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**“Sitting in the mud and telling dirty stories
about poets”: Robert Burns and the modern
Scottish Renaissance.**

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M.A. Hons**

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Abstract

The Modernist period in Scotland is of immense interest to academics from a range of disciplines; from a literary perspective, it signals the coming together of the most iconic figure in Scottish literary history and a generation of confident, motivated and talented writers, keen on carving out a new path for Scottish literature. The reception of Robert Burns in the early twentieth century has been regarded as hostile and controversial in some quarters, yet beyond the headlines and slogans, there is a much more significant story to be told.

As the leader of the modern Scottish Renaissance, Hugh MacDiarmid is central to any discussion concerning this period, and his attitude to Burns has often been judged on soundbites rather than careful analysis. The same can be said of Edwin Muir and Burns: a single line from his entire corpus of work defines (for some) his thoughts on Burns, rather than an appreciation of his complete critical and creative output. This dissertation aims to address this myopic mindset, which pervades when it comes to discussing the relationship between Burns and these integral figures of Scottish literature.

Catherine Carswell and James Barke, as characters within the Burns afterlife story, are as, if not more, important than MacDiarmid and Muir, yet often their work is overlooked, or summarised (and ultimately dismissed) through one single word or phrase. This dissertation seeks to amend what is a grievous oversight in Burns scholarship by exploring their roles in the evolution of Burns's legacy, as well as highlighting their importance as writers within the modern Scottish Renaissance.

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one month after this dissertation was submitted for marking. She
never doubted me, and will always be with me.

Sweet dreams mum.

Introduction

‘Burns is on one hand “perfect”, a kind of Best Of album, hits only; on the other, his apparent personal excesses martyr and contain him – he’s Jimi Hendrix or Marilyn Monroe.’¹

To define and contextualise is to ensure a sense of familiarity between the reader and any academic study. For a topic exploring the most iconic figure in Scottish literature and his reception during one of the most significant cultural movements in western society in the twentieth century, the definition and contextualisation of the themes and concepts to be explored becomes imperative. At its core, this dissertation aims to explore the relationships (individually and collectively) between Robert Burns (1759-1796) and four Scottish writers considered to be within the canon of Scottish Modernism: James Barke (1905-1958), Catherine Carswell (1879-1946), Hugh MacDiarmid (1892-1978) and Edwin Muir (1887-1959). Each writer has had their own substantial part to play in the development of the Burns story throughout the twentieth century: the poems and critical works of MacDiarmid and Muir are as entwined with each other as the creative texts produced by Carswell and Barke. It is the legacy of Burns, and the attempt to challenge existing preconceptions of his nature at the turn of the twentieth century, which ties each of these writers together; it is his symbolic power, his ‘individualistic radicalism, a social conscience, nationalism, and, perhaps, literary genius.’² Each of them adopt and mirror these traits in their own work, to a great or lesser extent. As stated, however, time must be taken to define the terms included in the title of this thesis, ‘Robert Burns and the modern Scottish Renaissance’, and to fully understand the context within which these writers were approaching ‘Caledonia’s Bard’. This dissertation engages with a broad understanding of Modernism as a general movement, but more significantly, with the modern Scottish Renaissance, itself a sub-genre of Modernism, with its own unique characteristics and contexts.

There are so many definitions and sub-definitions of Modernism that the time it would take to even begin to address these would result in a paper much longer than this one. Modernism is a complex, broad and variously used literary term and new work on the area appears regularly. Since 2000, at the University of Glasgow alone, there have been eighteen

¹ Richard Price, ‘Robert Burns and the Scottish Renaissance’ in *Love and Liberty* edited by Kenneth Simpson, (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1997), p.130

² Ibid, p.130.

postgraduate studies undertaken, each of which engages with Modernism as a central theme.³

Roger Fowler defines Modernist art as:

In most critical usage, reckoned to be the art of what Harold Rosenberg calls “the tradition of the new”. It is experimental, formally complex, elliptical, contains elements of decreation as well as creation, and tends to associate notions of the artist’s freedom from realism, materialism, traditional genre and form, with notions of cultural apocalypse and disaster.⁴

Peter Childs furthers this by explaining, ‘Modernism can be understood through what it differs from. Modernism is, for example, not realism, the dominant mode of the novel from its inception in Britain in the eighteenth century with the rise of bourgeois capitalism to the present day.’⁵ Modernism, then, at its basest definition, is a representative term of a change in attitude and ideas towards the model of society at the turn of the twentieth century. Disenchanted with the traditions and cultural norms of the nineteenth century, Modernist writers and artists sought to reimagine a new form of artistic expression and understanding of the world they inhabited. Modernism in Europe was generally seen as a reaction to a perceived cultural crisis, and World War One ‘was a defining moment in terms of both society and the individual, such that the fracturing of minds that came to be known as shell-shock seemed to represent in miniature what was happening to societies and nations [...] Europe was torn apart, and Russia thrown into revolution.’⁶ In a British context, this was defined through the decline of the Victorian era (and its culture) and the beginning of the end for the British Empire, as it began to crumble throughout the twentieth century: instigated in no small part by the Easter Rising in Ireland in 1916 – an event with notable repercussions for the modern Scottish Renaissance, discussed below.

Childs summarises Modernism thus:

Modernism has therefore frequently been seen as an aesthetic and cultural reaction to late modernity and modernisation. On the one hand, Modernist artists kicked against the homogenisation required by mass systems. On the other, they celebrated the new conditions of production, circulation and consumption engendered by technological change. There were paradoxical if not opposed trends towards revolutionary and reactionary positions, fear of the new and

³ Theses.gla.ac.uk [accessed 23.08.2017]

⁴ Roger Fowler, *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), pp.1-2.

⁵ Peter Childs, *Modernism*, (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.2-3.

⁶ Ibid, pp.20-1.

delight at the disappearance of the old, nihilism and fanatical enthusiasm, creativity and despair.⁷

The paradoxical aspect of Modernism, according to this definition, is notable when considering Scotland's involvement in the Modernist movement. Given that this was a trans-Atlantic and Europe-wide cultural phenomenon, and given Scotland's position as an integral part of the United Kingdom and (therefore) global affairs, one would presume that Scottish artists and writers of the early to mid-twentieth century, writing in this style and adopting these ideas, would also be classed as Modernists. Yet many published studies of Modernism fail to cite a single Scottish writer of this period. *Modernism 1890-1930* (1976), *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism* (1999), *Modernism* (2000), *Modernisms: A Literary Guide* (2009): neither Hugh MacDiarmid⁸ nor Edwin Muir, two of the most recognised Scottish Modernists, are cited in any of these texts. Tim Armstrong does mention them both in his 2005 publication *Modernism*, although a namecheck is all they are afforded. Why are these writers ignored to such an extent in the academic discussion of Modernism?

It is imperative to realise that Modernism in Scotland throughout the inter-war years is essentially substituted and referred to as the modern Scottish Renaissance, a revival of Scottish literature, its popular height being in the 1920s and 1930s. This movement was as much a part of Modernism as it was an opponent of it, due to a range of conflicting and colluding ideals, not least because of the incongruous character most people view as its leader, Hugh MacDiarmid. Despite his disagreements with several other writers involved in the movement (most famously with Muir, but also with Catherine Carswell and James Leslie Mitchell/Lewis Grassic Gibbon at various times), the relationship of the Renaissance and MacDiarmid is symbiotic – one could not exist without the other. *The Scottish Chapbook* of 1922, published by MacDiarmid, carried the slogan: ‘Not Traditions – Precedents!’, an ethos which very much associated with the Modernist ideal of attempting ‘to create “a tradition of the new”’.⁹ Yet as both MacDiarmid and Muir began to push and identify with a need for a homogenous Scottish language (discussed fully in chapter two), the path of the

⁷ Ibid, p.17.

⁸ The pen name of Christopher Murray Grieve. MacDiarmid is the name I will use throughout this dissertation, although ‘Grieve’ will occasionally appear in quoted extracts. Neither name is referenced in the above texts.

⁹ P. Childs, *Modernism*, p.14.

modern Scottish Renaissance began to diverge from the typical Modernist philosophy. This was not necessarily a deliberate deviation from MacDiarmid, as Roderick Watson explains:

There is no doubt that MacDiarmid *wanted* to get into bed with modernism. His ‘Theory of Scots Letters’ in the issues of the ‘Scottish Chapbook’ in the spring of 1923 cites Lawrence, Proust, Spengler, Dostoevsky, Cherneshevsky, Joyce and Mallarmé, in a transparent bid to establish his modernist and European credentials, as part of his then necessary campaign to get Scottish culture to broaden its horizons.¹⁰

One of the reasons why this did not become reality could be attributed to MacDiarmid’s politics, which were ‘viewed suspiciously as unhealthily nationalistic by critics.’¹¹ The transnational nature of Modernism meant that nationalist ideals were very much frowned upon as the movement progressed, although (again paradoxically), it was celebrated Modernist philosophers such as Nietzsche (discussed in chapter one) whose thinking led to the development of Fascism, and ultra-nationalist politics, across Europe.¹² The writing being produced throughout the modern Scottish Renaissance was thus, at the time of its production, not always considered Modern in its underlying ethos. Its emphasis on cultural difference and national identity meant that it was seen as sitting in opposition to Modernist values, as opposed to in harmony with them.¹³

This dilemma of a conscious and sustained attempt to be one thing (Modernist) whilst being perceived as another (Nationalist) is emblematic of the predicament of the Scottish literary scene in the 1920s and 1930s specifically. In *Whaur Extremes Meet* (the title lifted

¹⁰ Roderick Watson, ‘Scotland and Modernisms’ in *Scottish & International Modernisms: Relationships and Reconfigurations*, edited by Emma Dymock and Margery Palmer McCulloch, (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2011), pp.8-9.

¹¹ Emma Dymock and Margery Palmer McCulloch, ‘Introduction’ in *Scottish & International Modernisms*, edited by Emma Dymock and Margery Palmer McCulloch, (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2011), p.2.

¹² This was a political mode which both MacDiarmid and W.B. Yeats were attracted to, writes Scott Lyall in ‘That Ancient Self’ (2014). Given the view of Fascism in today’s society, it is perhaps difficult to reconcile celebrated literary figures with such a detested ideology. This is not the occasion to be discussing the intricacies of Fascist politics and its origins, yet it is worth noting that, as explained by Kevin Passmore in ‘The Ideological Origins of Fascism before 1914’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Fascism* (Oxford Handbooks Online, September 2012) that the atrocities which it produced were not completely forecast, and it was seen in many respects as a cultural escape from the ‘intolerable constraints upon individual creativity.’ p.16.

¹³ E. Dymock and M.P. McCulloch, ‘Introduction’, p.3.

from MacDiarmid's poem 'A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle' (1926) and absolutely fitting in the context of this argument), Catriona MacDonald discusses the situation that Scotland found itself in following the First World War and throughout much of the twentieth century: 'Scotland occupied this contradictory "space" and took from it lessons which encouraged both assimilation and distinctiveness, diversity and homogeneity. What emerged was a vibrant cacophony of competing voices each speaking of Scotland if not for it, and none claiming unconditional support.'¹⁴ The situation that Scotland found itself in, being 'part of the British Empire and a small European nation in its own right, both central and marginal to the major cultural forces of the age,'¹⁵ meant that a lack of coherence was inevitable, nowhere more evident than in the literary ideas being produced. This is perhaps not unusual in itself: which country can claim a completely coherent literary canon and culture? What is specific about Scotland's situation is the ongoing uncertainty over nationhood and identity, given the dichotomies explained by MacDonald. Central to this was the disagreement between Muir and MacDiarmid as to how the problem of the lack of a homogenous language should be solved. Perhaps the most comprehensive analysis on the debates surrounding the Scottish Renaissance and Modernism is Scott Lyall's essay "'That Ancient Self': Scottish Modernism's Counter-Renaissance' (2014). Lyall argues that 'The Scottish Renaissance, particularly in MacDiarmid's hands, was deeply influenced by the Irish Revival. Both movements looked back into the cultural past in order to kick-start a new national future.'¹⁶ The Irish Revival was a key factor in the resurrection of Irish national identity and the Easter Rising which followed, and inspirational to MacDiarmid's hopes for Scotland, in both a political and cultural sense. The reason for MacDiarmid's wish to return to an earlier model of Scottish literature, also encompassing the older Scots language, was due to the crisis he believed he was witnessing in the terms of Scottish national identity – an echo of the crises which instigated the Modernist movement in the first place. Lyall contextualises this through citing Cairns Craig and Robert Crawford:

"'English Literature' had been constructed as a narrative to which Scotland was integral." But in the post-World War One period Scotland was disconnected from its past due to the traumatic speed of the nation's industrialisation and urbanisation, hence the longing for an idealised historical wholeness. As the empire collapsed, and English Literature sought realignment with Tradition,

¹⁴ Catriona M. MacDonald, *Whaur Extremes Meet*, (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2009), p.289.

¹⁵ Ibid, p.288.

¹⁶ Scott Lyall, "'That Ancient Self': Scottish Modernism's Counter-Renaissance' in European Journal of English Studies, 18:1, (London: Routledge, 2014), p.74.

Scottish Literature was thrown into crisis, no longer central to an English Literature in retreat from its imperialist self-image.¹⁷

Thus, the purpose of the creation of the Scottish Renaissance was concurrent with the Modernist ideology of escaping what it viewed as the cultural stagnation of society, yet it sought to do so by delving into Scottish history and repurposing older traditions (in the form of the fifteenth-century Makars and language) – an ironic move given MacDiarmid's own afore-mentioned ‘Not Traditions – Precedents’ refrain.

In proclaiming the literary movement which was taking place in Scotland at this time the ‘Renaissance’, MacDiarmid is being methodically political, and is calling into question Scottish identity and Scottish history. Lyall notes that, ‘depending on scholarly locus, – art history, literature, or history – the European Renaissance can be dated anywhere between the thirteenth and seventeenth centuries.’¹⁸ Lyall then raises a question from R.D.S. Jack, “‘Is Henryson or Dunbar a medieval or a renaissance poet?’” Both Muir and MacDiarmid regarded these poets as medieval.¹⁹ This may seem inconsequential as an observation, but it is in fact crucial to the entire ethos of the modern Scottish Renaissance, as it implies that although a medieval literature was evident, a renaissance had not previously occurred in Scotland. As continued academic work into this field is demonstrating, this is an inaccurate conviction and the fact that so many writers in Scotland concurred with this theory is, for Lyall, ‘truly astonishing’.²⁰ In constructing the Scottish literary narrative in this way, the Scottish Modernists are situating themselves as the harbingers of a new epoch in Scottish culture: ‘*Renaissance* in Scottish Renaissance means re-birth after the downfall of a decrepit civilisation and so the possibility of a new order, one based on the recurrence of a Scottish cultural golden age.’²¹ By dismissing the literature of Scotland from the seventeenth century onwards, by claiming that ‘Scotland did not have a first Renaissance but instead suffered the Reformation,’²² the narrative allows for the Scottish Modernists to place themselves in an unchallenged position of cultural commentators and codifiers – something which is touched on in chapter one in the discussion regarding Edwin Muir’s literary elitism. One of the flies in the ointment of this theoretical framework is that the figure who is central to this

¹⁷ Ibid, p.75.

¹⁸ Ibid, p.76.

¹⁹ Ibid, p.76.

²⁰ Ibid, p.81

²¹ Ibid, p.77.

²² Ibid, p.81.

dissertation, Robert Burns, was writing during this supposed literary-vacuous period spanning the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. (This “vacuous period” is a critical judgement that has been made by several commentators, but as is discussed more fully in chapter one, is a judgement which needs to be challenged.) Given that Burns’s work was appreciated and admired by the Modernist writers, it is fascinating to analyse the ways in which the narrative was spun to adapt to this seemingly irreconcilable anomaly to suit the argument of the four Modernists here studied.

Lyall’s essay is an invaluable source on the complexities of Scottish Renaissance/Modernist debate and allows for more discussion on the topic than can be afforded here. Throughout this dissertation, the Scottish writers of this period will be referred to as Scottish Modernists, with the assumption that the foregoing information will highlight that specific nuances need to be considered within this terming. These writers embraced many of the features of Modernist literature, predominantly the challenging of cultural and societal conventions, but remained on the peripheries of the popular Modernist movement, as recognised outwith Scotland’s borders. As we now turn attention to Burns, it may be useful to draw out some of the key ideas of both Modernism and the Scottish Renaissance, taken from *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*:

General term applied retrospectively to the wide range of experimental and avant-garde trends in the literature (and other arts) of the early 20th century.

Modernist literature is characterized chiefly by a rejection of 19th century traditions and their consensus between author and reader.

Modernist writers tended to see themselves as an avant-garde disengaged from bourgeois values, and disturbed their readers by adopting complex and difficult new forms and styles.²³

If this is adapted to define the Scottish Modernists and their writing on Burns, it may be read as:

General term applied retrospectively to the wide range of experimental and avant-garde writings on Robert Burns (and other aspects of Scottish literature) in the early 20th century.

²³ ‘Modernism’, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.213.

Modernist Burns critics are characterized chiefly by a rejection of 19th century traditions and their consensus between author and reader.

Those writers who focussed on Burns in their work, tended to see themselves as an *avant-garde* disengaged from bourgeois values, and disturbed their readers by adopting complex and difficult (to digest) forms and styles.

As mentioned at the beginning of this introduction, Barke, Carswell, MacDiarmid and Muir all saw reflections of themselves in Burns to varying degrees. Using this adapted definition as a very basic template, each individual chapter of this dissertation will focus on one writer, identifying links to the others when relevant. Many Scottish academics specialising in the Modernist period have paid attention to the reception of Burns during this time. Alan Riach has written on MacDiarmid and Burns, Margery Palmer McCulloch is an authority on Carswell and Burns. Richard Price's essay, 'Robert Burns and the Scottish Renaissance', offers a snapshot of several Scottish writers of the inter-war period. Of Burns, he writes: 'he was perhaps more important to them [writers of the modern Scottish Renaissance] than any other figure of the literary past.'²⁴ Each of the writers covered in this dissertation is mentioned in Price's essay, and their work given a brief analysis; this dissertation seeks to put flesh on these bones, as it were, offering a deeper analysis and providing a fuller understanding of the employment of Modernist writing methods and ideologies onto the legacy of Burns.

The relationship between Edwin Muir and Burns is based on a 'cannily slippery'²⁵ myth, according to Price: 'Burns, in Muir's eyes, is popular because he is understood shallowly; even the "decent classes" [...] have been able to knick-knackify him.'²⁶ That the Burns tourist trade is supplemented by the sale of low value items sold as souvenirs adorned with Burns's words or images, signifies aspects of both capitalism and the whitewashing of Burns's image. This contributes to Muir's perceived disgust of the whole Burns legacy, although chapter one addresses the validity of such a perception, as well as the tensions and dilemmas which Muir faced when confronting this national phenomenon. Analysing 'Scotland, 1941' is a key aspect of this chapter, allowing for an understanding of the infamous 'sham bards of a sham nation' line, which is integral to many people's understanding of the relationship between Muir and Burns, without being properly comprehended. This chapter also explores the commentary on Burns by Muir in his *Scottish*

²⁴ R. Price, 'Robert Burns and the Scottish Renaissance', p.130.

²⁵ Ibid, p.130.

²⁶ Ibid, p.130.

Journey from 1935, another text which has only been relatively briefly examined in terms of Burns scholarship.

Of MacDiarmid, Price writes: ‘it is surely more constructive to thank MacDiarmid for reminding people to read Dunbar, rather than blame him for suggesting to a culture perhaps not grown out of its monobook obsessions that there was more behind and beyond Burns.’²⁷ It is certainly commendable that MacDiarmid promoted the older Scots Makars and perhaps highlighted their work to some members of a public who may not have been otherwise aware of such literary history. But this was not MacDiarmid’s immediate intention and there is a much deeper significance to his attacks on Burns and the Burns Cult. Given MacDiarmid’s overriding importance to the modern Scottish Renaissance, it is unsurprising that he is integral to each discrete chapter; this section of the dissertation, however, allows for more focus to be placed on his motivation in decrying the Burns Cult rather than a generalised statement or assumption on his ideology. This chapter also discusses in depth the R.D.S. Jack essay from 2000, ‘Where Stands Scottish Literature Now?’, which raises questions over the validity of both Muir and MacDiarmid’s concerns regarding the decline of Scottish literature and language, during and after the Reformation.

Chapter three of this dissertation focuses attention on Catherine Carswell and her 1930 biography, *The Life of Robert Burns*. The outcry following the publication and serialisation of this book was extraordinary, and has been discussed by many Scottish critics. Price attempts to raise, and answer, the question as to why this was the case: ‘What didn’t her readers like? The answer must surely be: Carswell’s treatment of Burns’s relations with women.’²⁸ This is not incorrect, but it is far from being fully explanatory. There are a multitude of reasons as to why Carswell’s work incurred the critical and popular reception that it did, many of which are bound up with the Modernist literary principles of the time. This chapter discusses the evolution of the biography as a literary form, as well as discussing Carswell’s style and intentions, which are essential to understanding her aims, political and otherwise. Carswell’s *Life of Robert Burns* is arguably the most significant Burns biography of the twentieth century, in terms of the impact it has had in igniting a re-evaluation of his legacy. Her gender and her commentary on Burns’s sexual activities and her, at times, erotic

²⁷ Ibid, p.128.

²⁸ Ibid, p.131.

writing style, are emblematic of a shift in the role and confidence of female writers in this era.

The concluding chapter then directs attention onto James Barke, who is most famous for his novelisation of Burns's life, in his *Immortal Memory* series. This was not his sole work on Burns however, as he edited a collection of Burns's poems and songs in 1955, and co-edited the *The Merry Muses of Caledonia* (published posthumously in 1959), providing an introductory essay, 'Pornography and Bawdry in Literature and Society'. Of the four writers analysed in this dissertation, Barke is perhaps the least well-known, but his work is crucial to our understanding of the changing appreciation of Burns and of the changing nature of Scottish society. Barke's literary output parallels many of the cultural shifts occurring throughout not just Scotland, but Europe. His status as a Communist writer, which is dissected and discussed in more depth throughout the chapter, is of huge significance in terms of what this means for the Burns who is being portrayed in his novels and his critical work; Barke is transposing Burns from the Conservative icon of the nineteenth century into a Socialist figurehead in the middle of the twentieth century. For too long, Barke's place in Burns scholarship has gone unrecognised and this chapter seeks to rectify this.

If Price's chapter 'Robert Burns and the Scottish Renaissance' can be classified as a snapshot, this dissertation aims to be a more comprehensive collage of Burns reception studies in the period 1920-1972 (this being the publication date of the final primary text analysed, MacDiarmid's auto-biography *Lucky Poet*). Despite the vast amount of research and academic writing on Burns already extant, more work has to be done to fully appreciate, not only the impact of the Burns icon on the shaping of Scottish identity, but the ways in which this impact has been carefully addressed, managed and re-evaluated throughout the past two and a half centuries. As work continues on Burns scholarship, and more details become unearthed and analysed, a fuller picture of the poet, his legacy and his cultural impact will emerge. The four chapters which follow propose to be a small but significant part of this.

Chapter 1

‘There are no facts, only interpretations.’¹

Edwin Muir & Robert Burns

‘Burns and Scott, sham bards of a sham nation,’²: for a discussion on Edwin Muir and Robert Burns, this infamous line from ‘Scotland, 1941’ (1945) could not be a more appropriate point to begin. Yet the message that is being relayed here, and in the poem as a whole, is often misunderstood, particularly by mainstream commentators. Emblematic of such misunderstanding is the piece written for *Standpoint* in November 2011 by Allan Massie, entitled ‘Overrated: Robert Burns’.³ In this article, Massie uses examples of Hugh MacDiarmid’s sloganeering and references Muir’s own ‘sham bard’ line to justify his observation of Burns being overrated. Although Massie does concede that this is more aptly a comment on the Burns Cult than Burns himself, the headline coupled with the out-dated and blinkered opinion that, ‘admiration of Burns, celebration of Burns, excuses us from any serious engagement with other Scottish poets,’⁴ demonstrates one of the issues facing anyone approaching the relationship between Burns and the Scottish Modernists. The notion of a ‘Burns Cult’ is in itself somewhat bemusing, yet the idea of Burns followers being comparable to religious fanatics has existed since the early nineteenth century, when the Reverend William Peebles coined the derogatory term ‘Burnomania’ in reference to those who enjoyed and celebrated Burns’s work.⁵ Peebles himself had been subject to Burns’s kirk satire⁶, which perhaps explains his sneering comment, yet this example allows us to immediately identify a division in the levels of admiration of Burns: those who adored him, those who enjoyed him and those who somewhat disliked him.

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, quoted in Erich Heller, *The Importance of Nietzsche*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p.66.

² Edwin Muir, ‘Scotland 1941’ in *The Complete Poems of Edwin Muir*, edited by Peter Butter, (Aberdeen: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1991), p.110, ll.30.

³ Allan Massie, ‘Overrated: Robert Burns’ in *Standpoint Magazine*, (November 2011), <http://standpointmag.co.uk/overrated-november-11-robert-burns-allan-massie-mawkish-cult-of-rabbie> [accessed 25/09/2017]).

⁴ A. Massie, ‘Overrated’.

⁵ Christopher Whatley, *Immortal Memory: Burns and the Scottish People*, (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2016), p.22.

⁶ Ibid, p.22.

These varying levels of respect have generally remained until the present day, and this article from Massie is no mere straw man: *The National*, ‘the newspaper which fully supports Scottish independence’ (according to its tagline), ran a series of articles throughout 2016 which sought to bring to light Scottish poets who had been, it argued, overlooked in the past, because of the obsessive focus on Burns. Written by Professor of Scottish Literature at the University of Glasgow, Alan Riach, each article is headlined: ‘Not Burns, ...’, followed by another Scottish poet’s name. By using and adapting this slogan from MacDiarmid (originally, ‘Not Burns, Dunbar!’), we are alerted to the fact that rhetoric from the modern Scottish Renaissance is still being very much adhered to by at least one contemporary critic within the discipline. In the primary article, Riach introduces the underlying objective of the series, when stating: ““NOT Burns – Dunbar!” was one of two slogans Hugh MacDiarmid created in the 1920s, advising all Scots that they would be better off spending time reading the poems of William Dunbar rather than indulging in the annual monster-fest of self-indulgence commonly known as Burns Night. He was right then and is even more so now.⁷ As with Massie’s article, Riach is directing his discontent at Burns nights specifically, but, in the twenty-first century, these celebrations are a metonymy for Burns himself, thus the attack on the Burns celebrations cannot go without a slight on the poet also. The issue is more complex with the Modernist and contemporary Burns critics, all of whom genuinely held/hold much of Burns’s poetry in high regard; it was other aspects of his life and afterlife which they tended to criticise. It should also be apparent that for any study of any writer to be concise and informed, it must be, by definition, at the exclusion of other writers.

