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Author: Margery Palmer McCulloch

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Reshaping Scotland: Ireland, Europe and the Interwar Scottish Literary Renaissance Movement

Margery Palmer McCulloch

What made the early twentieth-century literary renaissance outstanding among Scottish cultural movements was the belief of those involved that any revival in the nation's artistic culture could not be separated from regeneration in its social, economic and political life. This was something quite new in Scottish affairs, ideologically different from the turn-of-the-century 'renascence' associated with Patrick Geddes and that of the Celtic revival; and different too from earlier patriotic attempts by Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson to preserve in their writing something of a vanishing Scots language and its traditions. In contrast, the objective of the interwar reformers, in literature and in everyday life, was to create a Scotland which would throw off its acquired dependent status as a North British province and move forward to retake its place as a self-determining European nation. For engagement with Europe, and with the artistic and intellectual ideas of the modern period, was an equal priority for these interwar writers. Nationalism, internationalism and modernity were seen as complementary and interactive parts of an ambitious national renewal project.

In addition, the recent history of Ireland, with its political achievement of self-determination in the Irish Free State and its literary successes through the poetry of Yeats, the Abbey Theatre and the contemporary fiction of James Joyce, provided an inspirational exemplar for many activists; and during the interwar years, this Irish inspiration was adapted to suit the changing needs of the Scottish context. For example, before his conversion to literary Scots as the language of a modern revival, C. M. Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid) looked to Ireland for validation of a literary revival conducted through the medium of the English language, arguing in the *Aberdeen Free Press* in December 1921 that 'Synge, Yeats, and other great Irish writers found no difficulty in expressing themselves in an English which they yet made distinctively Irish'. At the same time he attacked what he called the 'perfervids' of the London Burns Club and their newly established Vernacular Circle which aimed to promote the use of the Scots language in speech and writing. At this point, Grieve had ambitions to lead an avant-garde, European-influenced revival and he consid-

ered that the Vernacular Circle's attempt 'to create a Doric "boom" just now or even to maintain the existing Vernacular cult in anything like its present tendencies' could be seen only as 'a gross disservice to Scottish life and letters'.[1] Even as late as 5 August 1922, a few weeks before the launch of his *Scottish Chapbook* periodical on 22 August and his reincarnation in its third issue as the Scots-language poet Hugh MacDiarmid, he was still insisting on a Scottish literary revival through the medium of English and looking to the Irish for support. Writing this time in the *Dunfermline Press*, he emphasised that such an English-language revival 'would be no more English in spirit than the literature of the Irish Literary Revival, most of which was written in the English language, was English in spirit'.[2] In its first issue, the manifesto of the *Scottish Chapbook* proclaimed an intention to 'bring Scottish Literature into closer touch with current European tendencies in technique and ideation', but it is noticeable also that, despite Grieve's recent *Dunfermline Press* article, the attitude towards the Scots language appears to have softened a little. Now the 'campaign of the Vernacular Circle of the London Burns Club for the revival of the Doric' is included among the activities to be given support. By February 1923 when, as Hugh MacDiarmid, Grieve had proved through a modernistic lyric such as 'The Watergaw' that an avant-garde poetry could indeed be written in Scots, James Joyce has replaced Yeats as the Irish model, with the *Chapbook*'s editorial proclaiming that 'we have been enormously struck by the resemblance – the moral resemblance – between Jamieson's Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish language and James Joyce's *Ulysses*. A *vis comica* that has not yet been liberated lies bound by desuetude and misappreciation in the recesses of the Doric: and its potential uprising would be no less prodigious, uncontrollable, and utterly at variance with conventional morality than was Joyce's tremendous outpouring'. And in March 1923, Ireland and Europe come together as inspirational forces when the Russian Dostoevsky joins the Irish Joyce as a symbol of the new linguistic potential to be found in Scots, with the Vernacular now being seen as 'a vast storehouse of just the very peculiar and subtle effects which modern European literature is assiduously seeking'.[3]

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[1] C. M. Grieve, letters of 13 December 1921 and 27 January 1922, published in *Aberdeen Free Press* 15 December 1921 and 30 January 1922; see also Margery Palmer McCulloch (ed.), *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland 1918 – 1939* (Glasgow, 2004), 21 – 23. For convenience of access, quotations will also be referenced where relevant from this collection of primary source documents.

[2] C. M. Grieve, *Dunfermline Press* 5 August 1922, 6; *Modernism and Nationalism*, 23.

