.1005)

The linking of such extremes cries out for justification which, in the event, is not forthcoming. Despite its accelerated performance, the bread-knife remains just a bread-knife, poetry remains poetry and 'never the twain shall meet'. Too often in The Kind of Poetry I Want, MacDiarmid fails to draw out the full implication of a simile, but hastily abandons it to suggest yet another comparison - or to comment (knowledgeably, but unnecessarily) on some obscure literary source.

And if MacDiarmid's passion for comprehensiveness results in

much unfinished business and a consequent degree of structural incoherence in The Kind of Poetry I Want, it also leads to the presentation of matter which should, perhaps, have been excluded altogether. Clearly, in the 1961 poem, MacDiarmid has taken Rilke's dictum that 'the poet must know everything' rather too much to heart. And, as an example of what 'the poet must know', he presents the following list of the things Schostakowitsch dutifully examines in his Gerlands Beiträge. Certainly, the catalogue has much to offer the parodist - but it is surely of less interest to the serious poet:

> ... the statistics of North Atlantic air temperatures.
> Nile flood levels, wheat prices, winter in Europe,
> Tree-rings, sedimentary layers and lake deposits,
> The dates of the sprouting and bloom of hawthorn,
> Of the first cuckoo, of the beginning of harvest,
> Of cattle products, herring and salmon catches, diphtheria,
> Typhus and measles epidemics, prices of Consols,
> Workers' wages, coal production, discount at the Bank
> of England,
> British export trade, American wheat production ...
> (C.P.2, p.1015)

MacDiarmid's preoccupation with the Ur-culture of the Scots is, predictably, represented in the 1961 poem. Since he was 'born a Scottish Gael', the poetry he wants must be one of 'earth's subtlest speech' - and one recalls the poet's reference in 'In Memoriam: Liam Mac'Ille Iosa' to Gaelic as 'an incomparable instrument'.[89] In one of the many musical analogies throughout The Kind of Poetry I Want (from 'The earlier Kajanus interpretation of Sibelius's Second Symphony' to 'The vividness of the orchestra in the cobbling song ... ') MacDiarmid employs 'terms for different tempi in pipe music' as an example of the kind of structure he desires in his 'utterly unEnglish' ideal poems. And, certainly, the last three lines of this extract do, in fact, suggest MacDiarmid's own improvisatory and inventive practice in The Kind of Poetry I Want:

Songs like the transition from the ùrlar to the crunluath,
Those variations which suggest hidden reserves
Of strength, of ingenuity, to follow,
Of undreamed-of gracenotes hidden in the fingers,
Then into the crunluath breabach,
Before the merciless variety, the ranting arrogance of which
Even the wonders of the crunluath pale to insignificance,
And finally into the fourth and greatest movement of the
    pìob mhòr,
The most fantastic music in all the range of the pipes,
The crunluath a-mach - where miracles of improvisation
Form themselves of their own volition under the fingers;
The expert ear may trace the original melody
Of the ùrlar weaving its faint way
Through the maze of gracenotes
But the very gracenotes are going mad
And making melodies of their own
As the player conceives new and ever louder diversions
(C.P.2, p.1007-8)

The kind of poetry MacDiarmid wants in the 1961 poem, however, must be 'Above all a learned poetry'. Although he is concerned to capture the 'collective interest' of the masses, MacDiarmid is certainly not prepared to make concessions to their present state of consciousness. In a letter to The Scotsman (April 7, 1964) he quotes from his own 1934 essay, 'Problems of Poetry Today', as follows:

'... it is the parasitical "interpreting class" ... who ...insist that the level of utterance [in poetry] should be that of popular understanding, and jeer at what is not expressed in thejargon 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-ciruiting of human consciousness' [60]