Recognising Burns’s place within the full range and depth of Scottish literature is the most logical and beneficial approach of any critic or scholar, yet some still single Burns out as an overshadowing presence (and therefore as a blockade to the other writers within the canon of Scottish literature); this latter attitude is a hangover from that of the rhetoric propagated by a number of Scottish Modernists. It is by decentralising the literary canon in general and using Burns as a focal point (which is, ironically, what the critics of Burns tend do as opposed to Burns scholars themselves), that this resentment of his popularity begins to occur. This argument is exemplified through the attitudes emanating from the work of MacDiarmid, Muir, Riach and others. It is through de-contextualisation that we can understand how Muir’s work can be, to an extent, misunderstood. Focussing only on the

⁷ Alan Riach, ‘Not Burns – Dunbar!’ in *The National* (22 January 2016),
http://www.thenational.scot/culture/14860580.Not_Burns_____Dunbar_/ [accessed 25/09/2017]).

line ‘sham bards of a sham nation,’ leads to a miscomprehension of Muir’s view on Burns, particularly on his strengths as a poet and song writer. Muir’s ‘Scotland, 1941’ is a lament for a lost history and acts as a cautionary tale, as alluded to in the line, ‘all may read the folio of our fable’ (ll.3). What Muir is cautioning against is the bigoted religious zealotry which gripped Scotland throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which he feels interrupted the country’s natural artistic expression and progression, and stunted the development of Scotland as a nation. Whilst there certainly was a change in the political and cultural atmosphere of the period, it was perhaps no more significant than what was occurring in England or in other parts of Europe. Muir’s (at times) hyperbolic commentary needs to be treated with caution, although Douglas Gifford expands on this point when stating that:

All [the writers of the modernist period] to a greater or lesser degree articulated views of Scottish history and culture similar to Muir’s in *Scott and Scotland* and ‘Scotland, 1941’. All, despite arguments regarding the place of Scots as a literary language, generally agreed that their Renaissance of Scottish literature and culture after the Great War had to be based on a repudiation of nineteenth-century cultural values and what they saw as that century’s excessive religiosity, stemming from their view that the Reformation of 1560 and the Industrial Revolution in Scotland had brought about a disastrous Deformation of Scottish creativity and art.⁸

Gifford’s sentiments here are hard to disagree with, and it is made clear in ‘Scotland, 1941’ that Muir feels Scotland’s literary, cultural and political malaise stems from the events of 1560: he portrays John Knox and Andrew Melville as Old Testament God-like characters, who ‘clapped their preaching palms/And bundled all the harvesters away,’ (ll.8-9). The clapping of the hands parrots the clapping of thunder which is disrupting the ‘simple sky,’ (ll.5) that Muir has previously referenced, and also removes the harvesters from the scene, symbolic of the artists, poets and writers that Scotland had been producing up until this point (figures such as Robert Henryson and William Dunbar). The reference to Alexander Peden, and the terrifying mask which he wore when preaching⁹, compounds Muir’s view on the unnaturalness of the events that were occurring in Scotland at this time. Although this information may, on the surface, bear little relevance to Muir’s references to Burns and Scott (and by proxy, the romantic notion of Scottish culture), it is in fact crucial for understanding the road that Scottish literature was beginning to take, the road that both of these men would

⁸ Douglas Gifford, ‘Sham Bards of a Sham Nation? Edwin Muir and the Failures of Scottish Literature’ in *Studies in Scottish Literature*, Vol. 35, Issue 1, (2007), p.340.

⁹ Held in the National Museum of Scotland.

eventually stand on as signposts in Scottish literary history. The biggest concern with Muir's argument here is that he is dismissing almost all Scottish literature from the seventeenth century onwards as being creatively tarnished by the Reformation, and therefore unworthy of appreciation. Gifford's insight on this particular point is that Muir is 'prejudiced against Scottish culture. Lacking formal education in Scottish literature, and disliking the Scotland which he left, he either did not know the range of Scottish literature in the century before him, or was prejudiced against it.'¹⁰ Muir's 'prejudice' is in stark contrast to his opinion on the literatures being produced by other European nations, which is discussed in further detail below.

The second stanza of Muir's poem is littered with negative images which Muir associates with the Scottish psyche: 'obdurate pride' (ll.13), 'robbed' (ll.14), 'damnation' (ll.16), 'vexed' (ll.22). Amidst these lines, central to the stanza, Muir poses the question, 'How could we read our souls and learn to be?' (ll.21). How, indeed, with such regimented religious fanaticism being imposed on the Scottish people, was it truly possible for self-reflection or creativity to occur? How could Scotland's soul, the essence of Scottishness, be identified within such restrictions? These questions, along with the previous points made and commented on by Gifford, demonstrate Muir's opinion on Scotland's literature through the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries very succinctly: he sees an emptiness and lack of connection between real life, and the arts. This is a fallacy. New research is currently underway regarding Scottish writing of the seventeenth century,¹¹ and it is becoming more apparent that the literary output of this century, although less well researched or studied in comparison to that of the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, was still in a healthy and vibrant condition. Scottish literature and creative output did not suddenly cease, as Muir argues. It would be possible to claim that the 1707 Union, and the years surrounding this, did instigate a revival of Scottish literary and national consciousness, as evidenced by James Watson's series of Scots poetry collections (1706-1711) and by Allan Ramsay's *Evergreen* (1724), then by the emergence of Robert Fergusson and Robert Burns. Yet this would be a nationalist subscription, which completely ignores any work being produced in the English language as being worthy of inclusion in a Scottish canon. It is a thorny and lively issue, covered exceptionally well in R.D.S. Jack's introduction to *The Mercat Anthology of Scottish Literature* (2000). Jack discusses in detail the literary work going on

¹⁰ Ibid, p.351

¹¹ Such as *Joyous Sweet Imagination* (Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2007), the collection of essays on early Scottish literature edited by Sarah Dunnigan and Sarah Carpenter.

up until 1707, which means that work of creative quality was being produced throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, yet not in a strictly Scots language form. The inaccuracy of Muir's argument suggests a selective reading and interpretation of the facts to suit his own political agenda, something discussed more fully in chapter two. Muir could be forgiven in that the works of the seventeenth century were perhaps not as readily available as they are today, but this is more likely a reflection on Gifford's point, that Muir's lack of a formal education in Scottish literature left him commenting on that which he did not fully understand.

It is against this background that Muir moves onto his observation on the position that Sir Walter Scott and Robert Burns now occupy in Scottish society, that of the national 'bard'. A full appreciation of exactly what this antonomasia signifies is again crucial to comprehend the point that Muir is trying to make. In Katie Trumpener's *Bardic Nationalism* (1999), she introduces the concept of 'a bardic nationalism' as a, 'resistance not only to the military conquest [...] but also to the arrogant assumption of the English that other cultures are there to be absorbed into their own.'¹² Although Wales is used as the opening example, Trumpener's argument extends to the other Celtic nations in north-west Europe:

In eighteenth-century Ireland, Scotland and Wales nationalist antiquaries edited, explicated and promoted their respective bardic traditions; emphasizing the cultural rootedness of bardic poetry and its status as historical testimony, their work represents a ground-breaking attempt to describe literature as the product of specific cultural institutions and to understand literary form as a product of a particular national history.¹³

Trumpener would undoubtedly view Burns's own work as a song collector within this context. What adds to the complexity of Burns specifically is the bestowing of the title of 'Caledonia's Bard' on him by his Masonic brothers whilst he was still alive¹⁴ and the subsequent manipulation of his legacy by nineteenth-century critics and supporters in continuing to apply this moniker. Through understanding Trumpener's argument, we realise the figure of the bard is more than just a classical representation of a teller of tales or a singer of songs; he (invariably it is a 'he'), is the spokesperson for a nation, and often the

¹² Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: the romantic novel and the British Empire*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), p.4.

¹³ K. Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*, p.4.

¹⁴ Corey Andrews, *Literary nationalism in eighteenth-century Scottish club poetry*, (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004), p.274.

spokesperson for a nation which is under threat in one way or another.¹⁵ The bardic figure, and what he represents, is sought at a time of perceived crisis, and this becomes identifiable in each writer examined in this study. The use of the word ‘sham’ to describe Burns and Scott is not, then, a direct insult levelled at these writers (as Massie amongst others understands it) but a criticism of the way their legacy has been moulded and developed into a falsehood.

Muir closely follows this with criticism of the path that the Scottish social hierarchy has conducted itself, and the path they have chosen to take Scotland down: ‘Now smoke and dearth and money everywhere [...] No pride but pride of pelf,’ (ll.27/32). The repetition of the ‘and’ conjunction to equate ‘smoke’, ‘dearth’ and ‘money’ demonstrates Muir’s feelings on capitalism conclusively: he feels that there is an unclean emptiness associated with the quest for financial success, that it is nothing truly tangible or rewarding – the ‘knick-knackifying’¹⁶ as posited by Richard Price in the introduction. Andrew Noble echoes this observation and attempts to explain more fully Muir’s views on Scottish Romanticism generally:

For Muir, then, Scottish Romanticism was, quite unlike its English and German counterparts, which he saw as essential modes of social comprehension, and which had a seminal influence on his thought and poetry, exclusively sentimental. At the core of this sentimentality lay an impotence which sought release in fantasy or, in life and letters, a decking itself out in the borrowed costumes, especially the wholly historically unsanctioned tartan ones, of a lost Scotland. For Muir this was to have one’s cake and eat it. The materially rewarding practices of modern economic individualism were allegedly happily compatible with the communal sentiments of traditional society. For Muir, this was the final self-indulgence of a greed not brave enough to declare itself.¹⁷

Whilst this is a largely convincing argument from Noble, there are aspects of it which must be treated with care. At the time of writing, in 1982, criticism regarding the Romantic movement in Scotland was very sparse. In truth, it has not been until much more recently, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, that substantial work has been done within this

¹⁵ K. Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*, p.7.

¹⁶ Richard Price, ‘Robert Burns and the Scottish Renaissance’ in *Love and Liberty*, (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1997), p.130.

¹⁷ Andrew Noble, *Edwin Muir: Uncollected Scottish Criticism*, edited by Andrew Noble, (London: Barnes and Noble, 1982), p.20.

subject area.¹⁸ Therefore, the Romanticism to which Noble refers is more accurately an uncapitalised ‘romanticism’, a sentimental notion attached to Scottish writers like Burns and Scott without a contemporary understanding of what this fully entails. When Muir states in his 1923 essay, ‘Robert Burns’, that, ‘more than any other poet of the last two centuries he has helped to humanize his own countrymen and the English speaking peoples generally, and to instil in them not only a more sensitive manner of feeling, but also a more philosophic habit of thought,’¹⁹ we can see that he appreciates there is much more to Burns’s work than pure sentimentality; in fact, if Burns was to be categorised as a Romantic poet in the same way as his German or English contemporaries, then his influence should also be appreciated in a similar fashion. Although predominantly agreeing with this argument, Gerard Carruthers takes a slightly different view on Muir’s aims with the ‘sham bards’ line. He writes that Muir’s inference is that Burns and Scott, ‘fabricated romantic, escapist versions of Scotland in their writings and all too easily lent themselves to propping up harmful myths of a cogent, virtuous nation.’²⁰ This demonstrates one of the many nuanced readings which can be taken from Muir’s work, and crystallises the difficulty in assuming a conclusive reading of his work and intentions. It is also worth reiterating the fact that, given there is a period of two decades between Muir’s ‘Robert Burns’ essay and ‘Scotland, 1941’ (with *Scott and Scotland*, published in 1936 and examined in the following chapter), his beliefs and critical modes would be fluid and undoubtedly subject to alteration.

It is this kind of romanticism, however, to which Muir is referring when he states that Burns and Scott being positioned as the bards of a nation is untenable, as the nation itself is untenable, given that it is built on a basis of deceit. Scottish romanticism (emphasis on the lower case spelling) is, in his eyes, a complete fabrication which is used by the capitalists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in order to ‘salve [their] souls,’ (ll.24) and in an attempt to create a fantasy in which they are not a part of the British Empire, and the evils associated with that, but are still part of, ‘a tribe, a family, a people’ (ll.1). This is a theme evident in the writing of Carswell and Barke, both of whom were fully conscious of the class and social divisions in Scotland. Although it may be desirable for members of Scottish society, particularly those in the middle/upper classes, to consider themselves part of the

¹⁸ *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Romanticism*, edited by Murray Pittock, was published in 2011. This volume was built on a progressively solid foundation of work and research into Scottish Romanticism in the preceding decade.

¹⁹ Edwin Muir, ‘Robert Burns’ in *Edwin Muir, Uncollected Scottish Criticism*, p.187.

²⁰ Gerard Carruthers, *Robert Burns*, (Tavistock: Northcote House Publishers, 2006), p.5.

Empire and part of this notional ‘tribe’, it is the pursuit of happiness through capitalism and competition which makes these ideals incompatible. Again, Carruthers reiterates this point when he states, ‘the reality was that mainstream Scotland from the time of Burns and Scott was [...] both nebulously British and enthusiastically imperialist overseas in hand with her southern partner.’²¹ Muir touches on this contradiction in much of his writing, particularly when he compares his life in Orkney to his experience of Glasgow²². The industrialisation of Scotland means that this romantic ideal of the past is now only ‘a painted field’ (ll.2), a piece of art, an unreality, which can no longer be experienced, except through memory. This painted field, symbolising the idealism of a peaceful and perfect environment, was unattainable for Muir. The impact of the First World War on the British economy, and the surge in poverty and unemployment this led to in Scotland especially, was crucial to the tone of *Scottish Journey*. The horror of the Second World War was perhaps even more devastating for Muir, given his close connections with people throughout Europe, and in Czechoslovakia specifically, where he and Willa had lived. It is within this context that ‘Scotland, 1941’ was written and the unhappiness which pervades the poem is demonstrably clear.

In *Scottish Journey*, first published in 1935, Muir tells us in his introduction that, ‘I shall have something to say about these various divisions in Scottish life in the course of this book, and perhaps when I have done that some picture of Scotland will emerge.’²³ His conclusion, however, is that, ‘I did not find anything I could call Scotland,’²⁴ (a conclusion which echoes ‘Scotland, 1941’). T.C. Smout concurs with this in his introduction to *Scottish Journey*, as he says of Glasgow: ‘there is nothing specifically Scottish about the character of the city: it is the misbegotten child of an industrial capitalism.’²⁵ That Muir’s quest was ultimately futile is unsurprising; outside of characters in novels or plays, it is difficult to ascribe a single identity to an individual, far less a nation. In truth, it is the oxymoronic nature of individuals which makes them individual. Take the man at the centre of this dissertation, for example: Robert Burns, a poet celebrated for his ideals of peace and liberty, who was but days away from sailing for the West Indies to work on a slave plantation.²⁶

²¹ Ibid, p.5.

²² See Edwin Muir, *An Autobiography* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1954).

²³ Edwin Muir, *Scottish Journey*, (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1979), p.3.

²⁴ Ibid, p.243.

²⁵ T.C. Smout, ‘Introduction’, *Scottish Journey*, p.xxvii.

²⁶ Andrew Lindsay’s *Illustrious Exile* (2006) is an historical novel which reimagines Burns’s life if he had departed for the West Indies.

Critics have questioned how these contrasting aspects of one man can be reconciled into a single identity. Inconsistency is, it seems, a hallmark of much of Scottish literature; chapter two of this dissertation considers the contradictions apparent in Hugh MacDiarmid, who, before leading a crusade for Scottish nationalism through the implementation of archaic Scots language, was a staunch campaigner against the revival of the self-same Scots language by the Vernacular Circle and Burns Federation.²⁷ Muir himself, is described by his biographer P.H. Butter as a holder of contrasting ideals, where, ‘his Nietzscheanism and his socialism were, of course, incompatible; but he would not allow himself to recognise this.’²⁸ That is, that the individualism and nihilism which was found within the philosophy of Nietzsche, did not sit easily with the socialist vision Muir had for the future Scotland. Each of these examples allow us to realise these conflicts appear in most everyone; the writers considered here being no exception. It is not, therefore, necessarily a negative criticism – merely an observed reality.

It is worth pausing to consider the relationship between Muir and the philosophy of Nietzsche, which, on immediate reflection, may seem to be a completely discordant one, not only in the case of socialism vs nihilism, but in their opposing religious convictions also. George Allan Morgan’s authoritative work on the life and writings of Nietzsche, *What Nietzsche Means* (1943), explains that, ‘beyond question, the major premise of Nietzsche’s philosophy is atheism [...] since atheism seems obviously true to him, he seldom offers arguments for it.’²⁹ Muir’s religiosity (discussed at the conclusion of this chapter), adds another difficulty in reconciling his relationship with Nietzsche. What is perhaps even more fascinating given the context of this thesis, is the way in which Nietzsche is described by Morgan in the opening of his book:

Like St Paul, whom he so hated and admired, Nietzsche has been “all things to all men”. Probably, no thinker has excited a wider ambit of conflicting interests, sordid and spiritual, shallow and profound [...] can anything be good which attracts so many flies? Certainly his motley following has aroused prejudice against him in cleanly and discriminating minds.³⁰

²⁷ Hanne Tange, ‘Writing the Nation: Four Inter-war visions of Scotland’, (University of Glasgow: PhD Thesis, December 2000), p.26.

²⁸ Peter H. Butter, *Edwin Muir*, (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), pp.9-10.

²⁹ George Allan Morgan, *What Nietzsche Means*, (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1943), pp.36-37.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p.3.

Compare this with Muir's own commentary on Robert Burns:

He is a myth evolved by the popular imagination, a communal poetic creation. He is a Protean figure; we can all shape him to our own likeness for a myth is endlessly adaptable [...] No other writer has said so fully and expressly what every man of his race wanted him to say: no other writer, consequently, has been taken so completely into the life of a people. The myth may in some ways be absurd, but it is as solid as the agreement which rises in Scotsmen's minds whenever Burns utters one of his great platitudes [...] It is also a grateful recognition that here is a poet for everybody, a poet who has such an insight into ordinary thoughts and feelings that he can catch them and give them poetic shape, as those who merely think or feel them cannot. This was Burns' supreme art.³¹

The similarities between the way Nietzsche and Burns are described by Morgan and Muir respectively are startling, and leads one to question whether Muir was consciously identifying Burns in a similar manner to that of his philosophical mentor. If it is a conscious decision, which given the dates of each publication could be possible, we can then recognise the esteem in which Muir must hold Burns, which in turn supports the previous discussion concerning the 'sham' moniker applied to Burns, and its subsequent misinterpretation.³² Morgan's rather crude description of sections of Nietzsche's followers as 'flies' then translates into the vocabulary used by Muir when describing his experience of the Burns Cottage in Alloway, which is discussed below.

In identifying this apparent paradox in Muir's schemata, another term which does not sit comfortably beside socialism (which is the term Muir would ascribe to his own philosophy), is elitism. The idea that a ruling class (not necessarily in terms of social standing or financial worth, but a highly cultured or a highly educated class) should preside over society did not manifest itself in this definitive term until 1950,³³ yet there are undoubtedly elements of this in Muir's philosophies. James Barke refers to the 'Scottish

³¹ Edwin Muir, 'The Burns Myth' in *Robert Burns: New Judgements* edited by William Montgomerie, (Glasgow: William MacLellan, 1947), p.5-7.

³² In truth, it could be possible that Muir adopted Burns as a replacement of sorts for Nietzsche, particularly after the rise of the fascist ideologies which sprang from his philosophies.

³³ OED.com cites the first usage of 'elitist' as: '1950 D. Riesman in *Psychiatry* 13 303/1 "He [sc. Freud] shared with...Nietzsche and Carlyle elements of an elitist position.'" That the term is used in discussion of Nietzsche is perhaps, given the content of this dissertation, to be expected.

intelligentsia’³⁴ in his work, a clear reference to figures like MacDiarmid and Muir, and it is through assuming the role of cultural codifiers that they demonstrate their elitism: this is analysed later in this dissertation. What intrigues most is that these contradictory ideals of socialism and elitism are present in two pieces of Muir’s work published within a year of each other; both pieces are directly related to Burns, yet each contradicts the other. In ‘Burns and Holy Willie’, an article published in *Left Review* in November 1936, Muir describes the ceremony of the unveiling of the Burns Memorial in Dumfries by ex-Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald³⁵. Muir offers a sardonic take on proceedings, particularly on his commentary on the invited audience, members of the higher echelons of society: ‘Objectively one can see that, Scotland being what it is, a ceremony in honour of its greatest poet should take just this form and no other.’³⁶ The ‘form’ in this case being a raised platform with dignitaries squashed in together, and the general public viewing from below. The ‘Scotland being what it is,’ observation is again an example of Muir’s disdain for the nation, although it is a somewhat ambiguous comment which could be interpreted in several ways. My own reading of this would be to suggest that Muir’s opinion of Scotland is that it flatters to deceive; it is a nation insistent on pomp and circumstance, on aesthetics rather than substance. (This is a motif which is repeated in chapter three, during the episode concerning Robert the Bruce’s castle and also repeats the sentiment discussed previously by Carruthers.) Muir is equally as scathing of MacDonald’s speech and its reception. The aim of the speech, to celebrate the poet, in fact contains nothing of any tangible worth as far as Muir is concerned and the description ‘is perhaps the vaguest Burns we have yet had to swallow; but he was swallowed amid applause.’³⁷ As alluded to in the introduction, this figure of Burns being represented by those in power in the United Kingdom in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, is a sanitised dilution, and it is this sanitisation which concerns the Scottish Modernists: the whitewashing is accepted without question, applauded even. A clear example of this is the Burns of John Gibson Lockhart’s 1828 *Life of Robert Burns*, which had the consequence of

³⁴ James Barke, ‘The Scottish National Question’ in *Left Review*, November 1936, taken from *Modernism and Nationalism*, edited by M.P McCulloch, (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2004), p.367.

³⁵ Christopher Whatley’s *Immortal Memory: Burns and the Scottish People* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2016) details similar unveilings and ceremonies throughout Scotland in the latter part of the 19th century. The Burns statue unveiled in Paisley in 1896 is particularly interesting, given it was witnessed by ‘no more than a thousand’, and the keynote speaker was the Earl of Roseberry (p.96).

³⁶ Edwin Muir, ‘Burns and Holy Willie’ in *Uncollected Criticism*, pp.189-190

³⁷ Ibid. p.191.

making Burns ‘safe for many an imperialists’ dinner or parlour ornament.’³⁸ One of the main outcomes of Burns’s critical reception by the Modernists, and Carswell and Barke most obviously, was his presentation as a ‘real’ man, a character with flaws. As Muir himself explains, ‘Burns the sentimentalist is now so necessary to it that he has become a vested interest, jealously preserved like all vested interests. This explains the extraordinary fury which greeted Mrs. Catherine Carswell’s excellent life of the poet a few years ago. She entrenched on a vested interest by showing Burns as a human being.’³⁹ The version which was propagated by Burns Clubs and politicians, amongst other organisations, was that of a flawless, God-like figure (i.e. the ‘Heaven-taught Ploughman’, suggested in Henry Mackenzie’s early review of Burns’s work). Muir’s chief concern here is with the appropriation of Burns by the upper classes and the shifting sense of propriety. This may seem like evidence against the claim of Muir being elitist, but the elite class are not necessarily the upper class. As we shall see in the following chapter with MacDiarmid, it was the superior intellect which, for both these poets, held most importance. Muir himself was of ‘indefinable class position’ and ‘lived in the interstices of Glasgow society’.⁴⁰ It is this liminal status which allowed Muir the belief that he could appreciate truly what was best for the people, and by extension, the Burns legacy.

Muir poses the question of ownership when he states that, ‘one is driven to ask what can have happened to Burns since his death to make him now the implicit property of the middle and upper classes, when he was the property of the poor man at the beginning.’⁴¹ This statement itself is worth analysing carefully before comparing it to another point of view Muir holds. Firstly, the observation that Burns was ‘the property of the poor man’ is not entirely accurate; were it not for the financial support Burns received from various beneficiaries outwith the working class, it is reasonable to assume that his ‘Kilmarnock’ edition (and his subsequent works) would not have seen the light of day. In this sense, it is arguable that, despite Burns’s own position and origins, he has always been the “property” of the higher classes in Scotland, reliant as he was upon their support. For the ‘Kilmarnock’ edition to even exist, Burns relied on the patronage of lawyers and landowners Robert Aiken

³⁸ Robert Crawford, *The Bard*, p.7.

³⁹ E. Muir, *Scottish Journey*, pp.91-92.

⁴⁰ T.C. Smout, ‘Introduction’, p.xv.

⁴¹ E. Muir, ‘Burns and Holy Willie’, p.190.

and Gavin Hamilton⁴², members of the growing Scottish middle classes. The notion that Burns has somehow been “stolen” from the working class of Scotland is therefore a fanciful notion used by Muir to support his argument here. The underlying sentiment, that Burns has been appropriated by the upper-classes is to an extent more accurate, albeit this appropriation took place at a much earlier time than he is insinuating (during Burns’s lifetime and not only after his death). Secondly, the whole idea of Burns belonging to the middle/upper-class does not seem to ring true in any sense. Outside of copyright, it is difficult to understand how Burns (and by Burns we mean his poetry, songs and cultural legacy) can ‘belong’ to any one individual or group. More accurately, it needs to be understood that different versions of Burns belong to different groups (as discussed in the Nietzsche comparison). It should not be ignored that this article was written for *Left Review*, a magazine funded by the British wing of Comintern, or the Communist International organisation. The appearance of some bourgeoisie vs proletariat rhetoric is therefore unsurprising. Although Muir clearly had sympathies with the Communist cause, he was in no way as militant or vocal about this as MacDiarmid or Barke, and seemed more aware of its flaws, preferring a less hard-line socialist approach. This is also evident in his views on Scottish nationalism, which he rejected as a political philosophy, ‘on the grounds that without a Socialist economic order it was frivolous, while the achievement of Socialism would make it superfluous.’⁴³

Given this point of view, it is perhaps puzzling that Muir should be at all labelled as elitist. The evidence above suggests that he is anti-elitist in both his politics and Burns criticism, as he feels that the propriety of Burns should lie with the working/lower classes, with the masses as opposed to the few of standing. However, Muir’s hyperbolic and sarcastic indignation at the way Burns is being remembered rings slightly hollow when compared to the thoughts he expresses in *Scottish Journey*. To contextualise, Muir visits the cottage of Burns’s birthplace after his travels through Edinburgh and the Borders, and before he reaches Glasgow and travels onto the Highlands. Despite Muir’s first-hand knowledge of Ayrshire⁴⁴, his encounter with Burns’s cottage is described as taking place almost by chance: ‘It was

⁴² See ‘Burns and Publishing’ by Gerard Carruthers in *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Burns*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

⁴³ Paul Robichaud, ‘MacDiarmid and Muir: Scottish Modernism and the Nation as Anthropological Site’ in *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol 28. No.4, (Indiana University Press, Summer 2005), p.144.

⁴⁴ Muir recounts his time spent working as an odd-job man at ‘a big house in Ayrshire’, in *Edwin Muir: An Autobiography*. Incidentally, the pages which cover this time (pp.90-91) also give us an insight into Muir’s thoughts on addressing his employer as ‘sir’, which he refuses to do, as he believes it to be ‘sycophantic’. This ties in with Muir’s socialist outlook but defies his elitist views.

amid a huddle of dusty bungalows and villas, in a suburban street crammed with parked cars, that I stumbled on Burns's cottage.⁴⁵ It is worth noting that as Muir's physical approach to Burns is, literally, through grubby houses and cars, his exit and road to Glasgow is, 'accompanied almost all the way by signs of Industrialism.'⁴⁶ In bookending the commentary on Burns with these images of modern society, Muir is doing (at least) one of several things; either he is placing Burns (a memory represented by the cottage⁴⁷) at the centre of the technologically advancing Scotland, a country with its heritage still firmly in place despite these changes; or, he is commenting on the danger of Burns being swallowed up by these advancements. Equally, he could be commenting on the absurdity or importance of the continued worship of a peasant farmer, in the age of technological innovation and advancement. Each of these sentiments are arguable in this context but Muir is certainly drawing our attention to the jarring image of Burns and his rustic legend (eighteenth-century Scotland) beside vehicles and modern buildings (twentieth-century Scotland).⁴⁸ There is certainly the possibility that Muir is commenting further upon the 'sham-ness' of the situation, that the public site of memorial is itself a dilution of Burns's legacy. This is clear in the 'general effect of cleanliness, a swept and dry impression,'⁴⁹ which Muir recounts, suggesting that the hardship and struggle in which Burns actually existed is not conveyed in any sense to a modern audience.

As he then makes his way into the cottage, Muir relates the following observations:

The place was packed; in the blazing sun hordes of people were wandering about the courtyard behind the bars like tame animals; and the queue to line up to sign the visitors' book was so long and so dense that one had to fight to get in through the door of Burns's house [...] It was so unlike my expectation of a visit to Burns's cottage that I could hardly believe in it, and only when I was out again and had time to compose myself did I see that this was exactly what the cult of Burns worship was bound to turn into in a commercialised, newspaper-reading,

⁴⁵ E. Muir, *Scottish Journey*, p.87.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.94.

⁴⁷ More in-depth analysis of this can be found in the work of Johnny Rodger, specifically in *The Hero Building* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2015).

⁴⁸ Muir's entire commentary on this experience is in fact reflective of his attitude towards the Burns Cult and the dilution of Burns's image, mentioned in his essay on the Ramsay MacDonald speech and to be addressed further later in the chapter.