[3] *The Chapbook Programme*, *Scottish Chapbook* inaugural issue August 1922 and subsequent

Although Joyce was to remain a literary and linguistic inspiration to MacDiarmid himself, culminating in the long 'vision of world language' poem *In Memoriam James Joyce*, published in 1955 but rooted in the 1930s, the Irish influence on Scottish cultural affairs shifted in the later 1920s and early 1930s to a more general preoccupation with the Celtic heritage of the Scottish Highlands and a shared Gaelic language; and, among some activists, to the possibility of adopting a Celtic identity for a regenerated Scotland as a whole. Whether those attracted to the Celtic identity idea saw it as an imaginative symbol or – as Ruaridh Erskine of Marr argued in his book *Changing Scotland* – saw the adoption of the Gaelic language throughout Scotland as a marker of an identity distinct from England, all were united in their insistence that this new Celtic revival would have no connection with the late nineteenth-century Celtic revival promoted by William Sharp and his *alter ego* Fiona Macleod. *Lyra Celtica*, an anthology of Scottish and Irish Gaelic poetry edited in 1896 by Sharp's wife Elizabeth with an Introduction and Notes by Sharp himself, was reprinted in 1924, thus bringing it into back into currency alongside the new ideas about the reshaping of Scotland. However, Sharp's belief in 'the re-birth of the Celtic genius in the brain of Anglo-Celtic poets and the brotherhood of dreamers' and his characterisation, via Mathew Arnold and Ossian, of the Celts as a people 'who went forth to the war, but they always fell',[4] were not positions acceptable to the new Celticists, as one angry letter in the correspondence pages of the *Scottish Educational Journal* in January 1926 made clear. Reminding readers that 'it was a Celt who acted as tutor to Julius Caesar', Donald A. Mackenzie from the Black Isle provided a roll-call of his distinguished countrymen, among them explorers, statesman and military men as well as the geologists Hugh Miller and Sir Roderick Murchison and the 'great translator' Sir Thomas Urquhart. For this modern Black Isle Celt, 'the nineteenth century nonsense about the "Celtic temperament", the "Celtic gloom" and "Celtic dreamers" should be flung into the nearest ashbin with other rubbish'.[5]

What was perceived as being more relevant to the needs of contemporary Celticists was Daniel Corkery's *The Hidden Ireland*, published in 1924, a book which drew parallels between Irish and Scottish Highland Clearances

issues; 1.7 February 1923, 183; 1.8 March 1923, 210. *Modernism and Nationalism*, xii, 27 – 28.

[4] William Sharp, 'Introduction', *Lyra Celtica: An Anthology of Representative Celtic Poetry* (1896: Edinburgh, 1924), xxxv, xliii.

[5] Donald Mackenzie, 'A Celt's Protest', *Scottish Educational Journal* 15 January 1926, 77 – 8. *Modernism and Nationalism*, 276.

and argued for a national and a vernacular literature as opposed to traditions derived from the classical Renaissance, an influence Corkery saw as inimical to the development of an indigenous culture. Such a view fitted well with the new emphasis in Scotland on the importance of both Scots and Gaelic, while Corkery's discussion of the Irish *aisling* tradition provided MacDiarmid in particular with background material for the Celtic sections of *To Circumjack Cencrastus*, the long poem which in 1930 followed *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*.

Although he was not himself a Gaelic speaker, the Highland novelist Neil M. Gunn was also a keen defender of Scotland's Celtic heritage, drawing for his imaginative recreations of Highland life not only on recent Scottish history but on Corkery, on the Irish folk legends of Finn MacCoul and on the Celtic material in Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* which was re-issued in a one volume edition abridged by the author himself in 1922. Gunn was positive about developments in Ireland, believing that Dublin could provide Scotland with the motivation to work for 'the continuance of a living Gaelic spirit'.[6] Gunn is best known for his fiction writing, but during the 1930s in particular his factual investigations of economic and social conditions in the Highlands, published in articles in the *Scots Magazine* under the editorship of J. B. Salmond, brought these conditions to a wider audience, interacting with and corroborating other Highland studies of the time. Other writers took up the question of the decline of the Gaelic language, with Fionn MacColla, himself a Gaelic learner, pointing the Scots towards Wales for an active policy to halt decline. MacColla's article 'Welshing the Scottish Race' was published in the *Free Man* in March 1933 and this periodical, independent of party affiliations but sympathetic to the movement for a new Scotland, frequently provided a platform in the early 1930s for discussions of the situation of Gaelic, with contributions from well-known language activists such as Erskine of Marr and from pseudonymous contributors who advocated the teaching of Gaelic in both Highland and Lowland schools. Had there been the political will and the governmental power to put even some of these language proposals into action, then we might not today be looking towards the demise of Gaelic as a spoken language. In the interwar period, however, while the Irish experience might have encouraged political aspirations and inspired practical investigations of a Celtic Scottish Highland region more often ignored by Lowlanders, without