In accordance then with his conception of the necessity of a levelling-up in society, MacDiarmid's ideal poetic must be a 'high' poetry, 'a poetry of difficult knowledge'. Hence it continues to require its connections with the great and the good. A due homage, therefore, must be accorded to the traditional exemplars, Virgil and Homer - and Plato must still be revered for 'the unparalleled fecundity of his thought'. Others heroes of the 1961 poem - and, as in

In Memoriam James Joyce, there is scope for 'name dropping' on a large scale - are Chestov and Buber, Voltaire and Baudelaire, Pushkin and Sibelius, Coleridge and Diaghilev. The desired poetry must have a classical perfection - it must (and note the repetition of a stipulation made in 'Second Hymn') be 'organised to the last degree'. Yet formal nicety is certainly not a feature of The Kind of Poetry I Want. Indeed the following passage, with its random juxtapositions of analogical instances and disorientating parenthesis is much more characteristic of the poem as a whole. Incidentally, the seven lines from 'Till above every line ...' to '... subtly against one another' have been taken, unaltered and unacknowledged, from F.R. Leavis's Revaluation: Tradition and Development In English Poetry (1949):[91]

> A poetry full of erudition, expertise, and ecstasy
> - The acrobatics and the faceted fly-like vision,
> The transparency choke-full of hair-pin bends,
> "Jacinth-work of subtlest jewellery' poetry à quatre epingles -
> (Till above every line we might imagine
> A tensely flexible and complex curve
> Representing the modulation,
> Emphasis, and changing tone and tempo
> Of the voice in reading;
> The curve varying from line to line
> And the lines playing subtly against one another
> - A fineness and profundity of organisation
> Which is the condition of a variety great enough
> To express all the world's,
> As subtle and complete and tight
> As the integration of the thousands of brush strokes
> In a Cézanne canvas) ... (C.P.2, p.1019)

Whilst granting classicism its due in the 1961 poem, MacDiarmid insists that the poetry he wants must be innovative, unfettered by tradition. It must be

> A poetry wilder than a heifer
> You have to milk into a gourd. (C.P.2, p.1024)

And since MacDiarmid is, in a sense, always his own subject, the image of the poet in the following extract - as daring, perverse, unpredictable and irreverent - is probably one he entertained of himself. And it is, on the whole, apt:

> The poetry of one like a wild goat on a rock.
> You may try to rope him on one crag.
> He leaps to a still more dangerous perch,
> Where, flirting with death, he waggles his beard
> And fires you an ironic ba-a-a ... (C.P.2, p.1024)

The paradox of MacDiarmid's desire for a poetry which would be both traditional and burgeoning with luxurious new life is imaged forth at a particular point in The Kind of Poetry I Want when the poet ceases to discuss poetry and actually writes it. In the passage which begins with hedge-laying as a model for poetry, there seems to be both a recognition of the necessity of formal limits and an awareness of a variousness and abundance which will brook no limitations. This passage, with its evocative visual, auditory and kinaesthetic images, and its rich sonic patterning certainly testifies to the presence of the poet (as well as the polymath) in the 1961 work. MacDiarmid wants

> A poetry abstruse as hedge-laying
> And full as the countryside in which
> I have watched the practice of that great old art,
> - Full of the stumbling boom of bees,
> Cuckoos contradicting nightingales all through a summer day,
> Twilight deepening with a savage orange light,
> Pheasants travelling on fast, dark wings,
> - Or like a village garden I know well
> Where the pear-trees bloom with a bravery of buds,
> The cydonia blossoms gloriously against its wall,
> And roses abound through April, May, and June,
> - And always with a surprising self-sufficiency ...
> (C.P.2, p.1025)

Although, on the whole, 'the sang' rather than 'the sermon' is foregrounded in The Kind of Poetry I Want the poem has (like, for instance, A Drunk Man and 'On a Raised Beach') a profoundly religious dimension. MacDiarmid is, in the final analysis, a visionary poet, and in the following lines he seeks to convey the metaphysic which underlies his search for an ideal poetry. The poet refers to