⁴⁹ E. Muir, *Scottish Journey*, p.88.

bus-driven, cinema-educated age. It is difficult to see what makes it so ridiculous, for the whole business is excellently organised.⁵⁰

Although Muir does not give us an insight into exactly what he was expecting from his visit, his description of his time at the cottage suggests that he would have preferred an empty location and peaceful atmosphere. Not that this desire in itself is anything extraordinary but it is in Muir's description of the other visitors which carries an air of superiority: 'packed,' 'hordes,' 'animals', 'dense' (the 'flies attracted to Nietzsche' as posited by George Allan Morgan earlier). Instead of focussing on the fact that the visitor attraction is clearly operating well and is a popular destination for tourists on what is described as a warm summer day, Muir takes the view that Burns's memory is being tarnished by such popularity. It is curious to consider a comparative episode: Ann Rigney recounts Thomas Mellon's visit to the same location in 1882, where the American banker finds the humble cottage as reflective of, 'the widely shared image of Burns as a man of the people, with a great popular and egalitarian appeal.'⁵¹ The contrast between the opinions formed by the wealthy businessman and the Scottish critic raises questions, not only Muir's motivation when describing Burns's cottage, but also with the previously discussed 'upper-class ownership' argument. The disdain that Muir feels for the gathered crowds is apparent, nowhere more than in his description of the 'commercialised, newspaper-reading, bus-driven, cinema-educated age.' It is in this definition that we truly recognise Muir's elitism: his belief that only those who are educated to a higher degree, those more experienced in critical appreciation of literature and fine arts, are in a position to celebrate and honour Burns's memory properly. Corey Andrews comments on the phenomenon of culture being legitimised only by those who have the authority to do so. In drawing on the cultural theory of Pierre Bourdieu and relating it to Burns's early critical reception, he explains that certain codes need to be adhered to in order for an artist to be appreciated.⁵² This is the essence of the point that Muir is making (and that MacDiarmid also makes), that only those with the cultural nous can decide on the value of a given piece of art, textual or otherwise. When Muir admits that he finds it difficult to see why the whole affair is 'so ridiculous', he is perhaps inadvertently conceding that his own perspective is out of sync with that of the rest of Scotland. Again, this is unsurprising, as Paul Robichaud's description of Muir suggests, 'his liminal status as an outsider, one whose Scottish identity gives him an insider's understanding of national culture and class

⁵⁰ Ibid, p.88.

⁵¹ Ann Rigney, 'Locating Memory: Abbotsford' in *The Afterlives of Walter Scott* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.36.

⁵² Corey Andrews, *The Genius of Scotland*, (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2015), p.71-72.

divisions, but whose Orkney origins, London residence and writer's occupation enable him to claim a wider perspective.⁵³ Taking this view on Muir, casting him as the outsider works in the sense that Robichaud argues, in that it allows Muir a different, more objective perspective on the situation. However, it can also operate in the sense that Muir is keenly aware of the class divisions, and clearly sees himself as occupying a completely separate space between the upper classes he decries in his *Left Review* article, and the 'dense hordes' that he has to fight his way through which make up the working class. In drawing on literary theory, Robichaud also states that:

Pierre Bourdieu notes that an "observer who divides a population into classes performs an operation which has its equivalent in social practice," and Muir's observational authority also implies an epistemological hierarchy, in which the poet's social analysis is predicated on his own cultural superiority to those he observes. Muir's distancing strategies, in Bourdieu's words, "produce and interpret signifying distinctions," even as he seeks to expose class pretensions.⁵⁴

This explanation gives us an excellent basis on which to consider Muir's writings on Burns, and the Burns Cult. An 'analysis predicated on his own cultural superiority', which one must assume Muir is unconscious of (given his socialist beliefs), informs us that his judgments are always going to be dissociative: that is, he will not believe himself to be part of the scene which he observes. He sees himself, as Robichaud suggests, as a liminal figure, occupying the margins of Scottish culture. In Muir's opinion, however, it is from the margins that the most valid criticism and appreciation of Burns will take place; opinions formed from the mainstream are either misunderstood due to a sense of entitlement or due to the lack of academic and/or philosophical enlightenment. In advocating such a belief, Muir is practising the opposite of what he preaches and is in fact appropriating Burns as part of an intellectual bourgeoisie.

These conflicting ideals which Muir places on Burns must also be considered alongside Muir's own interpretation of Burns as a poet, in contrast to Burns as an historical icon. It should be made clear that Muir respected Burns as a poet, and indeed concedes that the legacy which evolved and distorted over the years following his death up until the early part of the twentieth century, should not be viewed as a direct reflection of Burns's creative achievements. In Muir's writings on Burns Nights, we are reminded of the afore-mentioned articles by Riach and Massie, yet Muir is much more sympathetic to these celebrations. In

⁵³ P. Robichaud, 'MacDiarmid and Muir', p.148.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p.148.

his essay, ‘The Burns Myth’, we see Muir’s true sentiments regarding the entire Burns movement, a more genuine feeling than is perhaps conveyed in *Scottish Journey* or in the ‘Burns and Holy Willie’ essay. More genuine, I would argue, as it is written over a decade after these preceding pieces, which ultimately suggests that Muir has matured in terms of his position on Burns. ‘The Burns Myth’ is a survey of the legacy of Burns, as Muir ponders what he means to the Scottish people in general; ‘No other writer has said so fully and expressly what every man of his race wanted him to say: no other writer, consequently, has been taken so completely into the life of a people.’⁵⁵ There is no class division evident as we witnessed previously, perhaps evidence of Muir’s movement away from the Nietzschean/Communist mode of thinking. Instead Muir recognises the impact that Burns had was widely felt across Scotland, more-so than his own work, or that of any other poet for that matter. That Muir may have felt some professional jealousy towards Burns’s standing and cultural authority would be understandable, yet it would be myopic to consider this Muir’s sole prerogative when discussing Burns. Instead, and in contrast to Riach and Massie, Muir states that:

When we consider Burns we must therefore include the Burns Night with him, and the Burns cult in all its forms; if we sneer at them we sneer at Burns. They are his reward, or his punishment (whichever the fastidious reader may prefer to call it) for having had the temerity to express the ordinary feelings of his people and having become part of their life.⁵⁶

Muir alludes to the metonymy that was discussed previously, that Burns Nights are as much of a part of the Burns memory as anything else, and that to decry them is to decry him. As with all of Muir’s writings (and something which echoes the style of Nietzsche), there is an assumption that the reader will be on the same page, so to speak, and will understand exactly what point he is trying to make without it having to be spelled out. By labelling the reader ‘fastidious’, he is asserting that anyone taking the view of Burns Nights being a punishment, is essentially too hard to please and overly scornful. Ironically, the term Muir may have used, if it had been in circulation at the time, would have been ‘elitist’.

Yet, although Muir’s perspective has clearly evolved from the position we had witnessed previously, he has not completely changed his thoughts on the Burns Cult. What he does offer, which is perhaps lacking in other criticism, is a carefully considered view of the Burns Clubs and Burns Suppers, and what they do in fact represent. The observation

⁵⁵ E. Muir, ‘The Burns Myth’, p.6.

⁵⁶ Ibid, pp.7-8.

that, ‘what the Burns Nights ignore is the perfection of Burns’ art, which makes him one of the great poets,’⁵⁷ conveys Muir’s main concern (again betraying his own elitist principles), that the ‘true’ genius of Burns is going unappreciated. This is what was described in the introduction as the clearing of the path for the modern Scottish Renaissance writers, as it affords the opportunity to simultaneously praise Burns’s work whilst implying their own superior readings and appreciation of him. This sentiment continues as Muir describes what he feels the outcome of over a century of Burns memorialising is:

That large class of Scotsmen who are not very much interested in literature, not very cultivated, and know little poetry outside the poetry of Burns. It is these who have fashioned the popular image of Burns; and this is what really happens when a poet is taken into the life of the people. He moulds their thoughts and feelings; but they mould his too, sometimes long after he is dead. They make current a vulgarised image of him, and a vulgarised reading of his poetry; they take him into their life, but they also enter into his; and what emerges as the popular picture is a cross between the two.⁵⁸

As with the ‘sham bards’ analysis, great care must be taken when analysing these lines from Muir and realising exactly what it is he is attempting to say. The language used, specifically the choice of ‘vulgarised image’ and ‘vulgarised reading’, can be interpreted in two ways. The first interpretation would be to regard the word ‘vulgar’ in a modern context, essentially as a synonym for indecent, crude or disgusting.⁵⁹ This would then lead to assuming that Muir finds the Burns Cult all of these things, and returns us back to the argument that Muir is positioning himself as part of the intellectual elite that clearly has a more sophisticated grasp on how Burns should actually be remembered. The second interpretation, and the more satisfactory one given the context of the lines, is that Muir means ‘vulgar’ in its original sense, i.e. ‘common’.⁶⁰ This is not necessarily a negative critique by Muir; certainly, there are still elitist undertones within his statement, particularly with the observation that there a large class of Scotsmen who are ‘not very cultivated’ (albeit there is not a nation on earth which possesses a completely cultivated society in the sense with which Muir refers to). He is, however, striking at the essence of the Burns Cult and concluding that it truly is a symbiotic relationship, that the memory of Burns feeds off the actuality of his followers, his ordinary, ‘every day’ followers and vice versa. The fact that Muir associates Burns with commonality is not the negative that others may assume it to be; in truth, it is a fact to be

⁵⁷ Ibid, p.8.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.9.

⁵⁹ ‘Vulgar’, Thesaurus.com [accessed 25/09/2017].

⁶⁰ ‘Vulgar’, OED.com [accessed 25/09/2017].

celebrated, as Muir does himself when he states, ‘he became legendary because he was uniquely ordinary. He was the ordinary man for whom Scotland had been looking as it might have looked for a king; and it discovered him with a greater surprise and delight than if it had found a king; for kings are more common.’⁶¹ This exaltation, and a complete understanding of what Muir is meaning to say with his often archaic vocabulary, reflects his true sentiments towards Burns and should allow critics and commentators to move on from the ‘sham bard’ misconceptions which have dogged the Muir and Burns relationship throughout the past century.

The issues touched upon in this chapter go far beyond simply that of Edwin Muir and Robert Burns. This specific relationship, between two Scottish writers who are separated by a century and a half, is an opportunity to survey critical issues which are still hugely relevant and under consideration today: the history of Scottish literature, and its continuity versus its interruptions; the difference between Scottish Romanticism and Scottish romanticism, and the impact of each; the question of Scottish nationalism and British nationalism, and the conflicting ideologies between socialism and nationalism. Of the Scottish Modernists that this dissertation is concerned with, Muir could easily be ascribed, on the surface, as the most ‘European’, in that his philosophy and style tied in more closely with that of the traditional Modernist. Therefore it is he, more than MacDiarmid, who we can consider as a more suitable link between the discrete Scottish and European movements. Once more, this is evidence of the liminality of Muir, the occupant of two distinct movements without truly encapsulating either. To conclude this chapter, then, we must return specifically to Muir and Burns, and an issue which brings us full circle in this analysis of the relationship between these poets. There is the issue of religion which pervades much of Muir’s writing, clearly evident in his accusations of the Reformation being the cause of the decline of Scotland as a nation, and thus in the decline of its culture and literature. Although this has been discussed earlier in the chapter, Muir draws on this line of thinking when he labels Burns, ‘a very Protestant poet’.⁶² This is a negative observation on Muir’s part, as he goes on to explain that:

Even in his remoulding of old folk songs, he never goes back in sentiment past the Reformation. He certainly had no affection for the God of Knox, yet he himself had no other, except on occasion an eighteenth-century abstraction. His

⁶¹ E. Muir, ‘The Burns Myth’, pp.8-9.

⁶² E. Muir, *Scottish Journey*, p.46.

ribaldry, blasphemy, libertinism and sentimentality are all Protestant, and quite narrowly so.⁶³

Muir's critique of Burns's work here, is that it pales in comparison to the ballads of Scotland, which he refers to as 'Catholic'⁶⁴ and which he views as possessing, 'a quality which the rest of Scottish poetry after the Reformation lacks.'⁶⁵ Muir's intention in stating such an opinion could, theoretically, stem from the afore-mentioned professional jealousy that he may have had of Burns, given the ongoing adoration of his work. By explaining it through saying that it was through no fault of his own as he was raised in the protestant tradition and so did not have the creativity to produce anything better, Muir is shielding himself from any potential backlash, which could theoretically result from such a statement (see the reaction to Catherine Carswell's novel). Muir's own religious beliefs have never been fully analysed or discussed, although he tells us himself that, 'in St. Andrews I discovered I was a Christian without knowing it.'⁶⁶ Without defining this any further, his experience in Rome would suggest that he would be most closely associate with Catholicism, something which would also tie in with his underlying prejudices against Protestant Scotland. This information is useful when switching attention to a passage in *Scottish Journey*, when Muir tells the story of a grotto which is found at Carfin, just outside of Glasgow:

I have told the story of the Grotto as objectively as possible, so as to let it speak for itself. It is, looked at from any point of view, an astonishing story. Here, in one of the most hideous stretches of country-side, in an industrial region festering with poverty and unemployment, a flourishing shrine has grown up in a few years, one of the causes of whose popularity is that it produces miraculous cures of quite ordinary ailments. Many of these ailments, moreover, it is clear from Father Taylor's little book, are directly produced by the working of the Industrial System in the middle of which this shrine stands. On the other hand, it has risen without the help of that system, and by means which are foreign to it; for the Grotto is the result of voluntary labour, the labour of poor men.⁶⁷

Although this passage is not linked directly to Burns it is emblematic of Muir's overall psyche and can easily be ascribed to the thoughts he has on Burns. The 'flourishing' of something amidst the deprivation of the area it inhabits is not unlike the phenomenon of Burns, his difficult upbringing yet his ability to 'perfect his art', in Muir's words. It is reminiscent of the description of Muir's journey to Burns's cottage, an irreligious site which

⁶³ Ibid, p.46.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.46.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p.46.

⁶⁶ E. Muir, *An Autobiography*, p.276.

⁶⁷ E. Muir, *Scottish Journey*, pp.176-177.

is worshipped and adored in the same way as a religious shrine, yet stands amidst the ‘signs of industrialisation’, a byword for ‘evil’ in Muir’s experience. This phenomenon, of genius or beauty appearing in places so unexpected, is the essence of Muir’s life and writing, what he refers to as, ‘his own fable.’⁶⁸ The lesson learned by Muir over the thirty years between writing his essay ‘Robert Burns’ in 1924 and his autobiography in 1954, is that adopting the central aspects of a Modernist perspective on life, with a Nietzschean flavour (the rejection on cultural ‘norms’, the rejection of religion, the bleak appreciation of society), is not always fruitful. To exemplify this, I would refer briefly to one final example from Muir’s autobiography. Whilst describing his time as a college warden, he states how utterly surprised he was at the intelligence levels possessed by the manual labourers and civil servants who attended Newbattle Abbey College near Edinburgh.⁶⁹ As patronising as this is, it should be recognised that his admiration is genuine and carries no intentional malice. Rather, it is a recognition of the brilliance that can be found in the less privileged classes in society, if given the opportunity. Muir recognises that Burns was one of Scotland’s earliest examples of this, and his biggest criticism when writing about Burns, is that his full body of work is under-appreciated, not that it is of low quality. Through tracing Muir’s writing on Burns over his critical lifetime, we should understand that Muir’s relationship with Burns is a complex web of admiration and disappointment: the former for Burns’s creative work, the latter for the political mis(use) and under-appreciation he receives.

⁶⁸ E. Muir, *An Autobiography*, p.277.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.275.

Chapter 2

‘So you’ve met the Douglasite-Nationalist-Communist-Anarchist Grieve? What a boy!’¹

Hugh MacDiarmid & Robert Burns

A notable omission from the preceding chapter is Edwin Muir’s *Scott and Scotland* (1936), described by Eleanor Bell as, ‘the main critical text for which he [Muir] is now best remembered.’² As the focal point of this discussion now switches to Hugh MacDiarmid, it is now worth considering this text and its impact on the relationship between MacDiarmid and Muir, and its implication for the wider Scottish literary scene in general. That MacDiarmid and Muir disagreed on certain aspects of Scottish literary criticism is understating the fact. MacDiarmid refers to *Scott and Scotland* as a ‘stab in the back,’³ for the modern Scottish Renaissance, as he quotes Muir’s line, ‘Scottish poetry exists in a vacuum; it neither acts on the rest of literature nor reacts to it; and consequently it has shrunk to the level of anonymous folk-song.’⁴ Despite this, they agreed that the biggest problem facing Scottish literature in the twentieth century was the loss of its homogenous language⁵ – this concurrence being the *only* thing they did agree on, according to R.D.S. Jack. Where MacDiarmid and Muir then diverged was on their own solutions to this problem. In short, Muir advised opting for English, MacDiarmid for Synthetic Scots. Whilst both critics are reaching seemingly diametrically opposing conclusions, each stems from the same essentialist argument, that Scottish literature suffered a decline throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; this has been seriously challenged by Jack. Touched on very briefly in the preceding chapter, it is worth now pausing to consider Jack’s argument in fuller detail, reflecting on how it affects both Muir and MacDiarmid, before analysing MacDiarmid’s relationship with Burns.

In ‘Where Stands Scottish Literature Now?’, his critical introduction to *The Mercat Anthology of Early Scottish Literature 1375-1707* (2000), Jack immediately highlights the

¹ James Leslie Mitchell, letter to James Barke in *Modernism and Nationalism*, edited by Margery Palmer McCulloch, (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2004), p.354.

² Eleanor Bell, *Questioning Scotland*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), p.9.

³ Hugh MacDiarmid, *Burns Today and Tomorrow*, (Edinburgh: Castle Wynd Printers, 1959), p.82.

⁴ Edwin Muir, *Scott and Scotland*, (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1936), p.21.

⁵ E. Muir, *Scott & Scotland*, pp.18-19.

fact that a ‘major oddity exists’⁶ within the discipline of Scottish literature. Initially commenting on the seemingly haphazard inclusions of Scottish writers in poetry anthologies during the twentieth century, Jack then focuses his discussion on T.F. Henderson’s publication from the beginning of this century, *Scottish Vernacular Literature: A History* (1900). The central thesis of this work was ‘that the successors of the late and great medieval makars abandoned Middle Scots for English, intentionally and treacherously,’ a view which remains, to this day, ‘a keystone of critical belief,’ for many students, anthologists and literary critics.⁷ This ‘betrayal’ of Scots was picked up on by MacDiarmid as he launched the modern Scottish Renaissance, and the idea that Scottish literature all but disappeared throughout the seventeenth century was corroborated by Muir (as evidenced in *Scott and Scotland* as well as ‘Scotland, 1941’). As Jack notes, this agreement between the two was supremely important; not only for it being a rare moment of compliance, but for the fact that it was based on an erroneous thesis from Henderson to begin with. As Jack explains:

Languages themselves are in a constant state of gradual flux under the influence of much broader sociolinguistic pressures. The Reformation and the invention of printing would have been strong enough catalysts on their own without the prospect of Union [...] When the prospect of a Union centred in London beckons, therefore, Anglicisation may result from the social change itself. When the distinctive tongue of the smaller nation (in this case) ‘Scots’ is itself a dialect of ‘Inglis’ and has dubious patriotic roots, Anglicisation cannot simply be viewed as treachery. Yet on that premise the ‘Tradition’ is based and the excision of the Renaissance founded.⁸

In truth, this observation is not particularly earth-shattering. Languages *are* in a constant state of flux: words become obsolete or are invented, phrases are incorporated from foreign tongues, dialects alter. In the context of Scottish literary history, however, this natural progression is viewed suspiciously, as a manifestation of a deliberate political and cultural shift. In some ways it could even be construed as a form of colonisation, more of which will be explored later. Given the circumstances in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, of the Reformation, the Union of the Crowns and removal of the Royal Court to London, it is certainly understandable why such a conclusion has been reached; yet to blindly adopt this mode of belief and then to preach it as gospel truth is where the problem lies. Thus, as the remainder of this chapter will demonstrate, although I believe MacDiarmid’s theories

⁶ R.D.S. Jack, ‘Where Stands Scottish Literature’ in *The Mercat Anthology of Early Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 2000), p.vii.

⁷ Ibid, p.vii.

⁸ Ibid, p.xiv.

concerning the Scots language to be fundamentally flawed, this is no reason for them to be completely dismissed. The implication of Jack's analysis being applied to my own readings of Muir and MacDiarmid is therefore significant, in that it allows for existing preconceptions of their criticism on Scottish history, literature and language to be re-evaluated.

It could be argued that the greatest irony of the entire Renaissance/Modernist movement in Scotland, was that Hugh MacDiarmid's obsession in repositioning Scotland back into its 'natural' cultural course was attempted through the foisting of an unnatural language, Synthetic Scots, on the country. This is satirised in Lewis Grassic Gibbon's *Grey Granite* (1934), where nationalist politician Hugo MacDownall also writes in Synthetic Scots: 'Ewan asked *Why synthetic? Can't he write the real stuff?* And Archie said *I'm damned if I know. Sounds more epileptic to me.*'⁹ This evidences one of the popular contemporary criticisms of MacDiarmid's aims with the Scots language, highlighting perhaps that he was out of touch with the general public. MacDiarmid, of course, argued against the critics of his project, particularly those labelling it antiquarian: in his 'Immortal Memory' speech given at Greenock Burns Club in 1962, he called Scotland 'hopelessly defeatist' in its approach to the adoption of Scots as its mother tongue and defended his own efforts, saying: 'They say it is trying to put back the hands of the clock. Nonsense! Within the past half century many lapsed languages have been revived, and become the media of lively literature.'¹⁰ Specific examples of which languages are not cited, but MacDiarmid does appropriate Burns for the same cause, claiming that 'Burns had the matter of our independent native literary tradition closest to his heart.'¹¹ Whether this is completely factual or not, what cannot be denied is that MacDiarmid's use of language, both in English and Scots, and as amusing as it is acerbic at times, positions him as one of the most powerful voices coming out of Scotland in the period following the First World War. Two of the biggest issues faced by anyone approaching his work from a critical perspective are his talents in manipulating language to obfuscate what he is really saying, and the inconsistencies in his philosophies and statements. This opinion is corroborated by Carla Sassi when she states, '[his] work is notoriously run through by contradictions, unsolved

⁹ Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *Grey Granite*, (Edinburgh: Canongate Publishers, 1990), p.34.

¹⁰ Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Poet's Plea for Revival of Scotland's Language', *Greenock Telegraph*, (26th January, 1962).

¹¹ Ibid.

tensions.¹² The following observation made by MacDiarmid in the author's note to his autobiography, *Lucky Poet* (1972), exemplifies this:

If I were asked are there important issues about which I have changed my opinion since 1943, I would have to reply, I spoke then as I speak now, but I do not speak now as I spoke then. I am accustomed to being accused of all sorts of contradictions, to which I have often merely answered, like Walt Whitman, "I contradict myself. Very well. I contradict myself."¹³

This concluding diacope in particular encapsulates the difficulty in pinning MacDiarmid down to a definitive position. The fact that it is a quotation lifted from Walt Whitman is also of great interest in the context of Burns. In a 2015 essay, Arun Sood investigates the relationship between Whitman and Burns, with reference to an essay of Whitman's from 1875, 'A Modern Poet of the Scotch Bard'. Sood explores Whitman's views on Burns and Burns suppers (where he anticipates MacDiarmid's views to a degree), decrying the 'extravagant eulogium' that they encompass.¹⁴ Whitman's status in America as being emblematic of the 'American Protestant work-ethic', and of a 'revolutionary energy'¹⁵ is somewhat reflective of both Burns and MacDiarmid, to varying degrees. Despite the frequent contradictions in MacDiarmid's work, his views on language and Burns are perhaps less oblique than his views on other subjects. In *Lucky Poet*, he includes an extract from his own review of Keith Henderson's *Burns – By Himself* (1938) where he makes clear his feeling on Burns's language choice: 'The veridical Burns is no more to be found in his letters, which he wrote in English, than in his verse in the same language.'¹⁶ His feelings, then, which correspond with his beliefs on the treachery of seventeenth century Scottish writers using an Anglicised style, are that anything written by Burns which is not in Scots (i.e. his letters, not his poetry) is not the *true* Burns. This is the motif which is recurrent throughout Burns criticism, as it is with each chapter of this dissertation. As touched on in chapter one, the easiest way to reconcile this search for the true Burns is to recognise the existence of different versions of Burns for different audiences. MacDiarmid champions the true Burns

¹² Carla Sassi, 'Hugh MacDiarmid's (Un)making of the Modern Scottish Nation in *The Edinburgh Companion to Hugh MacDiarmid*', edited by Scott Lyall and Margery Palmer McCulloch, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p.113.

¹³ Hugh MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet*, (London: Jonathon Cape, 1972), p.xi.

¹⁴ Arun Sood, ““A Modern Poet on the Scotch Bard”: Walt Whitman’s 1875 essay on Robert Burns’ in *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*, Vol 32, No.4, (2015), p.233.

¹⁵ Robert Crawford, ‘America’s Bard’ in *Robert Burns and Transatlantic Culture*, (Surrey: Ashgate, 2012), p.108.

¹⁶ A. Sood, ““A Modern Poet””, pp.191-192.

as being he of the Scots tongue; Muir asserts the Bardic moniker is the opposite of truth; Catherine Carswell and James Barke, as we will examine, attempt to uncover and present their own version of the true Burns, to differing receptions. The continued search for this is underlined by Christopher Whatley's assessment that Burns 'became one of the principal pillars of the nation's sense of self.'¹⁷ That there existed such an obsession over clarifying who the true Burns was, is completely understandable on this basis, of Burns's metonymic iconicity.

It is the claim that the 'veridical Burns' can only be found in his Scots language work which highlights the difficulties of analysing MacDiarmid's and Muir's criticism of Burns. Both modernist writers were undoubtedly well read in Burns, but were selective in their uses of these readings, ensuring that the examples of his work to which they referred supported whichever argument they were making at the time. With the benefit of hindsight, we can recognise this trait in their critical work and treat the analysis of their work accordingly. The implications of such methodology from Muir and MacDiarmid, indeed from any critic with even a small level of public influence, should not, however, be underestimated. One of the intrinsic threads of this dissertation is the development of Scottish critical thinking within a cultural framework during the early to middle twentieth century (this also includes a discussion on the concept of MacDiarmid as a postcolonialist writer, to be examined later in this chapter). As Muir and MacDiarmid are vital components within this, and as the title of chapter one alludes to, their own unique interpretations of facts are usually presented with an emphasis on promoting their own agendas, something which must be always kept in mind when analysing their work. With respect to Burns criticism, MacDiarmid was acutely aware of this, as he stated, 'I know too well that Burns, like the Bible and like statistics, can be made to prove almost anything.'¹⁸

This leads into another argument between MacDiarmid and Muir, centred on Burns's poem 'Tam o' Shanter' (1790). The relationship between MacDiarmid and 'Tam o' Shanter' itself is worth recognising first. Generally considered MacDiarmid's poetic masterpiece, 'A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle' (1926) is an epic, stream of consciousness poem, described in *The International Companion to Scottish Poetry* (2015) as a lament on 'the perceived decadence of modern Scotland, where the Kailyard has side-tracked a Scottish poetic

¹⁷ C. Whatley, *Immortal Memory*, p.99.