[6] Dane McNeil [Neil M. Gunn], 'President of Eire: The True Value of Tradition', *Scots Magazine* 29 June 1938, 180; reprinted in A. McCleery (ed.), *Landscape and Light* (Aberdeen, 1987), 187.

a considerable measure of political self-determination it was well-nigh impossible to put positive proposals into action and so effect change.

In the artistic sphere also, the practical difficulties of attempting to adopt a Celtic identity were significant. MacDiarmid's *To Circumjack Cencrastus* is the outstanding example here with its attempt to substitute the 'Brightness of Brightness' of the Irish *aisling* tradition for a Lowland Scots language and Muse. In the end, the *Cencrastus* poet has to admit defeat with his acknowledgement that:

> Fain through Burns' clay MacMhaigstir's fire
> To glint within me ettled.
> It stirred, alas, but couldna kyth,
> Prood, elegant and mettled.[7]

Yet, despite his lack of competence in the necessary Gaelic and his inability to move his own poetic identity into a Celtic context, for MacDiarmid the 'Gaelic Idea' remained a 'great creative idea', 'a dynamic myth', as he described it in the essay 'The Caledonian Antisyzygy and the Gaelic Idea', published in the *Modern Scot* in 1931. As early as 1923, he had written in the *Dunfermline Press* of the need to recover and teach Gaelic as well as Scots and thus encourage the kind of literature in each that might have developed had the influence of English not driven both to the margins. As editor of the *Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*, published in 1940, he, unusually for the time, included a number of poems translated from the Gaelic 'with the assistance [. . .] of Mr Somhairle Maclean', some of which he himself had adapted.[8] That we now take it for granted that the tradition of 'Scottish Poetry' means poetry in all three of Scotland's historical languages is to a large extent due to the renewed interest in exploring Scotland's Celtic heritage during the interwar period, an interest fuelled by what was seen as the success of Ireland in achieving self-determination and cultural realisation. Even if the everyday condition of Ireland itself was not as paradisal as the Scottish reformers in their imaginations believed it to be, politically and culturally the example of Ireland provided them with an inspirational vision of what *might* be.

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[7] Hugh MacDiarmid, *To Circumjack Cencrastus* in A. J. Aitken (ed.), *The Complete Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid* (London, 1978), 225.

[8] C. M. Grieve, 'The Caledonian Antisyzygy and the Gaelic Idea', *Modern Scot* 2.2/2.4 Summer / Winter 1931; reprinted in Duncan Glen (ed.), *Selected Essays of Hugh MacDiarmid* (London, 1969), 56–74; Hugh MacDiarmid (ed.), *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* (London, 1946; 1940), x.

And what about the European dimension of the revival movement? Scottish artistic culture had of course already been in 'closer touch with current European tendencies in technique and ideation'[9] in the early years of the century when the artists Margaret and Francis Macdonald were exhibiting with Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Herbert MacNair at the Vienna Secession Exhibitions; when J. D. Fergusson was painting in the south of France under the influence of Cubism and the Fauve movement; and wealthy Glasgow businessmen and art dealers such as Alexander Reid were collecting French Impressionist and post-Impressionist paintings, thus bequeathing a fine legacy to Kelvingrove Art Gallery. In the visual arts at least, Scotland in the pre-1914 period had the European dimension to its culture which the interwar literary revival movement sought to recover. And although World War One made direct contact with continental Europe difficult, European artistic and intellectual ideas continued to be disseminated in Britain as a whole through books and periodicals.