> A deep religious impulse moving us, not that
> Interpreted by others through systems of belief and practice,
> But the craving for the perfect synthesis of thought and action,
> Which alone can satisfy our test
> Of ultimate truth, and conception of life's purpose.
> (C.P.2, p.1016)

In reference to the contemporary relevance of MacDiarmid's later poetry, Roderick Watson writes:

> ... the poet has relinquished his role as controller of metaphors and god-like author, in favour of a more open-ended, and less structured relationship between himself, the text and the reader ... 92

In _In Memoriam James Joyce_ and _The Kind of Poetry I Want_ MacDiarmid may have - to some degree - 'relinquished his role as controller of metaphors'. And certainly the open-endedness to which Watson refers is a feature of these poems. Can it really be held, though, that the poet has 'relinquished his role' as 'god-like author'? Surely it is still a _Romantic_ conception of the function of the poet which underlies the 1955 and 1961 poems? MacDiarmid continues to believe - as is apparent in my discussion of _In Memoriam James Joyce_ and _The Kind of Poetry I Want_ - that the poet can transform the world.

It is also arguable, I feel, that it is the poet's didactic intent, in regard to 'world consciousness', which determined the open-ended structure of the 1955 and 1961 poems. The poet's preparation of the ground for an ideal poetic (which is, as I see it, what these works represent) involved the employment of innumerable analogies, a mass of multi-cultural reference and the communication of information on a grand scale. The articulation of this extravagant purpose demanded considerable freedom of movement and generosity of scope - and hence the open-endedness and encyclopaedic mode of _In Memoriam James Joyce_ and _The Kind of Poetry I Want_.

In the course of this externalisation of the poet's own grand inner design, MacDiarmid gave us epics which, despite their structural weaknesses, represent a major contribution to 20th. century poetry. This is poetry of an imposing gravity and weight - and it is certainly a poetry in which, to quote Joy Hendry, MacDiarmid has 'enlarged our concept of what poetry is and can be ...'.[93] Most importantly, the poet has, as he intended, 'enlarged our concept' of what _man_ is and can be.

NOTES

CHAPTER FIVE

1. See 'Bagpipe Music' in _Complete Poems_, p. 665.
2. _Letters_, p. 871.
3. _Complete Poems_, p. 57
4. _Letters_, p. 89.
5. ibid., p. 91.
6. ibid., p. 122.
7. _Selected Essays_, p. 76.
8. _Letters_, p. 826.
9. _Letters_, p. 128.
10. Alan Bold, _MacDiarmid_ (London, 1988), p. 350.
11. _Letters_, p. 446.
12. ibid., p. 265.
13. ibid., p. 408.
14. ibid., p. 453.
15. See _Complete Poems_, p. 1462 for list of poems MacDiarmid had intended to include in the work.
16. _Complete Poems_, p. vi
17. Bold, p. 204.
18. _Selected Essays_, pp. 75 - 76.
19. Watson, p. 90.
20. ibid., p. 90.
21. _Letters_, p. 742.
22. See Author's Note in _In Memoriam James Joyce_ (Glasgow, 1956), p. 12. Hereafter: Author's Note.
23. Gish, p. 196.

24. ibid., p. 202.

25. Edwin Morgan, 'Jujitsu for the Educated' in The Twentieth Century vol. 160, no. 955, p. 227. Henceforth: The Twentieth Century

26. ibid., p. 227.

27. ibid., p. 223.

28. John Baglow, Hugh MacDiarmid: The Poetry of Self (Kingston and Montreal, 1987), p. 183.

29. Alan Scott Riach, Hugh MacDiarmid's Epic Poetry: A Study in Sources and Function. PhD Thesis (Glasgow, 1984), p. 167. Hereafter: Riach.

30. Margery Greenshields McCulloch, Hugh MacDiarmid: A Study of Three Major Poems. Master of Letters Thesis (Glasgow, 1977), p. 199 Hereafter: McCulloch.