¹⁸ H. MacDiarmid, *Burns Today and Tomorrow*, p.93.

tradition “And owre the kailyard-wa’ Dunbar they’ve flung.”¹⁹ Further to this, ‘Drunk Man’ is a re-imagining (‘deliberately reminiscent of – and clearly different from’²⁰) of Burns’s ‘Tam o’ Shanter’: a poem which, ‘perhaps more than any other, continues to cement Burns’s place in Scottish and global culture.’²¹ It would be inaccurate to label MacDiarmid’s poem as a philosophical version of ‘Tam o’ Shanter’, as this would suggest that there is no philosophical merit in Burns’s work. This is clearly not the case, as ‘Tam o’ Shanter’ has been approached through various theoretical frameworks: Gerard McKeever posits it as a dramatic ‘realization of an aesthetic model of nationhood as a moment of national self-revelation,’²² whilst Christopher Whyte’s 1993 essay ‘Defamiliarising ‘Tam o’ Shanter’’ lists a range of readings from the purely comic to gender and sexuality.²³ Of his own poem, MacDiarmid certainly wished for it ‘to be compared with William Dunbar’s ‘Seven Deidly Sins’ and Robert Burns’s ‘Tam o’ Shanter’²⁴ whilst he was purposefully addressing many of the modernist concerns at the time of writing, such as psychological and philosophical duality, the ‘nature of human consciousness and the question of human purpose’.²⁵ MacDiarmid references Burns directly throughout ‘Drunk Man’, and from lines 37-120 he focusses on what he believes Burns stands for in the contemporary Scotland being surveyed in the poem. Initially, we encounter the international appeal of Burns, albeit with MacDiarmid’s negative and xenophobic undertones, in the lines which describe a Chinese attendant at a (fictional) Burns supper and the nationality of the bagpiper (‘Chinee turns roon to say, “Him Haggis – velly goot!”/And ten to wan the piper is a Cockney’ (ll.39-40)), but it is in the opening lines of the following stanza where we can identify one of MacDiarmid’s

¹⁹ Emma Dymock & Scott Lyall, ‘The Poetry of Modernity’ in *The International Companion*, (Glasgow: Scottish Literature International, 2015), p.77.

²⁰ Alan Riach, ‘MacDiarmid’s Burns’ in *Robert Burns and Cultural Authority*, edited by Robert Crawford, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p.205.

²¹ Gerard McKeever, “‘Tam O’ Shanter’ and Aesthetic Cultural Nationalism”, *Studies in Scottish Literature*, Vol.42, Iss. 1, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2016), p.31. As stated by McKeever: ‘In 2012, YouGov reported that “Tam” was “Scotland’s favourite [Burns] poem”: see <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2012/01/Burns23012012> [accessed 7th January 2016]’.

²² Ibid, p.32.

²³ Christopher Whyte, ‘Defamiliarising ‘Tam o’ Shanter’’, *Scottish Literary Journal*, Vol. 20, Iss. 1, (Aberdeen: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1993).

²⁴ Margery Palmer McCulloch & Scott Lyall, ‘Introduction’ in *The Edinburgh Companion to Hugh MacDiarmid*, p.2.

²⁵ Margery Palmer McCulloch and Kirsten Matthews, ‘Transcending the Thistle in *Drunk Man* and *Cencrastus*’ in *The Edinburgh Companion to Hugh MacDiarmid*, p.50.

main criticisms of what Burns means in Scotland in 1926: ‘No’ wan in fifty kens a wurd Burns wrote/But misapplied is a’body’s property,’ (ll.41-42). The conflict between MacDiarmid and the Burns Cult will be discussed in more depth later, but these lines are a prime example of one of MacDiarmid’s biggest frustrations with Scottish culture, as he sees it. Hanne Tange describes this as a frustration on MacDiarmid’s part, where ‘Scotland has been reduced to the superficial images of bagpipe, kilt and Burns Supper, while the nation has ceased to exist on an aesthetic level.’²⁶ That these stereotypical yet inoffensive images are now, in MacDiarmid’s opinion, metonymic for Scotland, is a source of vexation for him. By obfuscating what he feels is the ‘true’ culture and identity of Scotland (again a signal of his conceived status as a cultural codifier and insight into the disappointment over his own popular reception), these images are, in MacDiarmid’s eyes, degrading to Scotland from an international viewpoint. These frustrations of MacDiarmid’s become perceptible in one of his major gripes with the annual remembrances of Burns, through the continued criticism that it is the man and not the poet who is celebrated. MacDiarmid’s distinction is that “Robert Burns the man” is as symbolically irrelevant as the afore-mentioned metonymic symbols of Scotland – haggis, tartan, bagpipes. Burns’s poetry on the other hand is his tangible legacy, and is what should be remembered above all, in MacDiarmid’s mind. MacDiarmid transposes this thought onto Burns when he writes, ‘poetry means little to the vast majority of people today – but to Burns it was the greatest thing in life and he gave his life to it.’²⁷ The message is plain: by ignoring Burns’s poetry, Burns’s life is also being forgotten. This seems a well-intentioned argument on MacDiarmid’s part, and could be considered so were it not for the fact that one of the aims of the Burns federation was to promote Burns’s work and ensure it was not forgotten (see Appendix 2 and further discussion later in chapter).

In returning to Burns poetry then, and ‘Tam o’ Shanter’ specifically, we can survey the disagreement which evolved between MacDiarmid and Muir over Burns’s use of language within the poem, which is demonstrative of the previous observation of MacDiarmid’s, concerning the ability to use Burns as evidence for any line of argument. The lines in question from ‘Tam o’ Shanter’, lines 59-67 (see Appendix 1) are the point in the poem where Burns reverts completely to standard English – ‘these lines have been praised by some as being beautiful, and attacked by others as a blemish on the poem, an

²⁶ Hanne Tange, ‘Writing the Nation: Four Inter-war Visions of Scotland’, (University of Glasgow, PhD Thesis, December 2000), p.65.

²⁷ H. MacDiarmid, *Burns Today and Tomorrow*, p.93.

unhappy sliding into English poetic diction.²⁸ Muir's opinion is that Burns's intention with these lines is to impose a critically reflective mood on the poem, something which could only be done through English, given Muir's opinion that 'Scots may serve our emotions but [...] we cannot think in it'.²⁹ This is at the heart of Muir's essay 'The Predicament of the Scottish Writer' located as the introduction to *Scott and Scotland*, and is the main reason for his disagreements with MacDiarmid. In contrast, MacDiarmid argues that, at this point in the poem, Burns is 'being ironic at the expense of the genteel and the pious'.³⁰ As such, he illustrates his poetic respect for Burns when he explains his views on these lines, as being used for comic effect, heightening the tension between the broad Scots – which describes the majority of the poem – and the neo-classical English similes. For MacDiarmid, one of the necessities of using Scots is that there are 'many important qualities of Scottish psychology,' which 'cannot be expressed in English or any other language'.³¹ Elevating the use of Scots above English, therefore, is a fundamental part of MacDiarmid's psyche, and to witness Burns doing this in such a way is clearly inspiring for him, surmised by Alex Thomson:

Grieve is committed to demonstrating the possibility of a distinctively national art: by differentiating Scottish from English literature, forging styles with deeper connection to popular life than would be possible following bourgeois standards, and thereby vindicating the ideal of a national aesthetic culture. This is the basis for his relationship to Burns – however degraded by the cult around the poet, there remains a genuine popular appreciation of the national poet which presages a potential regeneration.³²

Where MacDiarmid and Muir truly differ in their approach to Burns, which is demonstrated through this disagreement, is that Muir can recognise only one way of reading these lines, whilst for MacDiarmid, they represent a multitude of interpretations, which he believed was the essential component of Burns's genius. In the same essay quoted above, Thomson also writes of the characteristic strategies which were deployed within the modern Scottish Renaissance, one of which was 'critical' and involved an 'iconoclastic attack on the values

²⁸ Allan H. MacLaine, 'Burns's Use of Parody in "Tam o' Shanter"' in *Criticism*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (fall 1959), p.312.

²⁹ E. Muir, *Scott and Scotland*, p.22.

³⁰ A. Riach, 'MacDiarmid's Burns', p.206.

³¹ Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Poet's Plea'.

³² Alex Thomson, 'From Renaissance to Referendum? Literature and Critique in Scotland, 1918-2014' in *Journal of Scottish Thought*, Vol.8. (Aberdeen: Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies, University of Aberdeen, 2016), p.69.

of modern Scottish commercial society, interwoven with the repudiation of the recent tradition.³³ This comment underlines MacDiarmid's aims, both with the larger Renaissance movement and with his parallel relationships with Burns – one of fan, and one of critic.

It also hints at MacDiarmid's elitism, his annoyance that Burns is not solely reserved for those with an appreciation of the arts and poetry, but is enjoyed by the masses – an echo of Muir's visit to the Burns Cottage in Alloway and his encounter with the 'hoards' of Burns tourists. There is a striking dichotomy between this attitude and the one suggested by Thomson above, who believes MacDiarmid to be a true socialist and therefore an advocate of a class-free society³⁴. The absurd truth seems to be that MacDiarmid would be in favour of a classless society – but only if he were to be the one in charge of it. The difference between MacDiarmid and Muir in this context was that the former consciously perceived his status as one of the intellectual elite (see 'militant highbrow' statement below), whereas Muir seemed oblivious to his position at times. MacDiarmid's elitist sentiment is apparent in the lines: 'Mair nonsense has been uttered in his name/Than in ony's barrin' liberty and Christ,' (ll.57-58). The 'nonsense' to which MacDiarmid refers is explained by Riach as, 'the source of innumerable polite platitudes,'³⁵ the propagation of a 'Tory Burns' (as portrayed by John Gibson Lockhart, further discussion in following chapters) and the dismissal of his radical works for example (see chapter three for further discussion). MacDiarmid's militant stance on Scots and his desire to rid the country of the 'kailyard' culture has been well documented, but these lines emphasise his feelings on this specific subject. What is also worth reflecting on is MacDiarmid's decision to compare Burns to 'liberty and Christ'. What we witness here, as with so many other examples within MacDiarmid's work, is a dichotomy of opinions. On one hand he is dismissing the nonsense that he perceives in the Burns Cult, yet he is also placing Burns in the company of the God of Christianity and the concept of freedom. It can be difficult to reconcile MacDiarmid's sense of awe at Burns's impact on global culture with his obvious sense of disgust at certain aspects of the Burns legacy. Perhaps the only way to do so is to understand that MacDiarmid himself struggled to reconcile his own antagonistic views, surmised by Scott Lyall and Margery Palmer

³³ Ibid, pp.66-67.

³⁴ The biography of the official Twitter feed of the Socialist Party of Great Britain reads: 'Socialism means us ALL owning the 'Means of Production'. No ruling class or leader. Work simply to meet society's needs. Free access to all goods and services.' <https://twitter.com/OfficialSPGB> [accessed 08/12/2017].

³⁵ A. Riach, 'MacDiarmid's Burns', p.200.

McCulloch as a writer who ‘lives at the apex of such contradictions’.³⁶ This is evident here, as it is with his political beliefs, which ranged from Nationalist to Communist to Socialist to Fascist.

Yet another illumination of MacDiarmid’s contradictory nature, is the fact that despite his position as the leader of the Scottish Vernacular revival, enacted in part through the modern Scottish Renaissance, he was at the same time ‘an active opponent of the Vernacular Circle of the London Burns Club, which was attempting to revive Scots for literary purposes.’³⁷ Before becoming the self-styled “Saviour of Scots”, he dismissed the Vernacular Circle’s promotion of Scots, labelling it, ‘a backwater of the true river of Scottish national expression.’³⁸ Once more, we find MacDiarmid, in his own words, ‘whaur/extremes meet,’³⁹ occupying two directly contrasting points of view, albeit at different stages of the 1920s. His chief initial concern was that any revival of the Scots language would be detrimental to the national interest of Scotland, that it ‘would only invite cultural inferiorism and further marginalisation.’⁴⁰ The change in attitude comes from MacDiarmid’s further education about, and association with, the Modernist movement, demonstrated through his involvement with A.R. Orage’s *The New Age* literary magazine and his correspondence with other Scottish Modernists. In appreciating the values of the early modern European Renaissance, which ‘saw a move away from classical languages to national vernaculars’,⁴¹ MacDiarmid was struck with the realisation that Scottish literature needed a Scottish language. This is when he turned to T.F. Henderson’s thesis and the early Makars, and also adopted other ideological modes associated with Modernism. This included: ‘Apocalypse,’ as ‘one of the things modernist writers imagined most fondly. They saw themselves as inhabitants of a social and cultural system which had stagnated to the point where it was no longer susceptible to reform, but could only be renewed through total collapse or violent overthrow.’⁴² The social and cultural system of Scotland which Hugh

³⁶ S. Lyall and M.P. McCulloch, ‘Introduction’, p.1.

³⁷ Trevor Royle, *The Mainstream Companion to Scottish Literature*, (Mainstream, Edinburgh, 1993), p.135.

³⁸ Ibid, p.135

³⁹ H. MacDiarmid, ‘Drunk Man’, ll.141-142.

⁴⁰ Scott Lyall, ‘Hugh MacDiarmid and the Scottish Renaissance’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Scottish Literature*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012), p.173.

⁴¹ Ibid, p.176

⁴² David Trotter, ‘The Modernist Novel’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.77.

MacDiarmid wished to overthrow, was represented by Burns and the Burns Cult, and the metonymous images discussed and raised by MacDiarmid in ‘Drunk Man’, as well as numerous other written works of his. The quintessential product of this can be seen in the ‘Not Burns – Dunbar’ slogan, a phrase which strikes at the heart of MacDiarmid’s philosophy but was also ‘intentionally designed to upset the Burnsians’.⁴³ The elitist tone, becoming synonymous with much of MacDiarmid’s work, is also identifiable in such a slogan. MacDiarmid was of the belief that ‘most of the Burns orators are middlebrows – what John Buchan stigmatised as “the interpreting class” – ministers, bankers, school-teachers, business men, and what not.”’⁴⁴ He believed that this class of people were in no way qualified to be the celebrants of Burns. In the same passage, he quotes Virginia Woolf and her views on the battle taking place on a cultural level, between a coalition of lowbrows and highbrows, against the middlebrows.⁴⁵ MacDiarmid relishes the fantasy of a war against middlebrow culture and sees the iconicity of Burns as being a relic of this. He decrees that: ‘I am an unrepentant and militant highbrow and do not believe that the great body of the public needs nothing but “pap”, cold kail hot again, and that simple straight-forward diet most of their self-appointed mentors assume is good for them.’⁴⁶ The irony of such a statement from MacDiarmid is discernible; essentially, he wishes for the lowbrows of Scottish culture to rally against the middlebrow ‘self-appointed mentors’ and forget what they say about Burns. Instead, they are instructed to listen to what he and his highbrow comrades have to say, the self-appointed cultural codifiers, as they are the ones who truly understand how Burns should be appreciated properly. In other words, “swap one self-appointed mentor for another, but do not attempt to appreciate Burns on your own – I’ll tell you how to.” This is not an unfounded assumption: it is an aspect of MacDiarmid’s schemata which has been commented on by several critics of Scottish literature and culture. David Goldie’s opinion is that MacDiarmid:

Gives the impression that he identified with the Scottish generality only in so far as he might command their support. Like many leftist intellectuals of the time, he took few, if any, of his values from this mass, but demanded rather that they

⁴³ Ibid, p.176.

⁴⁴ H. MacDiarmid, *Burns Today and Tomorrow*, p.39.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p.39.

⁴⁶ Ibid, p.41.

adapt their tastes and judgements to those he had acquired through his professedly superior reading and culture.⁴⁷

There is little evidence in MacDiarmid's work to suggest that this is not the case.

Alan Riach's opinion on this idiosyncrasy of MacDiarmid's philosophy is that 'a discussion of MacDiarmid's Burns takes us to the heart of the conflict between popularity and elitism which runs through all MacDiarmid's work.'⁴⁸ In terms of the language debate, which is unavoidable in any discussion concerning MacDiarmid and any aspect of Scottish culture, Riach states, 'MacDiarmid was not only attacking the Burns Clubs and the sentimental vernacular versifiers, but he was also offering the Scots language itself as something far more radical, freshly attuned to international contemporary ideas in psychology and politics.'⁴⁹ Coupling Burns with the 'sentimental versifiers' is misleading in that it assumes equality between each separate entity. *The Whistle Binkie* anthologies (1832-90) have been described as 'emblematic of the stultified, cloying sentimentality that clogged the literary arteries of Victorian Scotland.'⁵⁰ This anthology, and others of a similar vein, epitomised the 'sharp descent of literature since the time of Burns,'⁵¹ with the emphasis very much placed upon the 'since'. Burns is not a sentimental versifier - his work has continually been praised by writers from Byron to Carlyle - yet it suits the agenda of MacDiarmid to label him as such in order to advance his own argument. In terms of the language point made by Riach, we have already recognised this in Sassi's statement regarding MacDiarmid's penchant for disorder, and Hanne Tange echoes this, with her statement that 'experimentalism, not conservatism, was the key to MacDiarmid's Renaissance project, which suggests a fundamental change of attitude to Scotland and Scottish culture.'⁵² The understanding from this, then, which ties in with MacDiarmid's function as a modernist writer, is that the Scots language should be used in a new way entirely; not as a translation of current methods but a development of these (see the previous discussion on 'Drunk Man' as primary evidence for this). Alex Thomson expresses this succinctly when he explains, 'the Renaissance needs to be understood not as an artistic

⁴⁷ David Goldie, 'Hugh MacDiarmid, Harry Lauder and Scottish Popular Culture' in *International Journal of Scottish Literature*, Iss. 1, (Glasgow: Association of Scottish Literary Studies, 2006), p.2.

⁴⁸ A. Riach, 'MacDiarmid's Burns', p.199.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.203.

⁵⁰ Gerard Carruthers, David Goldie & Alistair Renfrew, 'Introduction' in *Scottish Cultural Review of Language and Literature* (18), (Editions Rodopi BV, 2012), p.15.

⁵¹ Ibid, p.15.

⁵² Hanne Tange, 'Writing the Nation', p.61.

movement professing the revival of vernacular styles and traditions, but as a revolutionary movement whose significance depends on its self-understanding as a variant of the wider aesthetic critique of modernity.⁵³ If applying this mode of thinking to the MacDiarmid and Burns relationship, we can then understand more clearly what MacDiarmid is attempting to do – take an existing cultural icon and remould him into a figure which suits a new generation’s beliefs and goals. Labelling the disciples of Burns in the early twentieth century in a disparaging way and attacking them and their icon at every opportunity, was MacDiarmid’s attempt to reclaim the legacy of Burns for a Modernist agenda, as well as his own Renaissance movement – it is this line of argument which requires further analysis.

MacDiarmid unambiguously criticises Burns when he says:

Burns led directly to this sorry pass through his anti-intellectualism and his xenophobia. It is nonsense to say that he embodies all the great elements of the Scottish tradition when in these two main respects he in fact completely betrayed it.⁵⁴

One of the steps MacDiarmid took in his attempt to knock down the ‘monstrous monument’⁵⁵ of Burns created by the Burns Cult is through his use of betrayal as a motivating factor. As explained in the opening section of this chapter, MacDiarmid saw betrayal in the Anglicisation of the seventeenth century Scottish writers. It is the repetition of this theme in MacDiarmid’s writing on Burns and the Burns Cult, with its connotations of disloyalty and corruption, which is then frequently followed by a positive reference, which allows us to recognise his intent in attempting to discredit Burns without being overtly critical. To exemplify further, MacDiarmid uses the same phrase when he claims that Burns’s ambition and desire, (‘ae spark o’ Nature’s fire/That’s a’ the learning I desire’⁵⁶), was a ‘betrayal of Dunbar and Gavin Douglas and the other great *makars* to whom Burns owed so much, and it has been largely responsible for landing the Scottish Muse in the horrible mess it has occupied since.’⁵⁷ The problem with MacDiarmid lambasting Burns for dismissing the poetry of his predecessors and attributing his own work to genius, is that there

⁵³ Alex Thomson, ‘From “Renaissance” to Referendum?’, p.66.

⁵⁴ H. MacDiarmid, *Burns Today and Tomorrow*, p.23.

⁵⁵ Hugh MacDiarmid, ‘The Burns Cult’ in *Hugh MacDiarmid: Selected Prose*, edited by Alan Riach, (Manchester: Carcanet, 1992), p.105.

⁵⁶ Robert Burns, ‘Epistle To J. Lapraik, An Old Scottish Bard’ in *Robert Burns: The Complete Poetical Works*, (Alloway Publishing, Ayrshire, 1993), p.102, ll.73-74.

⁵⁷ H. MacDiarmid, *Burns Today and Tomorrow*, p.23.

is no concrete evidence that Burns even had access to the works of the fifteenth and sixteenth century makars. In *The Bard*, Robert Crawford's 2009 biography, Burns's main influences are cited as 'rich, maternal sources of song and oral tradition,'⁵⁸ and the poetry of the English poet Alexander Pope 'showed Burns what could be accomplished in modern English.'⁵⁹ The biggest influences in a Scottish sense came from Blind Harry's *Wallace*, which had a greater impact on his nationalist tendencies than his poetry,⁶⁰ and (ironically given MacDiarmid and Muir's dismissal of the existence of a Scottish literature from the sixteenth century onwards), eighteenth century poets such as Allan Ramsay and Robert Fergusson. Despite the misnomer, MacDiarmid goes on to praise Burns, claiming him for the modern Scottish Renaissance when saying, 'What would Burns have thought of the Scottish Renaissance Movement? He'd have been with it all the way – and further. He said so again and again in advance of the event.'⁶¹ The Burns that MacDiarmid is identifying here is the Burns who wrote in the Scots language, rather than the Burns who composed in classical Augustan English. A prime example of the Burns that MacDiarmid is celebrating here is in Burns's adaption of a 1742 English poem, 'The Parting Kiss' by Robert Dodsley. According to Robert Crawford, 'Burns metamorphoses this poem,' achieved in part by giving it 'greater vernacular urgency.'⁶² 'Ae Fond Kiss' (1791), which was the result of Burns's revision of this work, is described by Maurice Lindsay as 'a people's poem if ever there was one.'⁶³ Such praise ties in entirely with the Burns that MacDiarmid wishes to claim.

There is another feature of MacDiarmid's writing on Burns which again relates back to the discussion in chapter one on Edwin Muir, only in the case of MacDiarmid, it is perhaps more obvious: professional jealousy. We see evidence of this from David Goldie, as he draws a comparison between MacDiarmid and James Joyce, and their respective engagements with modernist popular culture:

Joyce shows, with a humour and magnanimity rarely seen in MacDiarmid, that the popular culture of modernity, vulgar and mongrel as it is, is a vital – perhaps even a central – component of the national life that the serious modern artist cannot afford to ignore. In setting himself apart from this aspect of national life

⁵⁸ Robert Crawford, *The Bard*, (London: Jonathon Cape, 2009), p.22.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p.56

⁶⁰ Ibid, pp. 47-49.

⁶¹ H. MacDiarmid, *Burns Today and Tomorrow*, p.89.

⁶² R. Crawford, *The Bard*, p.343.

⁶³ Maurice Lindsay, 'Burns and Scottish Poetry', *Love and Liberty: Robert Burns, a bicentenary celebration*, (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1997), p.147.

MacDiarmid forced himself into a number of awkward, sometimes specious, arguments to justify his self-estimation as the national bard.⁶⁴

It is also evident in the words of MacDiarmid himself, in his poem ‘Second Hymn to Lenin’ (1932):

Are my poems spoken in the factory and fields,
In the streets o’ the toon?
Gin they’re no, I’m failin’ to dae
What I ocht to ha’ dune. (ll.17-20)

These lines demonstrate MacDiarmid’s own ambitions as a poet, that he wishes to be one whose work is quoted by the public as they go about their everyday life – the way that Burns was during his own lifetime. The extract from Goldie’s essay alludes to why MacDiarmid’s ambition remains only an ambition, and not a reality – he was too far removed from the popular culture, from the low and middlebrow culture that he acknowledges and decries, to become an assimilated part of it. Goldie’s claim that MacDiarmid wished to assert himself as the national bard of Scotland is not an exaggeration, but it is a highly ambitious, perhaps impossible goal for MacDiarmid to ever achieve. His distance from the popular cultural psyche of Scotland is one reason for this, but this was not a purely accidental occurrence. Hanne Tange describes the intentional moves by MacDiarmid to place himself outwith the mainstream cultural trends: ‘From the beginning, Hugh MacDiarmid’s radical departure from the conventions of past generations attracted the attention of his countrymen.’⁶⁵ This had a polarising effect, with his manifestos encouraging ‘young Scots to discard established institutions such as the Burns Federation,’⁶⁶ and to associate themselves with more forward-thinking movements, such as the modern Scottish Renaissance. However, his poetry was overly experimental for the general public, according to contemporary reports.⁶⁷ There could be slight parallels drawn between MacDiarmid and Burns in this respect: Burns achieved fame and levels of notoriety by producing work which was considered radical and different, on both a local and national level. Corey Andrews explains that for a writer to break into the ‘literary field, their work must exhibit both competence and distinction,’⁶⁸ something evident in both poets’ work. Much of the early criticism of Burns’s work focussed on his rural background and his apparent natural gift: Henry Mackenzie wrote the

⁶⁴ D. Goldie, ‘Hugh MacDiarmid, Harry Lauder’, p.19.

⁶⁵ H. Tange, ‘Writing the Nation’, p.56.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p.56.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p.56.

⁶⁸ Corey Andrews, *The Genius of Scotland*, (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2015), p.71.

‘most influential review’⁶⁹ of the Kilmarnock edition in December 1786, where the moniker of ‘Heaven-taught Ploughman’ was first bestowed on Burns. The biggest difference between MacDiarmid and Burns was that the latter was able to ‘understand and empathise with others,’⁷⁰ through his poetry, and he remained grounded within his local community and his work was demographically accessible to all. MacDiarmid was altogether more alienating to much of the population, both through the use of his estranging language in his poetry and his elitist attitude. The popularity Burns enjoyed during his lifetime, and the iconic status he received following his death, could never be replicated by a man such as MacDiarmid.

The Oxford English Dictionary has fourteen discrete definitions of the word ‘jealous’; it is with definition 1a that I refer to in the case of MacDiarmid and his view on Burns: ‘Wrathful, furious.’⁷¹ As noted above, MacDiarmid greatly admires Burns artistry, even if he refers to him as a ‘traitor’, but he clearly exposes his wrath when it comes to tackling the Burns Cult, described in his own words as:

The hordes of bourgeois “orators” who annually befoul his memory by the expression of sentiments utterly antipathetic to that stupendous element in him which ensured his fame – an element, it cannot be overstressed, utterly and forever irreconcilable with the political, religious, social and all other bearings and elements of the personalities and lives of 99.9 (repeater) of his yearly panegyrists. Burns cult, forsooth! It has denied his spirit to honour his name. It has denied his poetry to laud his amours. It has preserved his furniture and repelled his message. It has built itself up on the progressive refusal of his lead in regard to Scottish politics, Scottish literature, and the Scottish tongue. It knows nothing about him or his work – or the work that should be continuance of his – except the stupid and stereotyped sentiments it belches out annually.⁷²

If there is an inconsistency in MacDiarmid’s views on Burns himself, or on any other subject, there is absolutely no doubt about his feelings on the movement which surrounds Burns’s afterlife. Yet the anger which issues forth from MacDiarmid when he discusses this organisation is founded on a true feeling of missed opportunity, of wastefulness on the part of Burns Clubs and the Burns Federation: ‘What an organisation the World Federation of Burns Clubs could have been – could even yet become – if it were animated by the true spirit

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.75

⁷⁰ Ibid, p.77.

⁷¹ ‘Jealous’, OED.com [accessed 25.09.2017].

⁷² H. MacDiarmid, *Burns Today and Tomorrow*, pp.1-2.

of Burns,'⁷³ is how he posits the argument for what Burns legacy could be used for. This is essentially a repetition of the sentiment found in Muir, particularly in his analysis of the Ramsay MacDonald speech at the unveiling of the Burns Memorial, discussed in chapter one. The elitism and sense of superior knowledge, the 'I know best' insinuation is clearly manifest in both MacDiarmid and Muir. In quoting Cyril Pearl, MacDiarmid claims 'the Burns legend is largely dependent on a complete misprizal of Burns's work – a determined "preference for the inferior"[...] "most still think of Burns as the author of *The Cottars Saturday Night*, *Scots Wha Hae*, and *Auld Lang Syne* rather as the author of *The Jolly Beggars*, *Holy Willie's Prayer*, and the *Rantin' Dog*. Burns would have enjoyed the irony of it.'"⁷⁴ What MacDiarmid is looking for is a way of applying Burns to critical thinking in social and political modes, through 'a programme based on his essential motives applied to crucial contemporary issues as he applied them while he was living to what, according to his lights, were some of the crucial issues of his own day and generation.'⁷⁵ Again, the dichotomy of MacDiarmid's relationship with Burns is apparent: there is his enthusiasm for the way in which Burns engaged with his own social environment and challenged issues through his work, but there is also the anger that this is not what Burns is being remembered for in some sectors of society, notably those with the greatest influence over Burns's legacy. Part of this is commented on by Alan Riach, as he notes, 'the Burns clubs had produced no valuable literary study of Burns or scholarly annotated editions of his letters, let alone shown any support for contemporary Scottish poets or Scottish literature of any kind outwith Burns himself.'⁷⁶ Two retorts, however, must be made to this claim. Firstly, we must ask whether there was any real onus on the Burns Clubs to produce such documents? If their primary function is to celebrate Burns, then should they also be depended on to contribute scholarly or critical materials towards the study of Burns? Secondly, as even a cursory glance at the *Burns Chronicle* in the editions produced between 1920 and 1940 will show, much scholarly and critical work was being produced by Burnsians, and not all of it completely focussed on Burns either. Riach expands on his point by saying that MacDiarmid is levelling the criticism at 'academic and educational establishments'⁷⁷ more than at Burns Club members, but this should not detract from the statement MacDiarmid makes in 'The Burns Cult' (1934)

⁷³ Ibid, p.27.