The New Age, edited in London by A. R. Orage, was an especially fruitful source of cultural information for autodidacts such as Edwin Muir and MacDiarmid. Both became contributors to the magazine which also provided MacDiarmid with a model for his own periodicals, the *Scottish Nation* in particular. Muir's first book, *We Moderns*, published in 1918 under the pseudonym of Edward Moore, began life as a series of aphorisms or short essays in the *New Age* and is notable for the way in which it communicates modernity while simultaneously struggling against it. Muir and MacDiarmid were both attracted to Dostoevsky, 'this great genius who is beginning to permeate our lives so curiously', as Virginia Woolf described him in 1917; and both were also influenced by the philosophy of Nietzsche: Muir as a means of overcoming personal tragedies after his family's move from Orkney to Glasgow in the early years of the century; MacDiarmid in relation to his mission to effect national self-determination, arguing in his *Scottish Chapbook* 'Causerie' that Nietzsche's 'Become what you are' must be the slogan of a Scottish literary revival.[10]

From the beginning of the revival movement, therefore, Europe was not merely a potential inspiration but already an actual presence in the minds and activities of those who were to become the leading literary figures of the interwar period. Of all the Scottish Renaissance writers, Edwin Muir was probably the one most immediately involved with Europe, both in his life and

[9] *The Chapbook Programme*, *Modernism and Nationalism*, xii.

[10] Virginia Woolf, 'More Dostoevsky', *Times Literary Supplement* 22 February 1917, 91; C. M. Grieve, *Scottish Chapbook* 1.8 March 1923, 24; *Modernism and Nationalism* 162, 174.

in his poetry. As a result of a contract with the American *Freeman* magazine after the success of *We Moderns*, he and his wife Willa were able to travel on the continent in the early 1920s, thus adding personal experience to knowledge derived from reading. Their stay in Germany and Austria at this time introduced Edwin to the poetry of Hölderlin, an interest which remained life-long. He was the first critic to introduce Hölderlin to an English-speaking readership through his article on the German poet in MacDiarmid's *Scottish Nation* periodical in September 1923. As a result of this first European journey, the Muirs began to earn their living by translating from German, their translations including the fiction of Franz Kafka and Hermann Broch's trilogy about the disintegration of Europe, *Die Schlafwandler* (*The Sleepwalkers*). As with his earlier contact with Hölderlin's poetry, contact with the work of Kafka and Broch had its influence on Muir's own writing, although his poetic imagery of lost ways and obscure journeys was recognisably 'Kafkaesque' before he encountered Kafka's fiction. He was strongly affected by the ideas in Broch's trilogy and by Broch's need to flee Nazi Germany, when he stayed for a time with the Muirs in St Andrews. Similarly, Muir's later wartime work with European servicemen and refugees in Edinburgh in the 1940s and the harrowing stories they brought with them fed into poetry collections such as *The Narrow Place* and *The Voyage*. Muir's late poetry in *The Labyrinth* and *One Foot in Eden* was again influenced in imagery and idea by his contact with Europe: by his experiences in Czechoslovakia after the end of the war when he was sent to Prague by the British Council; and by his subsequent, and happier, period of employment at the British Institute in Rome. Although such experiences followed after the principal interwar period of the Scottish Renaissance movement, they show the continuing importance to a writer such as Muir of his early European influences.

Others too experienced the influence of Europe in the period after World War One. MacDiarmid was always up-to-date with current artistic and intellectual ideas, many of which found their way into his long poem of 1926 *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, together with adaptations of European poetry. His Scots-language lyrics demonstrate formally the combined influence of Symbolist practices and Ezra Pound's insistence on a clear, hard image. MacDiarmid admired the French poets Paul Valéry and Stéphane Mallarmé, writing at least two essays on the former and quoting Mallarmé's dictum: 'Ce n'est pas avec des idées qu'on fait des vers, c'est avec des mots' – a maxim that on the surface at least seemed to fit with his own insistence in the *Penny Wheep* poem 'Gairmscoile' that 'it's soon' no' sense that faddoms the herts

o' men'.[11] The musician Francis George Scott had been interested in avant-garde European composers such as Schoenberg since the pre-World War One period and the settings of MacDiarmid's Scots lyrics he composed in the early 1920s show the influence of modernist musical forms. In painting, William McCance and his wife Agnes Miller Parker, although working in England in the interwar period, were drawn into the Scottish movement, supporting the idea of a national but modern new Scottish art. William McCance's work in particular shows the influence of the French Cubists and the machine-oriented compositions of Fernand Léger.

In addition to such specific interests and influences, awareness of the new psychological ideas of Freud and Jung is present explicitly or implicitly in much of the best writing of the period by both male and female writers, as is Bergson's writing on duration and memory and Proust's fictional representation of this in À *la recherche du temps perdu.* In a late essay, written in 1962, Neil Gunn remembered 'reading the Parisian magazine *Transition* in the Highlands when James Joyce's "Work in Progress" was appearing in its pages', while Catherine Carswell had written on 'Proust's Women' as early as 1923.[12] It is a Frenchman, Professor Denis Saurat, friend of the Muirs, F. G. Scott and MacDiarmid, who is usually credited with giving the literary revival movement its name through his essay 'Le groupe de "la Renaissance Écossaise"', published in the *Revue Anglo-Americaine* in 1924 – although Grieve / MacDiarmid had himself used the phrase 'Scottish Renascence' in a comparison with the Belgian Literary Revival in the first issue of his *Scottish Chapbook* in 1922. And in contrast to the contemporary, avant-garde European connections described above, Alexander Gray's Scots-language translations of German and Danish ballads and folk song made manifest a shared European folk tradition which stretched back into the pre-print world.