31. A Critical Survey, p. 194.

32. Gish, p. 180.

33. McCulloch, p. 151.

34. The Twentieth Century, p. 228.

35. Cited in The Twentieth Century, p. 227.

36. Selected Essays, p. 80.

37. Cited in Author's Note, p. 16.

38. ibid., p. 16.

39. See Marjorie Perloff, The Dance of the Intellect (Cambridge, 1985) pp. 110 - 111.

40. Edwin Morgan, 'James Joyce And Hugh MacDiarmid' in James Joyce And Modern Literature, ed. W.J. McCormack and Alistair Stead (London, 1982), p. 217.

41. Cited in The Socialist Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid, ed. T.S. Law and Thurso Berwick (London, 1978), p. xxxi. Hereafter: Socialist Poems.

42. Margaret Schlauch, The Language of James Joyce (Folcroft Library Editions, 1973), p. 3.

43. ibid., pp. 3 - 4.

44. ibid., p. 4.

45. See Complete Poems, p. 741.

46. See Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction (Oxford, 1983), p. 136.

47. Watson, p. 94.

48. Letters, p. 771.

49. ibid., p. 885.

50. ibid., p. 832.

51. McCulloch, p. 148.

52. See 'Satirist In The Modern World' in TLS , no. 2675. pp. 293 - 295.

53. See Letters, p. 832.

54. ibid., p. 832.

55. Erich Heller, The Disinherited Mind (London, 1975), p. x.
Hereafter: Heller.

56. Buthlay, p. 121 - 122.

57. Heller, p. 236.

58. ibid., p. 259.

59. In this thesis see A Drunk Man p. 87 and also Cencrastus p. 99.

60. Buthlay, pp. 104 - 105.

61. Alexander Hutchison Beveridge, Hugh MacDiarmid and Religion.
Ph.D. Thesis (Edinburgh, 1985), p. 202.

62. Lucky Poet, p. 408.

63. Annie Besant, The Bhagavad-Gîtâ. Trans. (London and Benares, 1904) p. 13.

64. V.K. Chari, Whitman in the Light of Vedantic Mysticism (Nebraska, 1964) p. 8.

65. ibid., p. 9.

66. ibid., p. 8.

67. ibid., p. 9.

68. George Steiner, After Babel (London, 1975), p. 358.

69. In a footnote on p. 746 of Complete Poems, MacDiarmid glosses the Scottish Gaelic word as (1) a solitary place, (2) a place of union ...

70. The Twentieth Century, p. 224.

71. Bold, p. 222.

72. See Ferruccio Busoni, Letters to His Wife, trans. by Rosamond Ley (London, 1938), pp. 157 - 158.

73. ibid., p. 157.

74. ibid., p. 158.

75. Complete Poems, p. 1021.

76. Socialist Poems, p. xxxi

77. Charles Sherrington, Man on his Nature (Cambridge, 1940), pp. 111-112.

78. Edwin Morgan, Notes and Queries, vol. 10, no. 10 (Oct., 1963), p. 384.

79. See The Essential James Joyce, ed. Harry Levin (Middlesex, 1972), p. 50.

80. Riach, p. 251.

81. McCulloch, p. 199.

82. Lucky Poet, p. 165.

83. Buthlay, pp. 100 - 101.

84. A Critical Survey, p. 201.

85. Letters, p. 827.

86. See Poems And Prose Of Gerard Manley Hopkins, ed. W.H. Gardner (Middlesex, 1953), p. 30.

87. Donald Low, 'Poet inventing the nation's future' in Weekend Scotsman Supplement, 6 August 1983, p. 5.

88. See James Joyce, Stephen Hero (London, 1975), p. 218.

89. See Complete Poems, p. 415.

90. Letters, p. 825.

91. See F.R. Leavis, Revaluation: Tradition and Development In English Poetry (London, 1949), p. 31.

92. Watson, p. 93.

93. Chapman, vol. Vl no. 6, Summer 1981, pp. 1 - 2.

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