⁷⁴ Ibid, p.4.

⁷⁵ Ibid, p.27.

⁷⁶ A. Riach, 'MacDiarmid's Burns', p.203.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p.203.

when he advises that it ‘must be killed stone-dead’.⁷⁸ The violent sentiment which underlies this message is undoubtedly intentional from MacDiarmid; this is in fact emblematic of postcolonial writing, a theoretical mode of literary criticism which is discussed in more depth below. MacDiarmid continues with the combative phraseology throughout the essay, when he cites the ‘*raison d’être*’ of the Burns Cult as aiming ‘to deny that Burns was Burns – and to make him instead acceptable to conventional standards that would have found in him their most powerful and persistent enemy, and to middle-class ‘buddies’ whom he would have flayed alive.’⁷⁹ The ‘conventional standards’ to which MacDiarmid refers is something the modern Scottish Renaissance intends to upset. It is, however, debatable as to whether MacDiarmid is being entirely fair to the Burns Federation with this comment. The five-point Constitution (see Appendix 2) sent out to all secretaries of known Burns Clubs in 1892 is documented in the *Burns Chronicle* of the same year, and then included at the beginning of the subsequent editions of the chronicle. The letter states that the purpose of the Federation is ‘to establish that wide and comprehensive Brotherhood’, an intention which was ‘the most intense aspiration of the Poet’s heart.’⁸⁰ The Constitution points are followed by the observation that ‘it is the intention of the Executive Council, as far as the funds will permit, to engage competent persons to superintend the publication of scarce and valuable Works on Burns, both original and compiled.’⁸¹ These motives suggest that MacDiarmid was again being selective in his claims about Burns, as the Burns Federation from its original inception did have the aim of promoting Burns’s work when possible.

Despite this, it should by now be clear that MacDiarmid is rallying against the legacy of Burns more than Burns himself, although he himself recognises that sometimes one may be mistaken for the other: ‘my attitude to Burns has been sorely misunderstood because of the necessity I have been under of attacking the *bourgeois* Burns Cult, a monstrous misappropriation of Burns, whitewashed and respectabilized.’⁸² This ‘monstrous misappropriation’ also refers to the afore-mentioned metonymy that MacDiarmid sees in relation to how Scotland is viewed both abroad and by the low/middlebrows within the country. One significant component of this, something which incorporates several of these metonymic images in one, neat package, is the Burns Supper, and, as is to be expected,

⁷⁸ H. MacDiarmid, ‘The Burns Cult’, p.103.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p.103.

⁸⁰ *Burns Chronicle* 1892, edited by John Muir, (Kilmarnock: D. Brown & Co., 1892), pp.125-26.

⁸¹ Ibid, p.126.

⁸² Hugh MacDiarmid, ‘Robert Burns, Sir Walter Scott and Others’ in *Lucky Poet*, p.191.

MacDiarmid holds his own views on this kind of event. As is also to be expected, these views are wildly contradictory in places. To begin with, he praises the Annual Suppers as, ‘infinitely preferable in almost every way to formal commemorations of poet’s anniversaries in other countries,’⁸³ – so far, so good. He admits that his ‘sole reservation’ is that Burns must be remembered primarily as a poet, and continues, ‘I would certainly be the last person in the world to wish to modify the gorging and the boozing, since these create an atmosphere Burns himself would have been at home in, and consequently an appropriate setting for his songs and poems.’⁸⁴ This, however, is exactly what he rallies against in ‘Your Immortal Memory, Burns’, a poem which is nothing short of a rant at the indulgence one may encounter at a typical Burns Supper. For writers such as Robert Hay Carnie, ‘Your Immortal Memory, Burns’ was little more than propaganda from MacDiarmid. Carnie’s essay ‘Hugh MacDiarmid, Robert Burns and the Burns Federation’ makes a convincing case for many of MacDiarmid’s opinions on Burns and the Burns Federation being based on an anti-English premise, points which have been suggested in this chapter already. Carnie posits MacDiarmid as a propagandist from his experience as a journalist and editor, and by which he classifies ‘writing that propagates a particular viewpoint or creed, to the exclusion and outright rejection of the validity of opposing viewpoints or creeds’.⁸⁵ Of ‘Your Immortal Memory, Burns’ specifically, Carnie sees this as an attack on ‘two obvious satiric targets: the Scottish common man’s rejection of all poetry save that of Robert Burns, and the “haggis and whisky” emphasis he finds at such events.’⁸⁶ The second target is a blatant contradiction in MacDiarmid’s own agenda, given the previous quotation that he would be the last person to criticise the ‘gorging and boozing’ of Burns Suppers. ‘Your Immortal Memory, Burns’ is nothing, if not an onslaught on the tradition. ‘No-Soul and No-Brain/And Humour-Far-From-It/Bunkum and Bung, Swallow-All Vomit’ (ll.18-20) are representative of MacDiarmid’s opinion of Immortal Memories which take place at, and are, indeed, a staple aspect of, the Burns Supper. Burns is referred to as ‘O Poet Intestinal’ (ll.12), which Carnie interprets as an attack on the ‘intellectual limitations’⁸⁷ of his admirers, presumably for their preference of feeding their stomachs over their brains. ‘Your Immortal Memory, Burns’ seems to be regarded as a bitter blemish on *Penny Wheep* (1926), the collection in which it

⁸³ H. MacDiarmid, *Burns Today and Tomorrow*, p.37.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p.37.

⁸⁵ Robert Hay Carnie, ‘Hugh MacDiarmid, Robert Burns and The Burns Federation’ in *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 30, Iss. 1, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), p.261.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p.266.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p.266.

was contained, and the first target that Carnie mentions is also referred to by Robert Crawford: ‘MacDiarmid satirises those who know no poetry other than that of Burns.’⁸⁸ Crawford goes on to cite the ‘O Poet Intestinal’ line, before concluding that this particular Burns, the one celebrated for indulgence and not poetry, is ‘an irrelevance to the future of Scottish literature.’⁸⁹ The continued presence of Burns in today’s culture and as an academic interest would suggest otherwise.

In another twist to the MacDiarmid/Muir conflict, there is a reference by Crawford to the attempt by MacDiarmid to cast Burns in a Nietzschean role – as was explained in chapter one, it was the application of Nietzsche’s philosophies to the rise of fascism throughout Europe which turned Muir away from him and onto Burns instead. The opposite is the case with MacDiarmid – he imagines ‘a rebel, Nietzschean Burns’, which ties in with the ‘elements of sex, Scots and religion’ as presented in his own early poetry collections.⁹⁰ This re-imagining and new way of interpretation or applying traditional philosophies is one of the traits of MacDiarmid’s critical writing which comfortably positions him as a postcolonial writer. (This is a methodology implemented by James Barke also, as analysed in chapter four.) Situating Scotland as a postcolonial nation is a curious task, due in part to its role as the coloniser during the height of the British Empire. Work by many contemporary and eminent academics discuss this, details of which can be found in Michael Gardiner’s introduction to *Scottish Literature and Postcolonial Literature* (2011). Avoiding the debate on whether Scotland can be considered in a postcolonial discussion (although this is a question described in the book’s introduction as ‘wearied and misleading’⁹¹), the theoretical framework behind postcolonialism incorporates nationalism and nation-building as two of its key constituents – two elements which are also integral to MacDiarmid’s Renaissance project. In *Beginning Postcolonialism*, John McLeod sees one of the essential parts of nation building as a re-evaluation of its history, partly through the identification of ‘chief actors and actresses in the story of the nation: great leaders, scientists, martyrs, writers, generals or admirals. These figures come from the people yet stand apart from the crowd due to their extraordinary or inspirational qualities.’⁹² In the relationship between MacDiarmid and

⁸⁸ Robert Crawford, ‘MacDiarmid, Burnsians, and Burns’s Legacy’ in *Burns and other Poets*, edited by David Sergeant and Fiona Stafford, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p.190.

⁸⁹ Ibid, p.190.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p.189.

⁹¹ Michael Gardiner, ‘Introduction’ in *Scottish Literature and Postcolonial Literature*, edited by Michael Gardiner, Graeme McDonald and Niall O’Gallagher, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p.1.

⁹² John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p.70.

Burns, we have this figure represented to a lesser and a greater extent, respectively. Burns was the chief actor in the story of the Scottish nation throughout the nineteenth century; MacDiarmid strived, unsuccessfully,⁹³ to be this for Scotland during the twentieth century.

In a nation that could not identify with great leaders or generals or admirals, unless it also acquiesced to its role within the colonial British state, those wishing to propagate the case of nationalism within Scotland faced a dilemma, and MacDiarmid recognised this. He writes in *Burns Today and Tomorrow*:

In the latter part of the 16th and nearly the whole of the 17th century, Scotland was engrossed in questions of theology and politics and war. Then came a sudden change in the direction of the national aspirations – the desire to become colonists instead of soldiers; to become traders instead of theologians.⁹⁴

Through his political involvement in both the Communist Party and the National Party of Scotland (later the SNP), MacDiarmid was active in trying to resolve this dilemma and what he saw as inherent issue in the Scottish psyche. He also attempted to do this through his cultural activities, and, as should be apparent by now, his treatment of Burns. One of the first steps in the attempt to create a new nation is through ‘the construction of a specifically national consciousness,’ which is ‘dependant on important *cultural* activities.’⁹⁵ Given the discussion which has taken place thus far, it could be assumed that the following quotation, taken from Frantz Fanon and re-worded by McLeod, was written with MacDiarmid and Burns in mind (although it was almost certainly not): ‘if the native intellectual wishes to stay in step with the people, he or she must participate in the *reinterpretation* of traditional culture in the present with the aim of opening up the possibility of a new future.’⁹⁶ This, above all else, from personal and professional jealousy to egotistical episodes, is what MacDiarmid was aiming at with his writing on Burns, and with Scotland - ‘we can still affirm the fearless radical spirit of the true Scotland [...] we can rise and quit ourselves like men and make Scotland worthy to have had a Burns – and conscious of it,’⁹⁷ was his patriotic call to arms

⁹³ This is not to detract from the importance of MacDiarmid as a figure within Scottish literature throughout the twentieth century, as has been documented by Riach, Lyall and Palmer McCulloch. However, his legacy in comparison to Burns is proof enough that they were not equals in this respect.

⁹⁴ H. MacDiarmid, *Burns Today and Tomorrow*, p.113.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p.85.

⁹⁶ Ibid, p.87.

⁹⁷ H. MacDiarmid, ‘The Burns Cult’, p.105.

in ‘The Burns Cult’. This grand sentiment encapsulates the legacy that MacDiarmid was aiming at, but it also symbolises the target he failed to hit.

Chapter 3

‘I would compare Mrs Carswell to an ant endeavouring to consume Vesuvius by nibbling at its base.’¹

Catherine Carswell & Robert Burns

Whilst Hugh MacDiarmid wished to become Scotland’s national poet, Catherine Carswell’s ambition was slightly less grandiose. The aim with her 1930 publication, *The Life of Robert Burns*, was to contribute ‘an honourable and honest piece of research to my country.’² The resultant criticism of the publication, both positive and negative, eclipsed these relatively humble intentions and made Carswell the author of ‘the most vibrantly written and readable biography of Scotland’s national bard’ ever written³ and, simultaneously, ‘the most hated woman in Scotland.’⁴ The extraordinary fallout from the text is, perhaps, when viewed from the distance of time and from a much more liberal societal setting, somewhat surprising. Yet it is this text, and its critical reception, which illustrates more clearly than anything else produced during the era of the modern Scottish Renaissance, the psyche of the Scottish public and the light within which Burns was regarded. Arguably, the Burns legacy exists in two separate epochs – pre-Carswell and post-Carswell. Such a classification is by no means bombastic: Alan Riach, is but one voice who maintains that Carswell ‘changed the understanding of Burns in the twentieth century,’⁵ citing her *The Life of Robert Burns* as one of two ‘revolutionary reassessments’⁶ of Burns; David Daiches’s 1952 critical study of Burns being the other. The validity of such a claim is questionable: dedicated Burns scholars such as F.B. Snyder and Hans Hecht were contributing excellent and vital work to Burns studies in this period, arguably of more worth to both academic and non-academic

¹ S.R. Millar, ‘Letter to *Daily Record*, September 1930’ in *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland 1918-1939*, edited by Margery Palmer McCulloch, (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2004), p.121

² Catherine Carswell, *Selected Letters of Catherine Carswell*, edited by Jan Pilditch, (Edinburgh: Kennedy & Boyd, 2016), p.76.

³ Gerard Carruthers, ‘The Procedure of Life’ in *Open The Doors: The Achievement of Catherine Carswell*, edited by Carol Anderson, (Edinburgh: Ramsay Head Press, 2001), p.165

⁴ Alasdair Gray, ‘Glories of Sex and a singular man’, review of *Dirt and Deity: A Life of Robert Burns* by Ian McIntyre, in *The Guardian*, (November 17, 1995), p.25.

⁵ Alan Riach, ‘MacDiarmid’s Burns’ in *Robert Burns & Cultural Authority*, edited by Robert Crawford, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p.208.

⁶ Ibid, p.208.

communities than Carswell's and Daiches's productions. Without dismissing their important work in the same field, the aim of this chapter is to contextualise Carswell's biography of Burns, as it evaluates the volatile cultural period within which it was produced, the effect of Carswell's style and the sexual candour of her writing, and the political aspect of her work which has largely gone unnoticed in criticism to date.

There are several reasons for the outrage which met the release of *The Life of Burns*, part of which was also serialised in *The Daily Record* in September 1930 (and therefore given more attention than may have otherwise been afforded it).⁷ In his 1999 essay for the *Burns Chronicle*, Ian Hunter discusses Catherine Carswell as a 'wayward genius',⁸ a moniker which he also ascribes to Burns himself. Hunter attempts to summarise the controversy surrounding Carswell and her work (in the same fashion as Richard Price, noted in the introduction) in a single statement: 'Well, what was it about Carswell's biography that touched off such a malevolent firestorm? The answer is simple, although still denied by some Burnsians: namely, Carswell was the first biographer to expose Burns's dark side.'⁹ Undoubtedly this was an aspect of the fallout but an aspect is all that it is. It also fails to recognise that aspects of Burns's 'dark side' were being discussed in biographies in the years following his death: James Currie's biography (1800), for example, did not shy away from (incorrectly) suggesting Burns was an alcoholic.¹⁰ The complete answer is not simple, as Hunter claims, but altogether more complex. To begin with, it is necessary to understand the genre of the work that we are considering. It would be safe to assume that Carswell would class it as biography: her 'energetic brief to herself for the book was to bring back to life the myth-eaten corpse of Burns through being "more honest and painstaking" than any previous biographer.'¹¹ One of Carswell's fiercest critics, the Reverend Lauchlan MacLean

⁷ It is clear from Carswell's letters from August 1930 that the serialisation was being sought by *The Daily Record*, presumably as the controversial aspect (and thus sales of the paper being affected) was noted. No details of the arrangement are given, although initially it was the *Express* who were mooted as looking to serialise the work. See discussion on page 79.

⁸ Ian Hunter, 'Wayward Genius: Catherine Carswell and her *Life of Robert Burns*', *Burns Chronicle* 1999, (Kilmarnock, The Burns Federation, 1999), p.136.

⁹ *Ibid*, pp.136-137.

¹⁰ Kenneth Simpson, 'Introduction', *Love and Liberty: Robert Burns a Bicentenary Celebration*, edited by Kenneth Simpson, (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1997), p.2.

¹¹ Gerard Carruthers, 'The Procedure of Life', p.165.

Watt, when reviewing the book for the 1932 *Burns Chronicle*, gives his opinion on what biography should be:

Biography is not the story of the scandals of a man. The Devil's Advocate is not a good biographer. Nor is biography meant to satisfy prurient inquisitiveness. A man's greatness is found in his work and teaching. His value for biographical purposes is his uniqueness in certain qualities whereby he transcends his fellows.¹²

This definition of biography is certainly the more traditional one and could arguably address the deluge of biographies and autobiographies which one will encounter in any High Street bookshop in the present day, many of which do not contain the slightest hint of a transcendental subject, except perhaps in way of financial worth. Key to Watt's argument is that he believes biography must be didactic in some sense, that the true objective of a biographer must be to highlight the qualities which set their subject apart from the common man or woman. This is no bad philosophy, but the problem with Watt's definition is that he can only see value in the lesson being taught if it is positive and wholesome, a characteristic of Victorian and nineteenth-century principles in respect to literature and culture in general.¹³ For Watt, 'biography written by the Man or the Woman with the muck Rake, searching not for jewels but for dirt, is not biography, but very nearly slander. The work of this Midden School of Biography, however well written, is only, after all, an exercise in clart.'¹⁴ What Watt fails to recognise is that highlighting the failings of a man or woman, no matter how exceptional their genius is in other areas of their life, is not necessarily slanderous, and can still be didactic.

Watt's review also highlights an important shift in the cultural perception of what biography was, or should be, a shift which was propagated by the Modernist movement. The change in modes of belief and ideologies which had been long-established in western culture (and the views to which Watt subscribed) were also reflected, in a literary sense, through form. In his chapter for *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, David Trotter writes:

¹² Lauchlan MacLean Watt, 'Burns Biography', *Burns Chronicle* 1932, (Kilmarnock: The Burns Federation, 1932), p.37.

¹³ The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms alludes to the negative connotations associated with Victorian literature being reflective of the Victorians in general, as 'blindly imperialistic, self-satisfied, humourlessly religiose, hypocritically sentimental, and above all sexually repressed.' p.352.

¹⁴ Ibid, p.36.

From about 1890 to about 1930, the novel was as popular as it had been during the Victorian period, and newly diverse. According to Henry James, in 1899, it was a universally valid form, “the book *par excellence*”; according to Ford Madox Ford, in 1930, it was indispensable, “the only source to which you can turn to ascertain how your fellows spend their entire lives.” And yet there was also a feeling, more prevalent among writers than among critics, that the novel as traditionally conceived was no longer up to the job: that its imaginary worlds did not, in fact, correspond to the way one’s fellows spent their entire lives.¹⁵

The way in which the novel was regarded as a form of literature, indeed, the way in which it was traditionally regarded as the literary medium which attempted to ‘extend and revise a shared knowledge of the world,’¹⁶ was under threat. Through both the creative and critical work of writers such as James Joyce, Ford Madox Ford and Henry James, ideas were discussed and proposed as ways of preventing the demise of this form of writing. Ford, in the same approach as James, and in his belief that novels should produce knowledge, insisted that ‘every last detail in a novel should be at once explicable and explanatory.’¹⁷ The great modernist poet T.S. Eliot ‘wanted to make the novel possible again by instilling into it a stricter form.’¹⁸ He admired Joyce’s use of the Homeric myth, and his solution ‘to literature’s inadequacy in the face of futility and anarchy was *more* literature,’¹⁹ if the novel associated itself more with ‘epic’ than ‘realism’, it would retain its status as the medium which extended and revised ‘a shared knowledge of the world’. Eliot essentially wished to do with the novel as a genre what MacDiarmid wished to do with the iconicity of Burns – remould it into a modern, contemporary beacon to reflect the cultural mode of the moment. What, then, does this mean for biography, generally, and Catherine Carswell, specifically?

There are two threads connecting Carswell, and *The Life of Robert Burns*, to this re-evaluation of literature and culture more generally. Firstly, one of Carswell’s close correspondents and indeed biggest supporters of her Burns project, was D.H. Lawrence – the inscription at the beginning of her book reads: ‘Without D.H. Lawrence, My Friend, And Donald Carswell, My Husband, *this book could not have been.*’²⁰ She would also write a biography of Lawrence – *The Savage Pilgrimage* (1932) – following his death in 1930, and

¹⁵ David Trotter, ‘The Modernist Novel’, *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, edited by Michael Levenson, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.70.

¹⁶ Ibid, p.74.

¹⁷ Ibid, p.69.

¹⁸ Ibid, p.74.

¹⁹ Ibid, p.74.

²⁰ Catherine Carswell, *The Life of Robert Burns*, (Edinburgh, Canongate Classics, 1930), flyscript.

he provided the link between her and this specific strand of the Modernist movement, given that ‘he was the writer who most summarily resolved the dialectic,’²¹ which was raised by Eliot, through decreeing that ‘a work of art should be judged neither by its fidelity to appearance nor by purely aesthetic criteria, but by its tendency to intensify or diminish the will-to-life.’²² In layman’s terms, Lawrence was proposing that the resuscitation of the novel as a genre would depend on the content of works being produced, and it must be content which would in some way affect the Nietzschean theory of ‘will-to-power’ or ‘will-to-live’: i.e. the main driving force in humans. Given that this was Lawrence’s personal *modus operandi*, it is therefore unsurprising that as one of Carswell’s biggest influencers and correspondents, this ideology would become manifest to some degree in her own work. (This will be further evidenced when regarding Carswell’s style later in the chapter, but is commented on by Gerard Carruthers when he states that, ‘Carswell, subscribing to the primitivist side of modernism, is entirely sure that the essential well-springs of human motivation and behaviour are unchanging.’²³) It is worth noting that Carswell’s third biography took fourteenth-century poet Giovanni Bocaccio as its subject, a man who ‘has something of the imperfection that is the charm of life.’²⁴ Another attraction of Bocaccio to Carswell was his attitude to sex and women – he ‘followed nature, was faithful to natural love, and in essentials trusted the heart before the intellect.’²⁵ As with Lawrence and Burns, Carswell is choosing men who have a kind of sexual aura in one way or another, subjects which compliment her style and vice versa. That these automatically add an element of controversy (itself a debate for a different paper) only highlights the change in sexual empowerment that was being displayed by women in this period. The second thread is clarified through an essay by Clare Battershill, ‘Life Before “The New Biography”’ (2015), where she surveys the changes to biographical writing which were becoming apparent during the 1920s, again propagated by names recognisable with the modernist movement, Rita Sackville-West and Virginia Woolf, amongst others. As Battershill explains, ‘no longer confined to authoritative, two-volume Victorian tomes, modernist biographers were keen to

²¹ D. Trotter, ‘The Modernist Novel’, p.76.

²² Ibid, p.76.

²³ Gerard Carruthers, ‘The Procedure of Life’, p.165.

²⁴ Catherine Carswell, *The Tranquil Heart: Portrait of Giovanni Bocaccio*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1937), p.228.

²⁵ Ibid, p.viii-ix.

experiment.²⁶ One aspect of this new found freedom for biographers writing in the twenties and thirties was evident in a paradigmatic shift, with a ‘focus on personality, rather than impersonality.’²⁷ In essence, as the re-evaluation of what the novel should be defined as was taking place (as noted in Eliot, Joyce et al), so then other genres of literature also began the same re-evaluative process. The distinct boundaries between ‘factual’ biography and ‘imaginative’ novel became blurred, and biographical writers were given more creative rein over the thoughts and feelings of their subjects, in keeping with the new, modernist approach.

Thus, at the time of Carswell undertaking her Burns project, the typical biography of Burns being produced throughout the nineteenth century was no longer considered truly reflective of either contemporary society or, more importantly, of the ‘true’ story of Robert Burns. To exemplify this, and although there are a vast number to choose from, John Gibson Lockhart’s Burns biography of 1828, *Life of Robert Burns*, was hailed by Thomas Carlyle as ‘the best to date,’²⁸ and then seventy years later, by the compiler of Lockhart’s own life and letters, Andrew Lang in 1897, as ‘never likely to be superseded.’²⁹ These observations have not stood the test of time however: Franklin B. Snyder, a twentieth-century Burns biographer, lambasted Lockhart’s work, writing: ‘it is inexcusably inaccurate from beginning to end; at times demonstrably mendacious; generously sprinkled with unsubstantiated anecdotes.’³⁰ The general consensus on Lockhart’s work from both the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is that it was a conservative take on the life of Burns. Nigel Leask argues that ‘Lockhart insisted on constructing Burns as a proto-romantic enemy of improvement,’ and through “‘Romanticizing’ Burns, the Tory Lockhart was using Burns as a weapon against the Whig disciples of political economy on the ideological battle preceding the 1832 Reform Bill.³¹ The Burns portrayed by Lockhart was the antithesis to

²⁶ Clare Battershill, ‘Life Before “The New Biography”: Modernist Biographical Methods in The Hogarth Press’s “Books on Tolstoy” 1920-24’ in *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, Vol. 31, Issue 1, (Oxford: Taylor & Francis, 2015), p.109.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p.110.

²⁸ Thomas C. Richardson, ‘John Lockhart’s Burns: Stirring “National Enthusiasm”, in *Studies in Scottish Literature*, Vol.30, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), p.158.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p.157.

³⁰ Franklin B. Snyder, ‘Burns and his Biographers’ in *Burns Chronicle 1932*, (Kilmarnock: The Burns Federation, 1932), p.70.

³¹ Nigel Leask, *Robert Burns and Pastoral*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp.22-23.

the Modernist Burns, and in a letter to Catherine Carswell's husband Donald, on hearing of her plans for her own Burns biography, D.H. Lawrence commented:

Cath's idea of a Burns book I like very much. I always wanted to do one myself, but am not Scotchy enough. I read just now a bit of Lockhart's life of Burns. Made me spit! Those damned middle-class Lockharts grew lillies of the valley up their ---- to hear them talk... My word, you can't know Burns unless you hate the Lockharts and all the estimable *bourgeois* and upper classes as he really did – the narrow-gutted pigeons. Don't for God's sake, be mealy-mouthed like them. Oh, why doesn't Burns come to life and really salt them!³²

As this passionate appeal exemplifies, the popular opinion over the function of biography in the Modernist era was changing and the old literary conventions were being attacked, with great emotion. It was this kind of sentiment which underpinned Carswell's motivation in writing *The Life of Burns*, and which was to lead to the outrage, controversy and, indeed, death threats which were to follow its publication.

Perhaps the best summation of Carswell's book, and in the foregoing argument concerning the context of its production, was in a review by Bonamy Dobrée, who ascertained that 'it is doubtful if it is altogether a satisfactory biography. On the other hand, it is without doubt a most satisfactory novel.'³³ This exemplifies the confusion over the way in which it should be classified in terms of genre, and particularly casts doubt over the complete veracity of the narrative. This is not necessarily a negative criticism of Carswell; it merely alludes to new questions being raised about Burns's life and legacy through a quality, Modernist mode. Margery Palmer McCulloch gives an excellent account of what Carswell attempts with this text:

She does not reproduce and weigh up facts and arguments, present and analyse sources as one might find to a greater or lesser extent in a more conventional biographical account. Instead she brings Burns the man alive for us through her characterisation of him and the people around him, and through her use of an omniscient narrative voice together with at times a more free indirect style of narration she brings the thoughts and feelings of the principal characters closer to us.³⁴

³² D.H. Lawrence, as quoted in Hugh MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet*, (London: Jonathon Cape, 1972), p.193.

³³ Bonamy Dubree, *Spectator*, (25 October, 1930), p.601.

³⁴ Margery Palmer McCulloch, “‘Bad sort but – lovable’: Catherine Carswell’s The Life of Robert Burns”, *The Bibliotheca*, vol.22 (Jan 1, 1997), pp.76-77.