While the 1920s were on the whole dominated by the literature and language debates of the literary revival movement, in the later years of the decade and in the 1930s discussion turned more and more to the condition of Scotland and to economic, social and political affairs through periodical articles and books such as George Malcolm Thomson's *Caledonia* and *Scotland: That Distressed Area*, Andrew Dewar Gibb's *Scotland in Eclipse*, Edwin Muir's

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[11] C. M. Grieve, 'Paul Valéry', *New Age* 1 December 1927, 54, *Modernism and Nationalism*, 181; Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Gairmscoile', *Complete Poems*, 74.

[12] Neil M. Gunn, 'Scottish Renaissance', *Scottish Field*, August 1962, 34, *Landscape and Light*, 97–98; Catherine Carswell, 'Proust's Women' in *Marcel Proust: An English Tribute* (London,1923), 66–77; *Moderism and Nationalism*, 195–98.

Scottish Journey, David Cleghorn Thomson's *Scotland in Quest of her Youth* and many others. As mentioned earlier, this was also an important period for the investigation of Highland decline and the decline of the Gaelic language. In a way this deluge of writing about the condition of Scotland – even if many of its findings were negative – could be seen as confirming a considerable degree of success in the literature-based revival of the 1920s. Many of these 'condition of Scotland' books emanated from London publishers and in October 1933, for example, the *Spectator* magazine announced an editorial policy of regular coverage of Scottish matters because 'developments are in progress in Scotland that are far too little understood or discussed outside Scotland'. While some of these 'developments' were literary – 'the cultivation of Gaelic and the conscious development of a modern Scottish literature are movements demanding not only observation but discussion' – others included the growing concern about the economic and social governance of the country.[13] Scottish affairs generally appeared to have moved into a higher position on the British agenda as a consequence of the literary revival and its post-North British objectives.

Yet, with MacDiarmid in Whalsay for much of the 1930s and the small magazines he had initiated in the 1920s having ceased publication, it might seem as if in Scotland itself the literary renaissance had entered a quieter phase. On the other hand, in the early 1930s in particular, the *Modern Scot*, edited in St Andrews by the American James Whyte, took over the avant-garde role played earlier by Grieve/MacDiarmid's periodicals, re-emphasising the complementary connection between nationalism and internationalism and declaring its intention to strengthen contacts with Europe directly by publishing translations of works by contemporary foreign writers. It was the *Modern Scot*'s successor, *Outlook*, which in the summer of 1936 published pre-publication excerpts from Edwin Muir's controversial *Scott and Scotland*, thus re-igniting the language arguments of the 1920s and causing a breach between Muir and MacDiarmid which was never healed – a quarrel detrimental to Scottish criticism, for Muir had been one of the few critics to write with understanding about MacDiarmid's modernist poetry.

European concerns took a darker turn after the coming to power of Hitler in 1933 and this was reflected in cultural as well as political publications. As early as the summer of 1931, an anonymous review of Wyndham Lewis's *Hitler* in the *Modern Scot* criticised what the reviewer saw as the irresponsibility of Lewis's attitudes towards the Nazis; and in the Winter 1932 issue, the editor

[13] Editorial article, *Spectator*, 6 October 1933, 434.