Through doing so, she is shifting the focus to ‘personality, rather than impersonality,’ the mark of Modernist biography as cited from the Battershill essay previously. The result of this technique then allows Carswell to depict scenes heretofore absent in any Burns biography. It also allows her to project her own feelings and opinions onto her Burns narrative, as in this example:

For a whole winter and more Robert went about his field work with one of the world’s worst novels in his pocket (he had been unlucky enough to secure a pocket edition), ardently believing it to be the world’s best. He thumbed it over devoutly till the binding was worn through, and then bought a new copy. Upon *The Man of Feeling* he would model himself. He took to leaning his head upon his hand and elbow on his knee in the correct attitude. He cultivated a dripping heart and was subject to pregnant silences, appropriate tears and bursts of rapture.³⁵

The less-than-subtle critique of *The Man of Feeling* is clear, and there is much to be made from this brief extract. As with the situation discussed with Muir and MacDiarmid, there is the argument for a lack of comprehension in respect to eighteenth century literature, particularly given the critical praise afforded to Mackenzie in contemporary academia. The disposability of Burns’s copy of *The Man of Feeling* can be read as a general comment on iconicity, with the idea that, despite an icon (in this case Burns’s copy of the book which he studied ‘devoutly’) having such powerful and emotional significance to a person, it can be replaced easily and quickly with a copy. What is most striking about this passage is the physical image presented of Burns, and particularly identifying that there is a conscious decision on his part to project a facade. The deliberate pose – which is not dissimilar to the pose replicated in memorial statues of Burns throughout the world, such as John Steell’s in Central Park, New York, but is in fact more akin to Auguste Rodin’s famous statue ‘The Thinker’ – is a reminder to the reader that the ‘genius’ of Burns, synonymous with such a pose, is more contrived than ‘natural’, as represented in his nineteenth century biographies. Not only is the external image artificial in this sense, but, in Carswell’s opinion, it is based on a character selected from ‘one of the world’s worst novels’. Carswell is leading her readers into the concomitant thought that the Burns ‘genius’ moniker itself is somehow based on a falsehood.

Further to this interpretation is significance of the language within the final sentence of the above extract, and the sexual undertones which can be identified within it – ‘dripping heart’ and ‘bursts of rapture’ are not merely coincidental sexual references. The use of the

³⁵ C. Carswell, *The Life of Robert Burns*, p.78.

adjective ‘pregnant’ to describe the silences is double-edged: a nod to the numerous pregnancies Burns was involved with, as well as the inference that when Burns is situated in a contemplative stance, his mind is still occupied with matters of sex. The narrative in *The Life of Burns*, and indeed Carswell’s entire body of work, has been described as ‘priapic’ by Gerard Carruthers, with the further assertion that her ‘writing is often soaked in innuendo.’³⁶ This is explained by her subscription to ‘the primitivist side of modernism,’³⁷ whereby she recognises the primal instincts within humans to be as evident in her contemporary society as it would be in Burns’s day, and we see examples of this throughout *The Life of Burns*, such as the following:

More than once of late, from the school window, Robert had noticed a girl moving about domestically in the garden next door, and had found it increasingly hard to concentrate upon his lesson. The struggle was at its height when he heard himself being ordered to go out. Mr Roger had desired him to take the sun’s altitude. He obeyed without loss of time. Next moment he was in the garden. The wall was not high. Soon he had spoken to the girl and found her friendly. She was called Peggy Thomson and her hair was as fair as Nelly’s. Sun, moon and stars forgot, he set about persuading her to meet him that same evening after school. She said she would.

For the rest of his time at Kirkoswald Robert did not work. William Niven was startled by the transformation in his clever friend, who seemed clever no longer except in the matter of devising meetings with his girl.³⁸

An analysis of this passage allows us to appreciate fully the strength of Carswell’s lascivious style. There is the obviously sexual connotative ‘desired’, and more sexually subversive words and phrases such as ‘ordered’, ‘obeyed’ or ‘the struggle was at its height’. There is the dual interpretation of ‘clever’, as a description of his intellectual talent, but also as a reference to the ‘skilful use of limbs or bodily movements’.³⁹ The breathless short sentences (‘He obeyed...not high’) add an element of both trepidation and excitement to the scene, but it is in the reference to both the garden and the wall where the true symbolism of the passage lies.

The change of attitude to sex, and how it was written about, from the Victorian period to the Modernist period is arguably as extreme as it was between the Modernist period and today’s society. This is the case made by Joyce Piell Wexler in her 2004 paper, where she

³⁶ G. Carruthers, ‘The Procedure of Life’, p.167.

³⁷ Ibid, p.165.

³⁸ C. Carswell, *The Life of Robert Burns*, p.73.

³⁹ ‘Clever’, OED.com.

asserts that ‘we tend to read sexual scenes as realistic accounts of ordinary behaviour. As a result, we lose the symbolic indeterminacy that descriptions of sex produced when they were transgressive.’⁴⁰ In other words, the use of symbolism in discussing or writing about sex was a Modernist trope, and something which Carswell is recognised to have utilised throughout much of her work. Sarah M. Dunnigan comments on ‘the explicit procedures of Carswell’s symbolism,’⁴¹ which are evident in *Open the Door!*, and of the same book, Carol Anderson praises the its ‘own distinctive power, with its beautiful, sometimes disturbing, symbolism and imagery.’⁴² Throughout history, in religion and literature, the garden has been symbolically significant; ‘the two most significant gardens in western literature are both biblical: the garden of Eden and the “garden enclosed” of the Song of Solomon.’⁴³ In the latter, the ‘sensual language’⁴⁴ of the Song of Solomon leads to the garden being regarded as an ‘erotic’ metaphor.⁴⁵ The literary device of the *hortus conclusus*, or the walled garden, appears in early modern Scottish literature in *The Kingis Quair* and *The Tretis of the Twa Marrit Wemen and the Wedow*, for example. The latter poem is an example of the tradition being subverted however, as the usual courtly romance is substituted for bawdy gossip. We thus have the wall which symbolises ‘the supernatural quality of the Virgin’s chastity,’⁴⁶ acting as a barrier to the garden, which is a ‘setting for and symbol of love encounters.’⁴⁷ Carswell’s allusion to the walled garden is a clear reference to this tradition, but as is her own style and the Modernist practice, the symbol is essentially redundant as Burns hops over the wall without any effort: the idea of courtly, romantic love is shattered and replaced with the physical action of love instead. It can also be regarded as a comment on the refusal by Carswell to collude with literary artificiality, a dissolving of the literary expectation. The

⁴⁰ Joyce Piell Wexler, ‘Sex Isn’t Everything (But It Can be Anything): The Symbolic Function of Extremity in Modernism’ in *College Literature*, Vol.31, No.2 (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, Spring 2004), p.164.

⁴¹ Sarah M. Dunnigan, ‘The hawk and the dove: religion, desire and aesthetics in *Open the Door!*’, *Open the Doors: The Achievement of Catherine Carswell*, edited by Carol Anderson (Edinburgh: Ramsay Head Press, 2001), p.97.

⁴² Carol Anderson, ‘Introduction’, *Open the Doors: The Achievement of Catherine Carswell*, p.7.

⁴³ *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*, edited by Michael Ferber, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.82.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.83.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p.82.

⁴⁶ Stanley Stewart, *The Enclosed Garden: The Tradition and the Image in Seventeenth Century Poetry*, (Madison, Milwaukee and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966), p.37.

⁴⁷ M. Ferber, *A Dictionary of Literary Symbols*, p.83.

idea of Burns conquering the wall, and thus the female, has a deeper significance still. One of the biggest criticisms from the afore-mentioned Reverend Watt in his review of the biography, was the reprinting of the letter from Burns to Bob Ainslie, ‘*verbatim*’.⁴⁸ The letter in question (‘a truly disgraceful letter’⁴⁹) is an explicit recounting of Burns’s intimate relationship with the pregnant Jean Armour (see Appendix 3). In the letter, Burns explains, ‘She did all this like a good girl, and I took the opportunity of some dry horse litter, and gave her such a thundering scalade that electrified the very marrow of her bones.’⁵⁰ ‘Scalade’ literally means to ‘attack by scaling the walls’, although Burns re-appropriates this meaning as an analogy for sex, and passionate, forceful sex as opposed to any sort of tender love. Therefore, when Carswell also uses the imagery of the wall as a facet of Burns’s relationship with Nell, we can recognise the euphemism being employed for the ease with which he is able to secure relations with her.

The purpose of highlighting Carswell’s style here is to offer a clearer contextualisation of the furore surrounding her biography. The outrage itself has been well-documented by Margery Palmer McCulloch, in her chapter for *Love and Liberty* (1997) and in *Modernism and Nationalism* (2004) and needs only brief reference here. Following the serialisation of Carswell’s *The Life of Robert Burns*, she was the recipient of comments from *Daily Record* readers which included: ‘it is regrettable that she has aimed for sensationalism rather than for truth,’⁵¹ and ‘No, Mrs Carswell, Burns is too big for you. Try something or somebody else.’⁵² The Reverend Watt classified it as ‘the kind of record Satan might keep near the door of his dark abode [...] an undocumented libel on the dead.’⁵³ More worryingly was a letter she received, signed by “Holy Willie” and ‘containing both a bullet and the instruction to use it “in a quiet corner” and so “leave the world a better and cleaner place.”’⁵⁴ The reason for such a vitriolic backlash to Carswell was not merely because she produced a

⁴⁸ L. Maclean Watt, ‘Burns Biography’, p.41.

⁴⁹ Margery Palmer McCulloch, ‘Sexual Poetics or the Poetry of Desire’, *Love & Liberty: Robert Burns, a bicentenary celebration*, edited Ken Simpson, (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1997), p.291.

⁵⁰ Robert Burns, ‘To Bob Ainslie, 3rd March, 1788’ in *The Letters of Robert Burns, Vol.1, 1780-1789*, second edition edited by G. Ross Roy, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp.250-251.

⁵¹ Alex Mutch, ‘Letter to *Daily Record*, September 1930’ in *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland 1918-1939*, edited by Margery Palmer McCulloch, (Association for Scottish Literary Studies, Glasgow, 2004), p.121.

⁵² S.R. Millar, *Ibid*, p.21.

⁵³ L. MacLean Watt, ‘Burns Biography’, p.36.

⁵⁴ M. Palmer McCulloch, ““Bad sort but – lovable””, p.72.

‘warts and all’⁵⁵ account of his life, as suggested by Ian Hunter, but is also because a) she is a woman, and b) her treatment of Highland Mary. The first point is almost ridiculous in its premise, yet is discussed further below. To fully comprehend the second point, one must first understand the cultural iconicity that was bestowed upon Highland Mary, not just by dedicated Burnsians, but by the general Scottish, British and international communities.

In an essay which emerged from work on the ‘Robert Burns: Inventing Tradition and Securing Memory, 1796-1909’ project, Pauline Mackay and Murray Pittock published an essay which explored the cultural history which grew up around the legend of Highland Mary. They assert that ‘very little is known about Robert Burns’s affair with Mary (or Margaret) Campbell [...] certainly not enough to merit the attention and status that she has acquired among many Burns devotees.’⁵⁶ Yet, by the mid-nineteenth century, ‘the relationship of Burns and Highland Mary and its images had almost become a national icon,’ and Mary was viewed as ‘a secular saint.’⁵⁷ This puzzling phenomenon is explained by Mackay and Pittock as existing due to a number of roles that Mary was to represent:

She was (variously) Burns’s only true love and a guarantee of the essential fidelity of his nature; the ‘saintly’ loved and lost ideal; the Highland love of a Lowland poet who completed his claim to be a national bard; and an icon of the tragedy of emigration, and the promise lost through death and displacement.⁵⁸

What Highland Mary symbolised was therefore more important to the preferred narrative of Burns’s life than the facts. The irony here is that one of the biggest criticisms which Carswell faced upon publication of the book was the departure from cold, hard facts and the entering ‘into the realm of conjecture, if not fantasy.’⁵⁹ It was this deviation, from what was already established as the ‘true’ Burns story (as discussed in both preceding chapters) that outraged many Burnsians and ‘Mariolaters’. It should be noted that Carswell expected this reaction, but whether she was intentionally intending to incite it is debatable. Certainly, the *Daily Record*’s decision to serialise it shows their awareness of the publicity it may receive and impact on their own potential sales figures. In correspondence with her friend Florence McNeill in 1929, she writes, ‘And *how furious* they will be to have Robert Burns brought

⁵⁵ I. Hunter, ‘Wayward Genius’, p.136.

⁵⁶ Murray Pittock and Pauline Mackay, ‘Highland Mary: Objects and Memories’ in *Romanticism* 18, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p.191.

⁵⁷ Ibid, pp.196-7.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.193.

⁵⁹ I. Hunter, ‘Wayward Genius’, p.138.

out of the mist they have loved to keep about him! Well, well.⁶⁰ Furious enough to send bullets she perhaps never supposed, but, as cited at the opening of this chapter, Carswell believed (and this has since been supported by the critical attention paid to her work in recent years) that her version of the Burns story was as close to the truth as any – she even signals as much when she writes early on in the book of Burns’s birth, saying, ‘It was one of those births about which legends are told; but the present narrative is not concerned with legends. The facts are enough.’⁶¹ The fact vs fiction debate is not resolved, but it is somewhat epitomised in the context of Burns by Watt, when he says of *The Life of Burns*, ‘It states, as facts, thoughts and reflections of folk who never felt or expressed one of them, and which its writer had no means whatever of knowing.’⁶² This point would be considered more valid if it was not then followed by a comment on Burns’s bawdy poem ‘The Court of Equity’, which Carswell reproduced in full in the original appendix to her book: ‘it was one of those that Burns was whipped up to scribble by a convivial crowd, and which he would have given his right hand to have recalled.’⁶³ Claiming Carswell could have no way of knowing Burns’s thoughts and then suggesting he himself knows exactly how Burns would have felt can only be viewed as hypocrisy – the same hypocrisy of the Burns Cult over which MacDiarmid enraged himself. Yet, as with Carswell’s commentary on *The Man of Feeling* and Burns’s foolishness for adopting it as his Bible-of-sorts, this seems to be a trait of almost all Burns critics and adorers: theories and interpretations are employed to demonstrate the kind of man he “really” was, whereas bona fide facts (what Burns has written, or is known to have read or possessed) are dismissed or argued away as follies on his behalf, if they do not fit a specific narrative. Again, an example of a specific Burns being created to the preference of a specific writer or audience, and a trait of all the Modernists discussed here.

Although Burnsians would claim it was the falseness of Carswell’s assertions which riled them most, much of the anger undoubtedly stemmed from what Carswell said about Highland Mary, and how she said it. We have already focussed on the style of Carswell’s writing, and how that in itself was too controversial for traditionalists to accept (Carruthers explains, ‘Carswell does not simply disrupt the myth of the upright, pious Burns family [...] so much as invest it with psychological undertow,⁶⁴’). Carswell broaches the subject of

⁶⁰ C. Carswell, *Selected Letters*, p.76.

⁶¹ C. Carswell, *The Life of Robert Burns*, p.35.

⁶² L. Watt, ‘Burns Biography’, p.39.

⁶³ *Ibid*, p.41.

⁶⁴ G. Carruthers, ‘The Procedure of Life’, p.167.

Highland Mary and, as with the information taken from the Pittock and Mackay essay previously cited, the relative brevity of the focus on Mary is quite reflective of the facts that were available concerning her. She is initially introduced by Carswell as ‘the most modest and devout of the female worshippers,’⁶⁵ and it is worth mentioning that this introduction follows a paragraph which describes Burns’s own church-going practices, which were strict but never confined to the same church. That he wanders around different churches before he ‘neglected other afternoon houses of God to concentrate’ on the one where Mary worshipped, mirrors the scenario with Peggy Thomson in the garden, only this time it is not education on which he loses focus but his religious habits. The description of Mary is archetypally angelic: ‘her face was gentle and steadfast; her hair, long and fine as silk, coiled up under her woollen head-plaid, was perfectly golden.’⁶⁶ She has ‘soft, singing, delicately broken speech,’ and ‘shy, sincere, and amiable eyes’.⁶⁷ Carswell’s portrayal of Mary, physically at least, resonates with the popular imagining of her, yet in her intimate relationship with Burns, Carswell describes her as ‘wilder, gentler in her yielding,’ whilst Jean Armour is attributed with the ‘homely and hearty willingness of a young heifer.’⁶⁸ Carswell’s treatment of Jean throughout the book is particularly insipid, as if she deserves no sort of poetic recognition. At one point we have Jean described as ‘very sad,’ whilst the following line has Robert ‘humbled, afflicted, tormented’.⁶⁹ The lack of emotion that she inspires from Carswell is again reflected in the cultural afterlife of Burns, where Jean is often depicted, unfavourably as ‘a middle-aged housewife.’⁷⁰ That the passionate love narrative does not sit comfortably in the case of Jean seems to be an obstacle for many Burns supporters, the Modernists included: James Barke’s treatment of Jean, as explored in the following chapter, provides his own solution to this.

As the relationship between Burns and Mary progresses (rapidly, within the space of one paragraph), Carswell terms Burns as ‘morally free’, a subtle aidanoeta referring to both his lack of morals in a general sense and his moral obligation to the recently pregnant Jean following their break-up. The significance of this reference becomes evident later in the section, particularly when we learn of Mary’s death. Mary then disappears from the

⁶⁵ C. Carswell, *The Life of Robert Burns*, p.154.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p.154-155.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p.155.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p.155.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.161.

⁷⁰ M. Pittock and P. Mackay, ‘Highland Mary’, p.193.

narrative at the end of chapter XVI – five pages after we are introduced to her. She does not then reappear until page 170 (twelve pages later): ‘And what, all this while, of Mary?’⁷¹ In the time elapsed, Burns has attempted to reconcile with Jean, accepted an offer as a bookkeeper on a plantation in Jamaica and had his collection of poetry printed to much adulation. Incidentally, Carswell’s recounting of Burns’s final standing in church as reprimand for his affair with Jean, could also be read as a prophesy of the furore surrounding her own work:

He knew that his book was succeeding beyond all expectations. So did his friends and his enemies. Every eye in church dwelt hungrily upon the face of the fornicator whose printed words had caused so great a stir, brought such wild delight, aroused such a fury of anger for miles around.⁷²

It is because of the hectic nature of Burns’s life at this point that Mary becomes an almost forgotten figure. Carruthers comments on the significance of this and explains that ‘Carswell represents Burns’s intervening dalliance with Mary as a kind of escapist fantasy from these pressures.’⁷³ This ‘escapist fantasy’ was also what Highland Mary was come to represent in popular culture too, as she became ‘the “saintly” loved and lost ideal’⁷⁴ in Burns’s afterlife culture. Carswell’s depiction of her death, and the expelling of this fantasy is but one more log on the fire in the case of the ensuing controversy:

That same afternoon, while the poet was taking wine with Lord Daer at Catrine, earth was being shovelled over the body of Mary Campbell in Greenock churchyard. The same grave contained her dead baby.⁷⁵

The callousness of this revelation is emphasized by the apparent indifference on Burns’s part: he is having a ‘delightful evening’ and composing ‘good-humoured verses’⁷⁶ whilst Mary, his true love in the eyes of many Burnsians, is completely out of his mind, dying of fever in an overcrowded tenement in Greenock.⁷⁷ The relation of this series of events to us by Carswell is all the more shocking given Mary’s quasi-religious status in Burns folklore; her death resembles martyrdom in some ways, as it is for her love of Burns (symbolically

⁷¹ C. Carswell, *The Life of Robert Burns*, p.170.

⁷² Ibid, p.165.

⁷³ G. Carruthers, ‘The Procedure of Life’, p.172.

⁷⁴ M. Pittock and P. Mackay, ‘Highland Mary’, p.193.

⁷⁵ C. Carswell, *The Life of Robert Burns*, p.175.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p.174.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p.176.

and literally in the carrying of his baby) that she has died. The ensuing outrage cannot be regarded simply as some Burns fanatics being over-sensitive about their hero. I refer again to the Trotter quote from the previous chapter, where he asserts that ‘apocalypse was one of the things modernist writers imagined most fondly. They saw themselves as inhabitants of a social and cultural system which had stagnated to the point where it was no longer susceptible to reform, but could only be renewed through total collapse or violent overthrow.’⁷⁸ What Carswell has done with Highland Mary is the smashing of the icon which MacDiarmid hankered after, the pulling apart of the sham façade of which Muir complained, the dressing down of which Lawrence had requested in his letter to Donald Carswell.

It would, however, be unfair to say that Carswell completely dismisses Burns’s own feelings for Mary; the paralleling of their situations at the point of her burial does represent an ignorance on Burns’s part, rather than an indifference. Vitally, the inclusion of the detail concerning the dead baby was outrageous in the truest sense of the word. The evidence for this lay in the fact that the bones of a child were also found in the grave where Mary was buried, when it was excavated in 1920, yet this has never been satisfactorily proved or disproved; ‘the truth seems to be that there was a number of miscellaneous bones and coffin-parts in Mary’s lair, the dating and provenance of which were very difficult to discriminate.’⁷⁹ With the benefit of hindsight and a balanced perspective, Carswell’s decision to include this claim about Mary’s baby within her book should be regarded as a carefully considered piece of sensationalism. Sensational in the sense that it was the first time that this information had been publicly revealed – the cover-up which Carswell suggested took place, was not in fact in any way recognisable until *after* her publication.⁸⁰ Carswell concedes that ‘Mary Campbell’s death affected Robert’s life crucially. On her account he had freed himself from Jean; now he was freed from her.’⁸¹ She also claims that it was this incident which sparked Burns’s decision to go to Edinburgh, despite ‘no definite news’⁸² regarding a second edition of his poems. This take on the motivation behind Burns’s trip to Edinburgh is not the general consensus amongst Burns scholars, a more popular belief

⁷⁸ D. Trotter, ‘The Modernist Novel’, p.77.

⁷⁹ G. Carruthers, ‘The Procedure of Life’, p.173.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p.172-173.

⁸¹ C. Carswell, *The Life of Robert Burns*, p.177.

⁸² Ibid, p.177.

being that it was purely through encouragement from friends in order to promote his recently published collection of poetry.

As Carswell's narrative moves to Edinburgh, so we can recognise a more political awareness develop through the eyes of Burns, with a growing realisation about his place in society. It is bemusing to read in the introduction to *Opening the Doors: the achievement of Catherine Carswell* that she was 'not generally thought of as a "political" writer. Her novels, for instance, never mention the suffragettes.'⁸³ This claim is redundant when considered alongside George Orwell's observation, that 'no book is genuinely free from political bias,' and that one of the essences of a successful writer's motivation must be the 'desire to push the world in a certain direction, to alter other peoples' idea of the kind of society that they should strive after.'⁸⁴ Even discounting this view, to suggest that because Carswell was not vocal in her support of the Suffragette movement she cannot be a political writer is a very blinkered view on what constitutes acceptable political writing. It is clear from early on in *The Life of Robert Burns* that Carswell holds strong political views on certain subjects – Scotland and class divides being the most frequently commented upon. These are the same issues arising in Muir and MacDiarmid, and also in Barke, as each writer is keenly aware of class divisions within Scotland. The difference is that Muir and MacDiarmid are speaking from a position of relative power, in literary and (self-proclaimed) intellectual terms; Carswell and Barke are writing from the margins, as will be discussed in the following chapter. Burns's own fluidity as a political icon, from the conservative figure posited by Lockhart to the radical poet evident in Barke, means he is well-placed to be used in a critique of political matters. And, for Carruthers, Carswell does exactly this: 'her "Prelude" and "Edinburgh" sections are brilliantly detailed in their depiction of social, class, and national tensions felt in the country,'⁸⁵ during Burns's lifetime. She is, therefore, as aware of the political significance of Burns as a cultural figurehead as any of the other writers discussed within this work. The reason she is not considered in such a way can be attributed to her own sex as much as anything else. Being the only woman, aside from Maria Riddell in the immediate aftermath of Burns's death, to write about Burns in a literary setting had undoubtedly repercussions for the reception of her work. Many would have been intimidated by it, many would have paid it less attention than it deserves. That Watt's review does not once mention her name but displays his outrage in sentences like: 'and what woman ever

⁸³ Carol Anderson, 'Introduction', p.10.

⁸⁴ George Orwell, 'Why I Write' in *Collected Essays* (London: Secker and Waburg, 1961), p.422.

⁸⁵ G. Carruthers, 'The Procedure of Life', p.177.

began a paragraph with a clean mind like this one...⁸⁶ is evidence enough of the role that simply being a woman played in Carswell's criticism.

Carswell's personal thoughts on the state of Scotland as a nation in the eighteenth century (which consequently presents a window to her thoughts on Scotland as a nation in the twentieth century) are made clear from the opening pages of the book. The prelude is in truth comparable to Muir's 'Scotland, 1941', although (as would be expected of an introduction to a book in comparison to a single poem), vastly more detailed and encompassing of the extraneous factors in creating the condition of Scotland at this time. The Reformation, the Union of Crowns and of Parliament are mentioned, as is the failed Darien Scheme and the Jacobite uprisings – all of this is presented in a relatively objective manner, in an unchronological timeline. As the narrative progresses, Carswell's personal opinion on Scotland begins to become more and more apparent. Discussing Burns's journey from Tarbolton to Irvine, he passes Robert the Bruce's castle at Dundonald, a semi-mythical building from tales of his childhood:

The place was dominated by the old brown castle of the Bruce, set like a child's toy on the top of its round hill. Eight years earlier an eminent English tourist had burst out laughing at the idea of a king with any claim to kingliness living in this three-roomed tower. It was like so much else in Scottish history – brave against the landscape when viewed from a distance, but at close quarters astonishingly poor.⁸⁷

This idea of Scottish history being deceiving, or at least the romanticised concept of Scottish history being deceiving, is expressed incredibly poetically by Carswell at this point. It is another example of questioning a traditional standard from a modernist perspective and posing a new, uncomfortable answer. Carswell inserts it into the narrative in such a way that it relates to the mindset of Burns at this particular stage in his life – he is travelling to Irvine to take up an apprenticeship in the developing trade of flax-dressing, and he sees in the sham nature of the castle and its legend, a reflection of his own disappearing 'boyish ambition'.⁸⁸ Burns's own relationship to his country is assessed further, and Carswell has no hesitation in ensuring the reader knows that Burns is supremely conscious of his 'bardic' status:

Scotland could and would do nothing for him as a poet, but he as a poet could and would do something for Scotland. This revelation came to him quietly but

⁸⁶ L.M Watt, 'Burns Biography', p.41.

⁸⁷ C. Carswell, *The Life of Robert Burns*, p.90.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p.90.

it inspired an emotion as profound as ever determined the direction of a man's life. Once conceived, the idea possessed him. He would identify himself with the nameless, unrewarded bards who had made the songs of the Scottish people.⁸⁹

There are clear Marxist undertones to this passage, particularly in Burns's dismissal of the nation as a source of support. It is not a totally Marxist text in that it does not dismiss the nation completely (as is one of the underlying ethos of Communism as an ideology), but it does realise the role of the individual in supporting the concept of the state, and not vice-versa. There is also the supposed sacrifice which Burns is making with his decision to 'identify himself with the nameless, unrewarded bards,' of Scotland's past. As discussed in chapter one, the bard is a significant character in the history of the nation's development, given his position as essentially the spokesperson for the common people. There is an interesting paradox in the concept of identifying with the nameless or the unknown – how can one even consider this in the first place? – yet Carswell reiterates the sentiment throughout the text: 'The calling, which he had with his whole heart accepted, was not that of a world poet, but of rustic bard.'⁹⁰ This is the humility and humbleness which Carswell bestows upon Burns, which does not contradict the conscious image of genius that he worked on and acted out, as discussed previously with reference to *Man of Feeling*, but complements it, allowing us to recognise a more human and vulnerable Burns than the 'Heaven-taught ploughman' idol represented throughout the nineteenth century.

Although *The Life of Burns* may have not been intentionally written with a Marxist philosophy in mind, Carswell did assert her political allegiances in a letter to Hugh MacDiarmid in 1936: 'I'm moving surely & rapidly toward the Left – and by that I mean Communism. It has taken me some time.'⁹¹ Perhaps this is Carswell's first admittance of her political ideology, but it should not come as a surprise for anyone who has read closely *The Life of Burns*, which was published six years prior to this letter. As hinted at, the section on Edinburgh contains observations which allude to a discomfort on Carswell's part with regards to the social structure of the city, and the way in which Burns is regarded by those in the higher classes. As is Carswell's favoured procedure, the issue of class is also linked with the theme of sex (a trait that is also found in Burns's work). The following extract demonstrates this succinctly:

⁸⁹ Ibid, p.127.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p.135.

⁹¹ Catherine Carswell, from letter to C.M. Grieve (May 1936) in *Modernism and Nationalism*, p.367.

He could keep them listening in rapture as long as he would, while he poured out for them the treasures of his wide experience of rural courtship and answered their questions concerning country loves. In return, they were delighted to admit his conquest. But what did it amount to? He soon found out. The friendly, elegant creatures competed to invite him, to dance with him, to display their bosoms and shoulders, even in their genteel way to flirt with him; and though he had the peasant's inveterate disapproval of low-necked ladies, he could not escape provocation. But when it came to honest love-making, crash! – he was up once more against the merciless wall of class distinction. Mr Burns was too familiar! Mr Burns must recollect where he was, and what!⁹²

Burns's inability to progress from the stage of interesting companion or entertainer to something more intimate is attributed entirely to his social standing. That physical sex would represent more than just the 'houghmagandie' that Burns enjoyed with the girls of the various parishes in which he inhabited throughout his life is abundantly clear; in this setting, sex is regarded as an act to be committed only by those of a similar standing. The irony in all of this is that it is the women who are apparently encouraging Burns's attention, through their suggestive dress and flirting, whilst he tries to maintain his sense of decency, through his 'inveterate disapproval' of their outfits and flesh on show. For Carswell, sex is omnipresent in her writing; of *Open the Door!*, Cheryl Maxwell writes that her 'handling of the theme of sexuality is particularly striking and radical.'⁹³ As Carswell is writing at a point in time when sex is being discussed more frankly and openly by women than ever before, we see the impact of this in *The Life of Burns*. Sex signifies more than just a physical act or even a plot device, but it is an assertion of power, a marker of status, a source of artistic creation and motivation. By being denied this in Edinburgh, Burns loses out on all three of these properties. Edinburgh comes to signify, in Carswell's biography, the divide between classes in Scotland, in much the same way that Highland Mary seemed to represent the union of Lowland and Highland Scotland. What is most significant is the change in Burns that transpires from his time in Edinburgh, exemplified by his change in reading material: 'Edinburgh had somewhat sickened him of human nature in high places. It made him an admirer of Satan, so much that he had bought a pocket Milton to carry about in place of *The Man of Feeling*'.⁹⁴ The discarding of what she had termed 'the world's worst book' in place of what is considered a foundation stone in the English literature canon, and the move from the emotional hero of *Man of Feeling* to the tragic anti-hero in *Paradise Lost* is tremendously significant and represents a maturing of Burns as a man. As commented on by Carol

⁹² C. Carswell, *The Life of Burns*, p.202.

⁹³ Cheryl Maxwell, "I'd rather be a girl...because I like boys best": Building the Sexual Self in *Open the Door!*" in *Opening the Doors: The Achievement of Catherine Carswell*, p.109.

⁹⁴ C. Carswell, *The Life of Burns*, p.216.

McGuirk, ‘Satan in Burns’s mind is not only Milton’s unrepentant rebel, but also an umbrella signifier for multiple realms of discourse.’⁹⁵ Burns’s shift in preferred text therefore hints at a loss of passion for the romanticised version of Scotland, so closely associated with the historic iconography of Edinburgh.

The introduction to this chapter asserted that the fallout from Carswell’s biography may be somewhat surprising, when considered within the context of today’s cultural sensibilities. The implicit sexual symbolism, the removal of the supernatural nature of Burns’s genius, the episode with Highland Mary: each of these aspects of the biography are integral to the overall impact of the book and the resultant direction that Burns’s afterlife took: he became less of a deity and more of an exceptional man. As with the previous chapters, what should be clear is that the ‘true’ Burns is eternally subjective, yet Carswell’s biography goes someway to presenting a Burns who is more human and more real than the one who had been iconised throughout the nineteenth century. Of his political views, she never had ‘any doubt about his convictions. He was for France, for Freedom, for Reform, for the People – all in capital letters.’⁹⁶ The radicalisation of Carswell’s Burns barely receives mention in any of the *Daily Record* comments following the serialisation or in the critical work which studies Carswell, yet this is as, if not more, important than the sexual innuendo found within the pages of *The Life of Burns*. Upon her death, her close friend Florence McNeill wrote that, ‘she was up against the old static “thou shalt not” moral code long too prevalent in Scotland, what she wanted to substitute was not moral anarchy, but a dynamic code that should make for fullness of life, without which there can be no great art.’⁹⁷ Of Burns’s death, Carswell writes:

Certainly none had ever possessed a racier gift of expression for his own people. The more for having sinned on all points wherein the common man is tempted to sin, both to glory and repentance; the more for having walked the valley of the shadow of compromise while yet retaining in his breast the proud, soft, defiant heart of a man.⁹⁸

The similarities between the two are not incidental; both, in their respective ways, were responsible for a changing shift in the cultural attitude of Scotland. Carswell’s role in taking

⁹⁵ Carol McGuirk, ‘Milton and Burns, Artsong and Folksong’ in *Love and Liberty*, p.316.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p.339.

⁹⁷ Florence McNeill, quoted in Carol Anderson, ‘Introduction’, p.12.

⁹⁸ C. Carswell, *The Life of Robert Burns*, p.383.

the legend of Burns, questioning it and transforming it for the twentieth century, cannot be underestimated, and must not be forgotten.

Chapter 4

‘James Joyce writing about Glasgow with a Communist Party card in his pocket.’¹

James Barke & Robert Burns

A Scottish Modernist who has arguably been all but forgotten, is James Barke. Unlike Catherine Carswell, there has never been any real debate over how to classify his work: he himself acknowledges it as fiction. However, the fictional genre within which it lies does not detract at all from its validity in the field of Burns reception studies. Barke’s own opinion on the matter was that, ‘Fiction is not concerned with conclusions; but in so far as it can claim to be historical it must rear its creative edifice on solid factual foundation.’² This quotation is taken from the note which fronts *The Wind that Shakes the Barley* (1946), Barke’s first novel in the *Immortal Memory* series, his serialisation of the life of Robert Burns. Closer inspection of Barke’s literary output, however, suggests that this sentiment is not entirely genuine: through his fiction he *did* seek to present a conclusive version of Burns to a Scottish and an international audience. The sheer volume and depth of his five Burns novels are testament to this, yet these are only part of the material which he has contributed to Burns scholarship. The overriding view of Barke is that his work is to be enjoyed without being considered as valuable in a scholarly setting (as the dearth of study on his work is testament to), a partial view that this chapter will challenge. His 1955 edition, *Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, aimed to ‘give the reader the most complete text of Burns’s poems and songs so far presented to the public,’³ and he also worked as co-editor on the 1959 edition of *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*. Co-edited by Sydney Goodsir Smith, this was the first ever modern edition of this particular corpus of Burns’s work and its significance to Burns scholarship cannot be overstated. Despite these contributions, Barke remains a peripheral figure in both Burns studies and Scottish literature; of the four writers surveyed in this dissertation, he is the least well-known, yet he is as political as Edwin Muir or Hugh MacDiarmid, and his treatment of Burns in a creative sense could justifiably be considered as controversial (though perhaps for different reasons) as Carswell’s. The similarities between Carswell and Barke are many, including the fact that both are writing from the

¹ Keir Elder, ‘James Barke: Politics, Cinema and Writing Scottish Urban Modernity’, (University of Dundee: PhD Thesis, April 2013), p.12.

² James Barke, *The Wind That Shakes the Barley*, (Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co Ltd, 1946), p.5.

³ K. Elder, ‘James Barke: Politics, Cinema’, p.11.

literary margins: one a woman, the other a working-class male. There are strong thematic undercurrents of sex, religion and politics in their writing on Burns, and each was met with criticism and incensed Burns's supporters, to differing levels. But this chapter does not seek to be a repetition of the previous one, substituting one writer for the other whilst offering analogous analysis. Rather, it explores the cultural moment(s) within which Barke was operating, and what consequence this had for his relationship with Burns. It also analyses how this relationship was made possible, and affected, by the Scottish Modernists who went before him. James Barke has largely been omitted from discussions in Burns scholarship until now. This chapter seeks to redress this and continue the conversation with him firmly in focus.

Although his work on Burns mainly comes at the tail end of the modern Scottish Renaissance, Barke was producing novels at the height of the Modernist period, and has largely been unappreciated or forgotten as a key Scottish Modernist, certainly in comparison to writers such as MacDiarmid and Muir, or even Lewis Grassic Gibbon or Neil Gunn. His novel *Major Operation* (1936), now out of print, has been described as a Glaswegian response to James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922): 'It was intended to do for Glasgow what *Ulysses* did for Dublin in communicating the essential character – in this case an unmistakeable Scottishness – of one of Modernity's "peripheral" cities.'⁴ This novel, along with *Land of the Leal* (1939), are two of Barke's more well-known works, but, as has been discussed in relation to MacDiarmid's and Muir's absence in studies of Modernism, Barke appears very fleetingly in studies on Scottish literature. Despite his close relationship with Hugh MacDiarmid (who wrote the obituary following Barke's death, and gave his funeral oration), he does not appear once in *The Edinburgh Companion to Hugh MacDiarmid*. Neither is he mentioned in the same companion series to Robert Burns. What is perhaps more curious than his scarcity, is the continual classification of Barke; it is normal to find him alluded to 'as a proletarian writer,'⁵ or 'the Marxist James Barke,'⁶ or a variation on these terms. Identifying Barke as a Communist signifies a disclaimer of sorts, essentially dismissing the relevance or importance of his work due to his politics. Of the four writers examined in this dissertation, each had distinct political beliefs: despite being 'not generally thought of as a

⁴ Ibid, p.6.

⁵ Ibid, p.16.

⁶ Richard Price, 'Robert Burns and the Scottish Renaissance' in *Love and Liberty*, (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1997), p.132.

“political” writer,⁷ Carswell confessed to having Communist sympathies; Muir was an ardent Socialist (who then became disillusioned by the rise of Fascism); MacDiarmid’s political beliefs were fluid, as he strayed between Communism, Nationalism and Fascism. Barke, however, is the only one who seems to be continually identified almost solely by his political ideologies. This could be to do with his relative lack of renown in comparison with the others; to alert an unfamiliar reader to his ideology but, as mentioned, it functions as a warning more than an introduction. Is this a fair labelling of Barke and what, then, is the significance of a Marxist or Communist writer being the one to tell Burns’s story in a fictionalised form in the twentieth century?

Before this question can be fully answered, it may be valuable to pause on the term Marxism and its implications. Marxism itself is more popularly associated with politics and economics than with literature, yet the role of literature in Marxism is of paramount importance. As a rudimentary definition, Peter Barry explains that, ‘whereas other philosophies merely seek to understand the world, Marxism seeks to change it. Marxism sees progress coming about through the struggle for power between different social classes.’⁸ Within the enveloping term of Marxist literature, there are two divergent streams of literary criticism: Leninist Marxism and Engelsian Marxism. Engelsian Marxist criticism denotes the years immediately following the Russian revolution. In the 1920s, ‘the official Soviet attitude to literature and the arts was very enlightened and “experimental”, and characteristically modern forms of art were encouraged.’⁹ This led to the emergence of the Russian Formalists, literary and cultural theorists whose ideas included ‘the need for close formal analysis of literature (hence the name), the belief that the language of literature has its own characteristic procedures and effects [...] and [Victor] Shklovsky’s idea of “defamiliarization” or “making strange”’.¹⁰ Once more, we can detect a parallel philosophy in MacDiarmid’s ‘Not Traditions – Precedents’ slogan, and is a line of thought in harmony with the Modernist ethos occurring across Europe at the same time. This was to change in 1929, with the beginning of the Stalinist revolution: ‘this is the year in which Stalin usurps power once and for all, becoming the ‘leader’ (*vozhd*) and ridding himself of all opposition,

⁷ Carol Anderson, ‘Introduction’, *Opening the Doors: The Achievement of Catherine Carswell*, (Edinburgh: Ramsay Head Press, 2001), p.10.

⁸ Peter Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), p.157.

⁹ Ibid, p.159.

¹⁰ Ibid, p.161.

and in which he begins the collectivization of the countryside. In this year, the attack on the ideological front also begins.¹¹ In tangible terms, this meant a stricter adoption of the Leninist dogma:

Lenin had argued in 1905 that literature must become an instrument of the party. “Literature,” he said, “must become Party literature...Literature must become part of the organized, methodical, and unified labours of the social-democratic party.” Experimentation was effectively banned: writers like Proust and Joyce were stigmatised as exemplars of “bourgeois decadence.”¹²

This new acceptance of the role of literature, along with the ‘collectivization of the countryside’ noted by Evgeny Dobrenko, is hugely significant. In the first instance, ‘the system of polycentrism, in which writers had been able to unify in various groups on the basis of their shared ideological and aesthetic views,’ was abolished; ‘everyone had to have identical political views and adhere to a single aesthetic principle: Socialist Realism.’¹³ Further to this, ‘the new mass reader was organically unprepared to comprehend complex culture. He was yesterday’s illiterate peasant,’ and there was now a ‘strong demand for cultural simplification.’¹⁴ Thus, the combination of the desires of much of the population and the political hierarchy meant that there was no place for the Modernist ideas which had hereto existed.

It must be realised that writers and social commentators from outside the Soviet Union ‘who were sympathetic to the ideas of Communism tried to follow the “Moscow line” on matters where an official Party policy existed, hence the international influence of the “Leninist” views.’¹⁵ To then reposition Barke within this discussion, we must turn to the literary theory of another Russian Formalist, Roman Jakobson. In his study on aphasia (language disorder), he posits the explanation that ‘two types of figurative imagery, metaphor and metonymy, play with language in significantly different ways.’¹⁶ Jakobson then associates each device with the dominant cultural mode of a particular era:

¹¹ Evgeny Dobrenko, ‘Socialist Realism’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Twentieth Century Russian Literature*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p.98.

¹² P. Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p.160.

¹³ E. Dobrenko, ‘Socialist Realism’, p.99.

¹⁴ Ibid, p.100.

¹⁵ P. Barry, *Beginning Theory*, p.160.

¹⁶ Peter Childs, *Modernism*, (London: Routledge, 2000), p.188.

Nineteenth-century Romanticism, he argues, was characterised by metaphor in its representation of individuals and their imaginative life in reaction to eighteenth-century classicism's metonymic imagery used to describe the social. Realism was metonymic, while Modernism swung the pendulum in the opposite direction again. In the twentieth century the process appears accelerated. The socially aware political writers of the 1930s favoured metonymy while the late Modernists staged a recovery for metaphor.¹⁷

The changing nature of Barke's literary output parallels both Jakobson's theory and the changing political situation (and its resultant literary effects) in Russia. As noted, *Major Operation* was compared to *Ulysses*, the epitome of the Modernist novel, and was written whilst he lived in Glasgow, during the height of the modern Scottish Renaissance. The decree for a stricter Leninist approach to literature did not come out of Russia until 1934 (following the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers¹⁸), which would suggest the impact of this would not affect writers such as Barke until after this. Barke's work produced at the end of the 1930s, such as *Land of the Leal*, is more attuned to the Soviet model: 'this book tells the story of Jean Gibson and David Ramsay. Dairy work to produce sixty pounds of cheese daily was killing them both, and they moved to an easier life on gentlemen's estates.'¹⁹ As Alan Riach notes, the Realism 'has a Russian power in this book.'²⁰ The case can then be made for Barke's *Immortal Memory* novels to be considered as a sort of bridge between Modernism and Socialist Realism, which then implies a major consequence for the legacy of Robert Burns.

On the face of things, Barke's *Immortal Memory* series fits in with several Modernist tropes. The titles of the five novels are emblematic of Jakobson's argument in that they are metaphoric rather than metonymic: *The Wind that Shakes the Barley*, *The Song in the Green Thorn Tree*, *The Wonder of All the Gay World*, *The Crest of the Broken Wave*, *The Well of the Silent Harp*.²¹ Another preoccupation of Modernist writing, as highlighted by Peter Childs, is 'the constraints of convention against the drives of passion'.²² This is certainly a

¹⁷ Ibid, pp.188-89.

¹⁸ E. Dobrenko, 'Socialist Realism', p100.

¹⁹ Harold Brighouse, 'Longer and Shorter Novels' in *The Manchester Guardian*, (09 May, 1939), p.7.

²⁰ Alan Riach, 'Arcades – The 1920s and The 1930s' in *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature*, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p.60.

²¹ P. Childs, *Modernism*, p.189 for a fuller discussion on the significance of titles.

²² Ibid, p.6.

recurring theme throughout all of Barke's Burns novels, and the following is taken from a conversation between Burns and his brother Gilbert:

If you've nocht but stagnant blood in your veins then you can hae nocht but stagnant thoughts in your head. I get a bit tired sometimes trying to argue wi' folk. Man – and woman too – should live according to their natures, according to the instincts, desires, capacities that have been implanted in them – or maybe inherited from their forebears. What raises the very devil in me is when folk try to threap down my throat that *their* way o' life should be mine. Folk have ceased to be human beings – they have become moralists.²³

This is exemplary of the many instances of Burns verbalising the 'constraints of convention against the drives of passion,' as he seeks to validate his own promiscuity and essential belief in free love. (This also echoes the 'primitivist side' of Modernism to which Carswell subscribes.) Throughout the novels, and a central feature of the first two novels, is Burns's inspiration for his poetry being derived from his love of women; in other words, passion begets passion:

Life ranged from the midden-heap to the silent moon and back again. The blood hammered and pulsed on the gates of the brain and the brain fired the blood and sent it surging through the body. Then the body sent it back again more urgent, more clamant than ever till there was only one end to the struggle – and the struggle ended in a woman's arms [...] Robin was glad he was achieving clarity on these matters: a clarity growing with conviction. Where before he had known hesitation he was now bold in his certainty. And this certainty and conviction gave him boundless strength and unlimited mental energy. Why! He had spun out the essential web of *Love and Liberty* in a day's ploughing and got it down on paper in a couple night's writing!²⁴

Given that Barke posits sex as such an intrinsic aspect of Burns's life and motivations, it is unsurprising that this theme appears so regularly throughout the novels. As discussed in the case of Carswell, discussing Burns's sexual encounters in such a frank and sometimes explicit manner was very much frowned upon by certain sections of society, especially in official Burnsian circles. Despite praising the quintet of novels overall ('Mr Barke rising to the occasion triumphantly'²⁵), James Veitch, editor of the *Burns Chronicle* from 1952-1975, wrote: 'it is a pity that Mr Barke's pentateuch has been so highly coloured by sexual incidents. I am not concerned with the possibility that he has offended many Burnsians. I

²³ James Barke, *The Crest of the Broken Wave*, (London: Collins, 1953), p.29.

²⁴ James Barke, *The Song in the Green Thorn Tree*, (London: Collins, 1947), p.59.

²⁵ James Veitch, 'Review of the Well of the Silent Harp' in *Burns Chronicle* 1955, (Kilmarnock: The Burns Federation, 1955), p.77.

simply deplore the fact that he has felt it necessary to linger over and exaggerate such matters.²⁶ This is paradigmatic of the relationship between the writers of the modern Scottish Renaissance and members of the Burns Cult, as has been documented throughout this dissertation. The outrage and distaste felt by many Burns supporters over the issue essentially boils down to the idea that, although the number of children fathered by Burns evidences the fact he was sexually active and licentious, the relations themselves should be largely ignored.²⁷

This point is also reflective of the attitude towards Burns's wife Jean and the myth of Highland Mary, again discussed in more depth in chapter three. Although Carswell sought to expunge the saintly legend of Mary, she was still cold in her attitude towards Jean. Barke's depiction of both women, on the other hand, is hagiographical to an extent. Mary is described as possessing the 'quiet ecstatic chastity of a saint,'²⁸ although the virginal aspect is refuted as she is not 'a saint of chastity'.²⁹ Jean is given the status of a different kind of saint; the chapter titled 'Denial' (with its own connotations of St. Peter's betrayal of Christ) sees her cursed to Hell by both her husband (Burns) and her father. Yet she is redeemed as the series progresses, finally resembling Saint Monica, the Christian saint of patience, understanding, mothers and wives, exemplified in 'The Greatness of Bonnie Jean',³⁰ a chapter where she agrees to mother Anna Park's child, another of Robert's illegitimate children. What is most noteworthy about Barke's treatment of Burns's most famous female partners, with the canonisation of Jean instead of Mary, is that it subverts reality. The religious imagery is clear in Robert's eyes as well:

He had ceased to compare love with love. Yet he could not fail to be aware that his loves were of two main kinds. At their base was Jean Glover; but they had been suckled right and left at the breasts of Jean Glover's anarchism. Jean Glover was too like himself – anarchistic and amoral in her loving...

²⁶ Ibid, pp.77-8.

²⁷ This kind of disagreement continues throughout the twentieth century. In Ian McIntyre's *Dirt and Deity* (1995), he recounts the episode between himself and Greenock Burns Club, where the request for the exhumation of Highland Mary's grave, in order to carry out DNA testing and to ultimately prove/disprove the illegitimate child theory, was refused over a prolonged period.

²⁸ J. Barke, *The Song in the Green Thorn Tree*, p.119.

²⁹ Ibid, p.119.

³⁰ J. Barke, *The Crest of the Broken Wave*, p.245.

On the right stood Alison Begbie, Jean Gardner and Mary Campbell: on the left stood Annie Rankine, Betty Paton and Jean Armour.

Jean Armour queened the left as Mary Campbell queened the right. The others, like Nancy Fleming, Mysie Graham and Eliza Miller, were mere maids-in-waiting.³¹

The religious connotation of this is difficult to miss, as Barke imitates the traditional religious imagery normally associated with stained-glass windows depicting the Father and his subjects at either side. The religious comparison then emphasises Jean's place in Barke's Burns legacy, as she is placed at the right-hand, conventionally the position taken by Jesus in relation to God. The subtle message being relayed is that Jean's place is more important than that of any other woman in Burns's life, a message which is reinforced as the novels progress. The first sexual liaison between Jean and Burns is also afforded a more classical literary description, yet is also an indicator of Burns's own influence on Barke's writing. The scene set is reminiscent of Burnsian pastoral, more-so perhaps than conventional pastoral, in its hyperbolic associations of nature and love:

He found her lips again. Across the low singing river, in the trees on the opposite bank, came the crack of a cushat's wing; beyond the trees the faint high-pitched calling of the herd-laddies bringing home the beasts. A chaffinch came and perched on a spray above their heads, rehearsed its seven merry notes and bobbed into the whins. Not far away, on the topmost birken twig, a mavis turned its spotted breast to the dying sun, and the air throbbed and pulsed with its full-throated vespers. A brown trout rose to the jiggling mayflies and plopped back into the dark pool. A yellow-billed blackbird, seeking his evening meal, came unexpectedly upon the silent lovers and ricocheted into the undergrowth with shrill and strident alarm. Then the cushat returned to the nest and soon its languorous cooing, mingling with the soft song of the river, soothed and caressed the gathering shadows and welcomed the gloaming stealing under the leafy banks.

Jean was running her fingers through his soft thick hair and humming a slow strathspey. Her low rich crooning was exquisitely soothing. Robin closed his eyes in a sheer lassitude of ecstasy.³²

As defined by *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, 'pastoral literature describes the loves and sorrows of musical shepherds, usually in an idealized Golden Age of rustic innocence and idleness.'³³ This depiction compounds Barke's desire to situate Jean as the

³¹ J. Barke, *The Song in the Green Thorn Tree*, p.295.

³² Ibid, p.161.

³³ 'Pastoral', *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, edited by Chris Baldick, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.249-50.

natural partner to Burns, surrounded as they are by a celebration of nature. Further to this, pastoral writing as a popular genre ‘came to be superseded by the more realistic poetry of country life,’³⁴ towards the end of the eighteenth century, thus, if applying the earlier theory by Jakobson, it also suggests a metaphoric style over a metonymic style. What we are seeing in this instance of Barke’s work is a Modernist stylistic with a Burnsian inflection.

Barke’s plan to involve Jean at the centre of the Burns narrative is an integral part of the entire *Immortal Memory* project; so much so, that following the five novels on Burns’s life, there was a sixth which focussed solely on Jean’s life after Burns’s death, *Bonnie Jean* (1959). That this novel itself is relatively obscure is perhaps unsurprising: Jean’s part in the Burns narrative is often less-well regarded, in comparison to other figures (Highland Mary for example), and the date of publication, on the 200th anniversary of Burns’s birth, may not entirely be coincidental. As Barke alludes to in his author’s note: ‘In relation to the essentials it is a brave story of a great woman. It is a story the historians, the scholars and the “Burns Cult” have most shamefully neglected.’³⁵ The significance of Barke’s portrayal of Jean, both in the Burns novels and in her own dedicated narrative can be tied in with another of Childs’ listed Modernist tropes: ‘a quest(ioning) towards reality.’³⁶ The reality here is that Jean is written out of much of Burns’s popular legacy, and Barke’s questioning of this reiterates the statement made at the opening of this chapter. Barke is attempting to offer the conclusive Burns, as he is relating the oft-neglected role and narrative concerning Jean, who, as his wife and mother to his children (including those not conceived with her) is an integral part of the Burns story. A conclusive story, by definition, must contain all salient details and facts, otherwise it is incomplete.

There is little subtlety to the Socialist/Communist politics which are found within the pages of Barke’s quintet; it is in fact one of the defining features of his work. If we consider his work through the lens of Socialist Realism, a satisfactory explanation as to why this is the case becomes apparent. A clearer conceptualisation of this approach is through the application of Roland Barthes’ theories, laid out in essays such as ‘Death of the Author’ (1967) and ‘Theory of the Text’ (1981). Barthes’ critical theories followed the aforementioned Formalists, categorised as Post-structuralist, and are conceptually complex.

³⁴ Ibid, p.250.

³⁵ James Barke, *Bonnie Jean*, (London: Collins, 1959), p.7.

³⁶ P. Childs, *Modernism*, p.6.

Natalia Kaloh Vid, in her 2011 book on Burns translations in the Soviet Union summarises the relevant thread for this discussion:

In Barthes' conception, the reader (and the translator is also a reader) becomes the one who creates the text in the process of reading, and the question of the author as 'God' of the text dissolves. Texts should be interpreted not in terms of their author's intentions, but only in a reciprocal relationship with other texts and discourses.³⁷

What I wish to propose for the remainder of this chapter is that Barke's work is itself considered a Marxist reading, or translation, of the Burns story, rather than applying a Marxist critique to Barke's writing. This allows for an analysis not of his own textual output, but of his relationship with Burns and of his motives, not only with the *Immortal Memory* series but his critical works as well.

To revisit the opening quotation with this in mind, the fiction which Barke is creating is based, in his words, on a 'factual foundation'. This foundation is constructed through his own reading and interaction with texts, which itself would be influenced by his own political thinking and environment; what Barthes and other theorists would class as 'intertextuality'. A consequence for Burns is that, if we consider the Burns icon as metonymic of Scotland, then the Tory Burns, presented by Lockhart and others (discussed in chapter 3), and the epitome of the Burns legacy for the majority of the nineteenth century, has now been usurped by a Socialist Burns in Barke's novels. Barke's own political beliefs are absolutely key to this: writing in *Left Review*,³⁸ in November 1936, Barke explains his views on Nationalism within Scotland:

Nationalism – political, economic or cultural – is not a deep or fundamental issue in Scotland. The overwhelming majority of the Scottish people do not feel that they are suffering from the oppression of a conquering nation. Unlike certain sections of the Irish people, they do not feel that they are a subject race forced to submit to an alien domination. Only a small section of the Scottish people are

³⁷ Natalia Kaloh Vid, *Ideological Translations of Robert Burns's Poetry in Russian and in the Soviet Union*, (Maribor: Zora 76, 2011), p.27.