himself contributed an interesting analysis of the implications of *nationalist* as opposed to *national* art. Writers who in earlier years had found themselves inspired by the intellectual and artistic ideas of the continent, now found themselves involved in its political crises. In May 1932 Willa Muir wrote to Helen Cruickshank, secretary of Scottish PEN, about the conditions she and Edwin had found when they went as delegates to the International PEN conference in Hungary. She told of a man tortured for distributing socialist pamphlets before the start of the conference and wrote: 'the general atmosphere is filled with hatred, revenge and cruelty [. . .] I spent Thursday afternoon of Congress week in roaring and greeting in my bedroom over the state of Central Europe'.[14] In 1934, Catherine Carswell was one of a group of women asked to go to Berlin to help look after the mother of the communist leader Dimitroff when he was on trial in relation to the Reichstag fire, and in 1938 she was attempting to organise a settlement scheme in the Scottish Highlands for Austrian refugees from Nazi persecution. In 1938 also, MacDiarmid dedicated his anti-Chamberlain poem about the Munich Agreement jointly to Carswell and the Czech writer Karl Ćapek, while Eric Linklater and Willa and Edwin Muir wrote an open letter about the shame of Munich and called for a return to the pledges of the League of Nations. The Muirs, Linklater, Carswell, MacDiarmid, William Soutar and Naomi Mitchison were among sixteen prominent literary Scots who wrote a joint letter to several newspapers in July 1938 appealing for funds for the 'ancient peoples of Catalonia and the Basque country' in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War.[15] More controversially, perhaps, Neil Gunn's defence of his decision to allow the translation of his novels into German appeared to follow the PEN organisation's belief that literature 'should remain common currency between nations in spite of political or international upheavals'. In May 1938, Gunn wrote to the novelist James Barke who had attacked the translation of *Butcher's Broom* into German:

> If I honestly feel that there is something of our common humanity in *Butcher's Broom*, should I not want Germans and other peoples to read it as well as my own people? For the Germans as a people, a folk, I have always had a deep respect, and feel that I owe them something for the hours of intense delight I have got out of their music alone. How on earth are we to let the Germans or the Russians or other peoples know

[14] Willa Muir, letter to Helen Cruickshank 26 May [1932] in P. H. Butter (ed.), *Selected Letters of Edwin Muir* (London, 1974), 74.

[15] See e.g. 'Spanish Relief Appeal', *Scotsman*, 16 July 1938, 15.

> that we believe we are all of the common people unless we contrive to let them know?[16]

A commitment to nationalism and internationalism was no idealistic, abstract theory in these difficult years, but a belief demanding difficult decisions in both creative work and everyday life.

In conclusion, what I personally find so stimulating about interwar writing – both creative writing and non-fiction prose writing – is the commitment, intellectuality and imaginative vitality of its debates. Yes, these writers were often contradictory thinkers, sometimes even *daft* thinkers; but their capacity to respond to new ideas, to utilise the dynamic of change to engage fully and idealistically with both literature and politics was an essential ingredient in their attempt to reshape their country. And as we have seen, for these writers nationalism and internationalism were not polarities, but were two sides of the one coin. Their ideological position – or positions, for there was a spectrum of colours within their overall belief system – has been much misunderstood by cultural commentators in our own time who persist in seeing the interwar revival in terms of narrow nationalism, or an attraction to fascism or a retreat from historical reality into some mythical golden age of the past. Yet even a modest perusal of the primary sources for the period – both creative and discursive writing – should demonstrate that this is a falsification of ideas and perspectives which were coming freshly to these Scottish writers from the cultural revolution we now call the modernist period, and which they were assimilating, analysing and reinterpreting in relation to their own needs and traditions. And in the political sphere, it is important to remember that terms such as 'fascism' or 'communism' did not mean the same to those living in the period immediately after the end of World War One as they do to us whose historical understanding includes the Hitler War and the Cold War. We ourselves need to learn to read historically, as opposed to putting the imprint of our present times on the past.

With regard to the influence of Ireland and Europe in interwar Scotland, it seems to me that the cultural and political influences of Europe probably played a more actual and more lasting part in the shaping of the ideas of those associated with the Scottish Renaissance movement and their imme-

[16] Charter of International P.E.N., adopted by Scottish Centre when formed in 1927 and included in official publications of the Centre; letter from Neil M. Gunn to James Barke, 21 May 1938, James Barke archive, Mitchell Library, Glasgow; *Modernism and Nationalism*, 322, 372.

diate successors than did admiration of the achievements of Celtic Ireland and the inspirational vision of a possible Celtic identity for Scotland – a vision which did have a partial success in the new focus it encouraged on the Scottish Highlands and on the need to halt the decline of Gaelic, but which in wider practical terms posed problems which could not readily be overcome. Yet as we begin a new century, it appears as if the southern Irish, with their success in Europe and at home, might once again act as an inspiration to the Scots to find confidence in ourselves as a self-determining nation; and to find confidence also in our membership of a European community of nations to which we culturally and politically belong, yet to which – as with British responses as a whole – we seem reluctant to commit ourselves unreservedly. We present-day Scots have still much to learn from the interwar period, its writers and their contemporaneous influences, about how to engage more actively both with the condition of Scotland and with relationships in the wider world.

University of Glasgow