³⁸ As discussed in chapter one, this magazine was a publication from the literary wing of the Communist Party in Great Britain.

conscious of any wrong and injustice resulting from their incorporation in the ‘United Kingdom’.³⁹

Barke goes on to class the people who are most motivated by a sense of nationalism as ‘the middle class, particularly the professional class, university students and the so-called Scottish “intelligentsia”.’⁴⁰ The reference to the ‘so-called intelligentsia’ is undoubtedly aimed at figures such as MacDiarmid and Muir, more-so the former, given Barke’s conclusion that it is from these sections of society listed that the ‘Scottish National Party sprang’.⁴¹ Barke does attempt to rationalise this behaviour as he describes the role that the London press barons had in creating a Scottish identity upon realising the potential newspaper customers that they had in Scotland. Barke’s theory here is certainly explained coherently, but the most valuable revelation in this article, certainly in terms of the current discussion, is his appropriation of the thesis of Muir’s ‘Predicament of the Scottish Writer’ essay. As discussed in chapter two, this essay was at the root of the falling out between MacDiarmid and Muir, and is a central text to any discussion regarding the modern Scottish Renaissance. Where Muir (and by response, MacDiarmid) focus on language, Barke recognises this “predicament” of the Scottish writer, but sees it in a different light:

An effort must be made to understand the problems and difficulties of Scottish writers. The best of them feel that Scotland has something unique and valuable to contribute to the world (as distinct from the Press Barons) even when they sometimes make the mistake of thinking the world’s boundaries lie between the Tweed and the Solway.

They are obsessed with the idea that English national characteristics have been equally degraded and debased. Capitalism in its ruthless days of ripening maturity destroyed everything that did not serve its purpose. And today the only use capitalism has for national traditions and characteristics is to debase them for imperialistic ends.⁴²

That there is a craving for a national identity is appreciated by Barke, but he sees the underlying cause of this not as an overbearing, dominating alien culture, but as a world issue, as an economic problem. Perhaps of most importance is Barke’s recognition that Scotland is not unique in this sense, that national cultures are being threatened on a global level; what

³⁹ James Barke, ‘The Scottish National Question’ in *Left Review*, November 1936, taken from *Modernism and Nationalism*, edited by MP McCulloch, (Glasgow: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2004), p.367.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p.367.

⁴¹ Ibid, p.367.

⁴² Ibid, p.369.

he then does with Burns, as the metonymic image of Scotland, is as a response to this. There is an element of sentimentality when Barke labels Burns as ‘the first world poet...[who] embraces all humanity,’⁴³ but it is also important to realise that Barke is attempting to liberate Burns from the contained notion of ‘Caledonia’s Bard’ (and all this entails: see the discussion regarding Muir’s article on the unveiling of the Burns statue by Ramsay MacDonald in chapter one), and position him as a more internationally recognised Socialist figure.

This is an important distinction from being merely internationally recognised, as it once more demonstrates the variety of audiences which exist for Burns. It is also an aspect of Burns’s appreciation which is discussed in greater depth by Vid, in the aforementioned Soviet translations text. Vid’s main concern and motivation for her own research is that ‘millions of Russian readers still admire the Soviet translations of Burns without knowing that they are reading ideologically adapted interpretations.’⁴⁴ Barke was undoubtedly also crafting an ‘ideological interpretation’ of Burns, as evidenced in passages such as:

The Bard had been deeply affected by the successful revolution that had taken place in America; that the Americans (their English-speaking cousins) had achieved Independence – a word minted of the purest rationalist gold – from the Hanoverian regime; that they had repudiated the Hanoverians almost in the same terms as the Hanoverians had repudiated the “bloody and tyrannical House of Stewart” was all grist to the sentiment of his political mill.

The young America was on the side of independence. Their hero was George Washington. And the Bard was violently on the side of Washington.

He had no great love for and had less faith in the Whigs; but they seemed to him to represent the lesser evil to the Tories. Charles James Fox was in advance of Pitt – and Washington was a tremendous advance on either.

And so, sentimentally and aesthetically, he favoured the Jacobites against the Hanoverians; preferred Charlie ower the Water to German Geordie. These were the sentimental fantasies of the day. Yet he saw through the fantasies: none clearer. For kings and queens he didn’t mourn...

What he desired for Auld Scotland was freedom. He revolted against wealth and privilege and the corruption of the party politics of wealth and privilege.⁴⁵

⁴³ James Barke, ‘Introduction’ in *Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, (London: Fontana, 1960), p.8.

⁴⁴ N.K. Vid, Ideological Translations, pp.11-2.

⁴⁵ J. Barke, The Crest of the Broken Wave, p.72.

This is essentially an unapologetic political manifesto set out by Barke for Burns, and clearly demonstrates Barke's ambition for the ways in which he wished for his protagonist to be considered. This was picked up on by critics contemporary to Barke, as in a review from A.S. Wallace: 'The Burns-cum-Barke who emerges seems rather further to the left in his politics than is warrantable, but at least he is a great deal more probable than is the sentimentalised figure of much Burns Club oratory.'⁴⁶ That Barke's Burns was considered more palatable than this 'sentimentalised figure', presumably the Tory Burns already discussed, is an indicator, not just of Barke's achievement, but of the changing cultural environment into which these books were being received (as well as highlighting the existence of varying audiences, each expecting different things from Burns texts). This portrayal of Burns also offers a link back to the argument concerning the Socialist Realism aspect of Barke's work. The main tenets of the Socialist Realism doctrine were “ideological commitment” (*ideinost*), “party-mindedness” (*partiinost*), “popular spirit” (*narodnost*), “historicism” and “typicality”.⁴⁷ Along with the Modernist features of Barke's work, as discussed, we can also identify aspects of these throughout his publications. The ideological commitment and party-mindedness aspects are evident in scenes where Barke highlights the social divisions Burns faces ('Elizabeth Kennedy, English wife to Robert Riddell, did not think she would be asked to sit beside a working tenant-farmer who did his own carting and ploughing – especially when he was a neighbour. But certainly if the Duchess of Gordon could have him to dinner...')⁴⁸ and issues of bourgeois power ('it's Pitt, Dundas, Burke – the parliamentary representatives o' the aristocracy that constitute the enemy,'⁴⁹).

So too with the critical work of Barke's, particularly his introductory essay to *Songs and Poems of Robert Burns*. A facet of any sort of dictatorship and an important tool in the controlling of public opinion and belief is that of propaganda. Propaganda and 'popular spirit', as a principle of Socialist Realism, are almost interchangeable as concepts. Barke says of Burns:

Despite his background and foreground of poverty and hunger and never-ceasing toil, he could laugh. He relished the gift of life as few mortals have. He paid a

⁴⁶ A.S. Wallace, 'North of the Border' in *The Observer*, (3rd August, 1947), p.3.

⁴⁷ E. Dobrenko, *Socialist Realism*, p.100.

⁴⁸ J. Barke, *The Crest of the Broken Wave*, p.19.

⁴⁹ James Barke, *The Well of the Silent Harp*, (London: Collins, 1954), p.95.

terrible price for this quality of enjoyment; but he paid it gladly enough. He accepted the penalties imposed by necessity.⁵⁰

Here Barke is creating the idealised version of a worker's spirit, someone who can acknowledge the unfairness and struggle of life, but accepts it willingly. For a revolutionary political ideologist such as Barke, this may seem unbefitting at first consideration; why set up Burns as submissive to his situation when, ultimately, Barke's desire would be for a radical change in the organisation of society? The answer to this becomes clearer when considering the historicist aspect of Barke's work, defined by Dobrenko as the presumption that 'literature should reflect "life in its revolutionary development" [...] the difficult past had been preparation for socialist revolution'.⁵¹ Therefore, the Burns that is being described by Barke is a figure within his own historical context, yet is archetypal of the personalities needed to ensure the implementation and success of a Communist society.

Richard Price's take on Barke's Burns project is that it resembles a 'hagiography'.⁵² Although this is in reference to his creative work, there are strains of this which can be interpreted in his critical work also, when considering statements such as:

He knew the nature of man and woman opposed to the bare elements of existence. His experience, if searing, was fundamental and therefore universal. It is this supreme quality that makes Burns the first world poet. Burns embraces all humanity. Humanity has, in turn, embraced him.⁵³

There are strains of hyperbole in this quasi-deification of Burns, but it is not altogether far from the truth. Burns was, and is, appreciated internationally, as the volume of translations of his work demonstrates. Through a Socialist Realism lens, however, Barke is manipulating this popularity and recasting Burns as a figure-head for a Marxist vision of society. This is not dissimilar to the intentions of MacDiarmid and Muir, albeit they were appropriating Burns for differing objectives, as discussed in these past chapters. To label Barke's contribution to Burns scholarship as merely 'hagiographical', as Price does, is to miss the political intention lying behind his work. By the same token, however, we must also return to the question regarding Barke's place in both the literary and academic canon, to address the issue of his lack of presence., and in particular the lack of focus and discussion on his editions of Burns's work. While Barke's work deserves some credit, there are some

⁵⁰ J. Barke, *Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, p.7.

⁵¹ E. Dobrenko, *Socialist Realism*, p.101.

⁵² R. Price, 'Robert Burns and the Scottish Renaissance', p.132.

⁵³ J. Barke, *Songs and Poems of Robert Burns*, p.8.

noticeable flaws. In a review for *The Observer* in 1955, Ivor Brown calls the introduction to the *Songs and Poems* edition ‘astonishing’.⁵⁴ This is partly down to Barke’s claim that, ‘in no sense was Burns a libertine. Of no other man is it recorded that he looked upon the children he fathered in or out of wedlock as his, and not the mother’s, responsibility.’⁵⁵ Brown comments, ‘what this second sentence means I do not know.’⁵⁶ Essentially what is going on is that, in attempting to display all of Burns’s flaws beside his qualities whilst still exalting him, Barke is falling into the same trap as many of the Burns Cultists that the other Scottish Modernists were so keen to decry – he is whitewashing the legend and playing the role of an apologist. This is not the only identified shortcoming on Barke’s edition, as the review by James Kinsley (whose own edition of Burns’s work a decade later would become, and is still currently, the academic standard resource), in the 1956 *Burns Chronicle* asserts:

Another editorial duty...perhaps the primary one...is to provide an intelligible text; but although the annotator of a one-volume Burns deserves sympathy and needs a rare economy in his work, Mr Barke gets no credit for abandoning his post with the cry “What cannot be understood must be skipped.”⁵⁷

It seems that the greatest criticism of Barke’s work as an editor comes from the lack of critical analysis, a by-product of his desire to include as much of Burns’s material as possible. This is possibly an unfair critique, however, as it fails to recognise the accessibility of Barke’s text to readers, both academic and non-academic. This was the dilemma in which Muir and MacDiarmid found themselves in in many cases, as their self-proclaimed ‘intelligentsia’ status and complex theoretical work/language resulted in the alienation of a great number of their potential audience. Barke himself was acutely aware of the need for such accessibility; he was upset at the standard of editorial work on a 1946 edition of Burns’s work, *Robert Burns*, edited by William Beattie and Henry Meikle. In a review for *Forward*, a Scottish Socialist newspaper, Barke states that ‘not only was the attitude here to this great world poet intolerably insular and patronising; but, in addition to a number of inaccuracies, contained one grievous slander.’⁵⁸ The slander being Burns’s supposed alcoholism (something which Barke is also careful to refute throughout his novels) is supplemented by

⁵⁴ Ivor Brown, ‘Ayr and Song’, *The Observer*, (Feb 6, 1955), p.8.

⁵⁵ J. Barke, *Songs and Poems*, p.9.

⁵⁶ I. Brown, ‘Ayr and Song’, p.8.

⁵⁷ James Kinsley, ‘Review of *Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*’ in *Burns Chronicle* 1956, (Kilmarnock: The Burns Federation, 1956), p.104.

⁵⁸ James Barke, ‘Review of Meikle and Beattie’s Poems and Songs of Robert Burns’, (taken from Barke Archive in Mitchell Library, Glasgow, MLSC018, Box 1), p.978.

the selection of poems chosen by the editors, it being ‘one of the most partisan ever offered to the public’.⁵⁹ Barke’s biggest concern is over the fact that this Penguin’s Progress publication will be the first introduction to Burns for ‘tens of thousands of young readers,’⁶⁰ and will therefore be offering a distorted picture of Burns. Barke also comments on the ‘most glaring and inexplicable piece of bad editorship,’⁶¹ which is the partial presentation of ‘The Jolly Beggars’. In Barke’s eyes, this is tantamount to treason, and he asserts that it ‘must be given in full or not at all.’⁶² This goes someway to explaining Barke’s own edition and its focus on content rather than analysis, reflective of a careful editorial decision to present everything in its entirety, for the reader to then draw their own conclusions. In truth, this is not such a different procedure from modern editorial decisions, whereby as much information is made available as possible. It also very much ties in with the ethos behind Barke’s *Immortal Memory* project as well, the mission to present as much of Burns as possible without being concerned with ultimate conclusions.

Aside from this, another criticism that Kinsley makes is on the decision to omit some of Burns’s more risqué verse:

Nor need a modern editor exclude bawdy verse, when Chaucer, Dunbar, Lindsay, Rochester and Swift come before the reading public complete and unashamed; and Mr Barke’s phrase “literary taste” is a poor euphemism for the prudishness or timidity of himself or his publishers.⁶³

This could be viewed as an anomalous aspect of Barke’s book, especially as we consider his other major contribution to Burns scholarship, the 1959 edition of *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*. This collection of ‘bawdy folksongs’ has been a source of consternation for Burnsians since its initial publication following Burns’s death. In both the 1894 and 1895 editions of the *Burns Chronicle*, articles were written on the original publication of *The Merry Muses*, and the association of Burns with such work. Described in the first instance by Duncan M’Naught as ‘not only an unwarranted mendacity, but one of the grossest outrages ever perpetrated on a man of genius,’⁶⁴ James Adams goes on to suggest a “BLACK

⁵⁹ Ibid, p.980.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p.980.

⁶¹ Ibid, p.980.

⁶² Ibid, p.981.

⁶³ J. Kinsley, ‘Review of Poems and Songs’, p.105.

⁶⁴ Duncan M’Naught, ‘The Merry Muses of Caledonia’ in *Burns Chronicle* 1894, (Kilmarnock: D. Brown & Co., 1894), p.28.

LIST” for any publisher, writer or printer who suggests Burns was the author of *The Merry Muses*.⁶⁵ By the time Barke and Goodsir Smith were ready to publish their edition (although it should be noted that it was not published until the year following Barke’s death), the atmosphere had changed somewhat from that of the tail-end of the nineteenth century, as another *Burns Chronicle* review suggests:

Following his magnificent pentalogy on the life of Burns, James Barke has produced a new and fully comprehensive edition of the poet’s more arcane, erotic works. Unthinkable twenty years ago, such a volume contains little that would genuinely seem offensive in these more permissive or enlightened times.⁶⁶

The observation on this edition being ‘unthinkable’ is worth pausing on. If nothing else, it is a signifier of how dramatically the attitudes have changed in society, particularly to Burns (bearing in mind this review is from the same publication as the previous two quotations were taken). Although it is still unpalatable to some Burnsians (‘even now, there are some ardent admirers of Burns to whom the *Merry Muses* are forbidden fruit,’⁶⁷) it represents a significant change in the course of Burns legacy. The previous three chapters have all demonstrated the difficulties each writer has had in dealing with the legacy of Burns and their struggles to control what is a seemingly unstoppable force. Barke’s intentions with *The Merry Muses* specifically was to bring Burns’s bawdry ‘into the full light of day.’⁶⁸ More than this, Barke believed that Burns’s bawdry was an essential part of his legend:

His bawdry is never wholly amoral. There is always some moral in it, implicit or explicit [...] Certain it is that without an understanding of Burns’s bawdry there can be no full understanding of his contribution to history and particularly the history of the struggle for a society that will ensure the maximum of human happiness.⁶⁹

The sensitivity of this reading into what is a delicate area of Burns’s work should not be overlooked, whilst the closing two lines of the above quotation encapsulate much that is

⁶⁵ James Adams, ‘Deity or Dirt? A review of an old controversy on Robert Burns’ in *Burns Chronicle* 1895, (Kilmarnock: D. Brown & Co., 1895), p.17. The “BLACK LIST” was to be hung at Burns’s birthplace, death-place and public monuments.

⁶⁶ James A. Mackay, ‘Frank and Fundamentally Humorous’ in *Burns Chronicle* 1984, (Kilmarnock: The Burns Federation, 1984), p.15.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p.15.

⁶⁸ James Barke, ‘Pornography and Bawdry in Literature and Society’ in *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*, edited by James Barke and Sydney Goodsir Smith, (London: W.H. Allen, 1965), p.26.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.35.

associated with Social Realism: historicity, typicality, popular spirit. Through an example such as this, Barke has undoubtedly earned his moniker as a proletariat writer. Yet he is more than merely this. As with his recasting of Jean Armour in the central role of Burns's love life, a driving against the current of Burns's popular mythology, Barke is also drawing attention to the work of Burns which has largely gone unappreciated. In the true spirit of a Modernist writer, Barke is demonstrating the Modernist ideal of, as explained in the introduction to this dissertation, changing the model and ideals of society at the turn of the twentieth century. This chapter serves only as an introduction and brief analysis to some of the work undertaken by Barke, whilst drawing out his undeniably crucial relationship with Burns.

James Barke's work on Robert Burns acts as bridge between several different cultural components. In one aspect, he is a generational link between the older, conventional image of Burns and the modern, liberal Burns. His imperative edition of *The Merry Muses* opened a window onto Burns scholarship which had long since been closed, clearing the path for even further contributions to the discipline. Barke's work also acts as a conduit between academics and non-academics, providing a fuller edition of Burns than had ever before been made available, and setting the groundwork for later, more established editions, such as James Kinsley's 1968 volume. That the Kinsley text is considered more established surmises the problem Barke faces in some circles, as his work is continually dismissed without good reason. Although criticised for not providing enough analysis of Burns's work, such criticism fails to account for the foundations of a good edition, which is to make available the work for others to then assess. By consciously deciding not to over-analyse and perhaps deter readership, Barke took a step towards opening Burns's work up for a newer generation. An important part of this was Barke's language, and his overall accessibility. This feature, as much as anything else, allowed Barke to reach an audience that was nigh-on impossible for the likes of MacDiarmid and Muir to capture, whilst his adherence to a fluid European outlook in terms of his style and approach to writing, meant his work could be viewed as the most international of all four writers discussed here. Possibly the most significant link that Barke's work represents is between the modern Scottish Renaissance and the next epoch of Scottish literature, informally known as the Second Renaissance. His working relationship with Sydney Goodsir Smith, one of this next era's recognised literary figures, is evidence of this. As this closing chapter demonstrates, Barke's place as an integral figure in both Burns studies and Scottish literature must no longer be overlooked.

Conclusion

‘Then at the balance let’s be mute,
 We never can adjust it;
 What’s done we partly may compute,
 But know not what’s resisted.’¹

In the note to his final novel in the Immortal Memory series, James Barke states:

All I claim is that I have done the best I can for my generation. It is a pioneer effort at clearing the field of much nonsense and a rank and wicked crop of calumny.²

Although they would not perhaps echo these exact words, Catherine Carswell, Hugh MacDiarmid and Edwin Muir would undoubtedly endorse this sentiment as underlying their own work. And, without being as grandiose, this dissertation has attempted to perform a similar act, in revealing a more balanced and truer account of the connections between Burns, the modern Scottish Renaissance and four of its most notable exponents. By recognising two vital elements within the Burns/Modernism relationship, all four chapters have been discrete in their focus whilst linked in their argument. The first element of the relationship is Burns’s metonymic status as the international symbol of Scotland. Each writer recognised this and thus sought to remould or challenge it in a way that would speak to their own political and cultural sensibilities. The second element is in understanding the reason why each writer felt the need to do this, and the answer lies in the same explanation for the rise in Modernist thinking in the first place. Anticipating crisis in some form, whether on a cultural level or in terms of identity in its multitude of definitions, leads to responses such as attacks on established values or traditions. As explained by Katie Trumpener and discussed in chapter one, the bardic figure is located at times of crisis, and this is exactly how the four Scottish Modernist here discussed have reacted. Yet, whilst turning to Burns as a symbol of Scotland in a time of what they variously perceive to be a time of social/political/national crisis³, they have also attempted, perhaps unconsciously, to embody the self-same icon – each is attempting to become the bardic figure for Scotland at their own

¹ Robert Burns, ‘Address to the Unco Guid’ in *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns, Vol.2: Texts*, edited by James Kinsley, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.54, ll.61-64.

² James Barke, *The Well of the Silent Harp*, (London: Collins, 1954), p.5.

³ Crises that are identifiable within the unstable nature of society following the First World War and leading into the Second World War. Each writer recognises uncertainty, and thus scope for change, in many of the foundational elements of life.

specific cultural moment. Essentially, they can be seen as attempting to represent their own discrete political or social beliefs, by becoming their own distinctive form of ‘bard’, based on their respect and acknowledgement of Burns as such a figure.

However, a main aim of this dissertation is to challenge the metonymy and simplification which has also occurred in the case of each of these writers, with specific words or phrases acting as a summary of their own relationship to Burns: ‘Sham bard’, ‘Anti-Burns’, ‘Controversial’, ‘Communist’. The application of each of these terms does little except to present a barricade over which we must climb in order to truly understand their work and its impact on Burns scholarship and it cannot be forgotten than in the period from 1920-1960, the traditional iconicity of Burns was challenged, more passionately than ever it had been. MacDiarmid’s and Muir’s self-proclaimed ‘Scottish intelligentsia’ status, and propagators of the Modernist doctrine, meant that they stood in opposition to the conventional understanding of Burns. This re-analysis of the role that they played in evolving Burns’s legacy has allowed for a discussion which considers more than just headline phrases such as ‘sham bards’ or ‘Not Burns – Dunbar!’. By exploring the misconceptions surrounding the path of Scottish literature since the sixteenth century and the overstated role of the Reformation, Muir’s and MacDiarmid’s relationship to Burns has been considered in a more insightful fashion. This research project has also demonstrated the diversity of the writing coming out of the modern Scottish Renaissance; how it was in tune with Modernist values whilst also being discrete in its approach to certain cultural, social and political issues. By highlighting Carswell’s contribution to academia, and by going beyond the controversy and applying a more sensitive political reading of her work, the door has been opened for a much fuller analysis on how she changed the understanding of Burns forever.

In affording Barke space for analysis – space which he has been otherwise deprived of in Scottish literary studies – this dissertation has opened up the possibilities for a greater perception of a changing Burns legacy throughout the twentieth century. Without fully understanding the role Barke plays in Burns scholarship, one cannot fully understand Burns scholarship in the twenty-first century. The greatest irony in now appreciating Barke’s position within the Burns conversation, is that, in comparison to the other three better-known writers covered in this paper, it can be strongly argued that he is the most internationalist of all. His work chimes with many of the European standards of the time, particularly, as explored, with the literary mode of the Soviet Union. Given the volume of work contributed to Burns scholarship by Barke, one single chapter is ill-suited to providing a full sense of

what was to become his vocation. Without being able to fully dissect six full novels and two editions of Burns's work, the importance of James Barke has been identified, and the first steps in fully appreciating his locus in Burns studies have been taken. The concluding chapter of this work is, in reality, only an introduction.

As an academic work in Burns studies first and foremost, this dissertation cannot claim to be authoritative on Modernism. Rather, it offers, through a Burnsian lens, an introduction to the terminology and theoretical arguments which lie behind many of the facets of Modernism. It offers a greater understanding of the intricacies and complications which arise when approaching the writers of the modern Scottish Renaissance; more remarkable than this, it is through their shared passion for Burns that we can identify a link which binds them. Burns does not obscure the focus on these other Scottish writers, as some critics would claim, but allows for a greater understanding of them comparatively. As a central starting point, this work advances the opportunities for more work to be done on the writers covered here, and on other writers of the Modernist period and their relationship with Robert Burns. It allows for a link between early twentieth and late twentieth/early twenty-first century Burns criticism, and for a starting point of the exploration of Burns and Scottish writers in the period(s) following the modern Scottish Renaissance. Finally, it raises questions about the nineteenth century legacy of Burns and explores how these four writers consequently tasked themselves with tackling the traditional icon of Burns, remoulding it into their own distinct version, for a new century and new generations.

Appendices

Appendix 1- ‘Tam o’ Shanter’¹

But pleasures are like poppies spread:
 You seize the flow’r, its bloom is shed;
 Or like the snow falls in the river,
 A moment white – then melts forever;
 Or like the borealis race,
 That flit ere you can point their place;
 Or like the rainbow’s lovely form
 Evanishing amid the storm.

(ll.59-66.)

¹ Robert Burns, ‘Tam o’ Shanter’ in *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns, Vol.2: Text*, edited by James Kinsley, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.559.

Appendix 2 - Burns Federation Mission Statement (1892)²

The object of the Federation shall be to strengthen and consolidate the bond of fellowship presently existing amongst the members of Burns Clubs, by universal affiliation ; its motto being – “A man’s a man for a’ that.”

The members of every Burns Club registered as belonging to the Federation shall be granted a Diploma admitting them to meetings of all the Clubs connected with the Federation, they being subject to the rules of the Club visited, but having no voice in its management, unless admitted a member of the Club visited, according to local form. The Affiliation Fee for each Club shall be One Guinea, and for each Member’s Diploma, One Shilling, these payments being final and not annual.

The Funds of the Federation, so accruing, shall be vested in the Executive Council for the purpose of acquiring and preserving Holograph Manuscripts and other interesting Relics connected with the life and works of the Poet, and for other purposes of a like nature, as the said Council may determine.

The headquarters of the Federation shall be at Kilmarnock, the premier Club in the movement, the town in which the first edition of the Poet’s Works was published, and which contains the only properly organised Burns Museum in the United Kingdom.

The election of an Honorary Council, comprising – Presidents of the Affiliated Clubs, and other Gentlemen of eminence nominated by the Executive. The Executive Council to consist of the Presidents and Vice-Presidents of the leading Affiliated Clubs, and other eligible gentlemen, with power to add to their number.

² Burns Chronicle 1892, edited by John Muir, (Kilmarnock: D. Brown & Co., 1892), pp.125-26

Appendix 3 - Robert Burns's Letter to Bob Ainslie³

Mauchline, 3rd March, 1788

My dear Friend,

I am just returned from Mr Miller's farm. My old friend whom I took with me was highly pleased with the bargain, and advised me to accept of it. He is the most intelligent sensible farmer in the country, and his advice has staggered me a good deal. I have two plans before me: I shall endeavour to balance them to the best of my judgement, and fix on the most eligible. On the whole, if I find Mr. Miller in the same favourable disposition as when I saw him last, I shall in all probability turn farmer.

I have been through sore tribulation and under much buffetting [buffeting] of the wicked one [Wicked One] since I came to this country. Jean I found banished, [like a martyr –] forlorn destitute and friendless: [All for the good old cause.] I have reconciled her to her fate, and I have reconciled her to her mother. [I have reconciled her to her mother. I have taken her a room. I have taken her to my arms. I have given her a mahogany bed. I have given her a guinea, and I have f---d her till she rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory. But, as I always am on every occasion, I have been prudent and cautious to an astonishing degree. I swore her privately and solemnly never to attempt any claim on me as a husband, even though anybody should persuade her she had such a claim (which she had not), neither during my life no after my death. She did all this like a good girl, and I took the opportunity of some dry horse litter, and gave her such a thundering scalade that electrified the very marrow of her bones. Oh, what a peacemaker is a guid weel-willy p----le! It is the mediator, the guarantee, the umpire, the bond of union, the solemn league and covenant, the plenipotentiary, the Aaron's rod, the Jacob's staff, the prophet Elisha's pot of oil, the Ahasueus' Sceptre, the sword of mercy, the philosopher's stone, the Horn of Plenty, and Tree of Life between Man and Woman.]

³ Robert Burns, 'To Bob Ainslie, 3rd March, 1788' in *The Letters of Robert Burns, Vol.1, 1780-1789*, second edition edited by G. Ross Roy, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp.250-251.

I shall be in Edinburgh [the] middle of next week. My farming ideas I shall keep private till I see. I got a letter from Clarinda yesterday, and she tells me she got no letter of mine but one. Tell her I wrote to her from Glasgow, from Kilmarnock, from Mauchline, and yesterday from Cumnock[,] as I returned from Dumfries. Indeed she is the only person in Edinburgh I have written to till this day [today]. How are your soul and body putting up? – a [up? A] little like man and wife, I suppose.

[Your faithful friend,]

R.B.

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