History and the Nation in the Work of Fionn MacColla

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Abstract of Thesis

It is the object of this thesis to undertake a revisionary analysis of the work of Scottish author, historiographer and pioneering nationalist, Fionn MacColla. Generally, MacColla has been regarded as an excessively radical figure whose allegedly dogmatic approach has too often obscured the more promising aspects of his work. He continues to feature in the most up-to-date accounts of twentieth-century Scottish literature as the voice of an unpalatable extremism which, with religion at its core, is too controversial, too sensitive and too antagonistic to be considered constructive. This thesis argues, however, that MacColla has been typecast as a Catholic propagandist and erroneously categorised under the assumption that his motives were purely religious or his views extreme. It shows that such a view not only overlooks the complexity and significance of his often esoteric, though not impenetrable, ideas, but grossly oversimplifies and misrepresents them.

The thesis focuses, particularly, on MacColla's theoretical approach to history while exploring the techniques which he develops in his attempt to construct a narrative method capable of re-presenting the issues raised in his theoretical material. Importantly, it does not attempt to situate MacColla within a specific context, other than that of his role within the twentieth-century Scottish Renaissance Movement. It is the aim of this thesis, rather, to identify and explore the conceptual content of MacColla's theory and fiction as part of a need to consolidate a greater understanding of a writer who, at best, has only been dealt with fleetingly within the Scottish critical canon.

Contents

Abbreviations

Frequently cited texts are abbreviated as follows and the page references appear in the body of the thesis:

CF   Fionn MacColla, *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* (Edinburgh: M. MacDonald, 1967)

MUJ   Fionn MacColla, *Move Up, John* (Edinburgh: Canongate Press, 1994)

FM   Fionn MacColla, *Facing the Muzhik* (National Library of Scotland, Deposit 265/2-7)

Part One

Facing the Facts

Introduction

Of all the authors associated with the Scottish Renaissance movement, there are none more precariously placed, in terms of his contribution and position of importance, than Fionn MacColla. Regarded by some, most notably Hugh MacDiarmid, as ranking among the most significant players in the development of a modern Scottish literary and nationalist forum, MacColla has nevertheless been regarded as an excessively radical figure whose allegedly dogmatic approach has too often obscured the more promising aspects of his work. As a writer, he was too often at odds with his publishers, who frequently refused to publish his fictions on the grounds that they were too didactic, too opinionated or, at the very least, too much endowed with their author's (rather than their characters') points of view. In summarising MacColla, Isobel Murray and Bob Tait have written:

> The adjective eccentric might well also be used. MacColla had some very strong views, on politics, religion, history and nationalism, and saw no reason to disguise these in his writings. He thought it part of the proper function of fiction to debate large issues, to be contentious, to attempt to persuade, and he is singular in the extent to which he did this.[1]

In categorising MacColla, meanwhile, critics have tended to focus not so much on his theoretical mandate as on his conversion to Catholicism and his critique of the Protestant Reformation as the watershed marking the beginnings of the end of Scotland's political and cultural autonomy. This has earned him a reputation as something of a fundamentalist; and he continues to feature in the most up-to-date accounts of twentieth-century Scottish literature as the voice of an unpalatable extremism which, with religion at its core, is too controversial, too sensitive and too

antagonistic to be considered constructive. Certainly, for MacColla, the Reformation resulted in the consequent dislocation of Scotland's national and cultural self-determination and historical development. This thesis argues, however, that MacColla has been typecast as a Catholic propagandist and erroneously categorised under the assumption that his motives were purely religious or his views extreme. It shows that such a view not only overlooks the complexity and significance of his often esoteric, though not impenetrable, ideas, but grossly oversimplifies and misrepresents them.

It is perhaps because of the esoteric nature of MacColla's work that it has been treated in the most reductive terms and remains largely ill-defined within the context of the Scottish canon. It is therefore important to stress that, where religion figures highly in MacColla's theoretical and fictional repertoire, it is only as a consequence of being an integral part of his overriding concern with the historical, political and cultural status of Scotland. In answer to accusations that *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* was 'a Catholic view of the Reformation', MacColla protests:

> It isn't even about the Catholics or the Reformation except as it were accidentally; i. e. because the enquiry starts off in a period when those terms were all about. It isn't even strictly about 'religion' - if anyone would define that term for us. It is simply about what it says it is about - the human psyche... What destroyed Scotland, I seemed at last to perceive, was a movement of negation or Nay-saying, universally instigated & maintained throughout century after century - by kirk and school of course, it must be said... It's not a question of 'Catholics' and 'Protestants' & wha was richt? All that is purely superficial and unhelpful.[2]

Locating the causes of Scotland's deterioration as an independent nation has invariably led MacColla, like others, to question the role of the sixteenth-century Reformers. But he does not do this blindly. It is part of a detailed and sustained

engagement with Scottish history which, in itself, is part of a lifelong commitment to the Scottish nationalist cause.

But it is also the case that, in seeking to define and remedy Scotland's peculiar position as a nation without nationhood, MacColla has been led into a much wider territory. With Scotland at its core, MacColla's work is notable, not only for its polemical cut and thrust, but for its attempt to construct a theory of history that can be applied in the broadest possible sense. In his discursive texts - the essays, the commentaries, the unpublished fragments - MacColla constructs a method of historical and cultural analysis which, as we shall see, is not incompatible with those of modern-day theorists like Michael Foucault and Homi K. Bhabha. In view of all this, it is the object of this thesis to provide a clearer definition of MacColla's position by providing a clearer definition both of his fictional *and* theoretical writing. It will focus on MacColla's analytical approach to history and nationalism more generally whilst considering the same, more specifically, in relation to Scotland. Theoretical work aside, this thesis also considers the way in which MacColla represents his ideas about the condition of Scotland within the context of his fictions. In particular, it discusses the techniques he develops in attempting to represent these ideas through the medium of narrative to the fullest effect.

This latter aim is problematic in the sense that MacColla's theoretical and fictional works are not always easy to separate. It is a measure of his unorthodoxy that his novels were sometimes refused by publishers on the grounds that they were too tendentious, too full of a discursive material that came from the author rather than the characters he created. More acceptable, it seems, is where MacColla does the opposite, as, for example, in his most extensive theoretical work, *At the Sign of*

the Clenched Fist, where he incorporates fictional extracts into the main body of the text as a means of illustrating the arguments raised. The trans-generic operations of MacColla's writing are indicative of an idiosyncratic disavowal of conventional modes of fiction and analysis which, if problematic, is hardly grounds for his dismissal. Indeed, one would expect the reverse - that MacColla ought to be examined more extensively given the audacity of his experiments with established modes of discourse, an activity which arguably puts him on an equal footing with several notable post-structuralists who would later explore the same field. To this extent, MacColla is an author who begins to question our assumptions about established modes of discourse in a similar way to celebrated critics like Michel Foucault. As Foucault says in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*:

> We must also question those divisions and groupings with which we have become so familiar. Can one accept, as such, the distinction between such forms or genres as science, literature, philosophy, religion, history, fiction, etc., and which tend to create great historical individualities? […] The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network. [...] Before approaching, with any degree of certainty, a science, or novels, or political speeches, or the *oeuvre* of an author, or even a single book, the material with which one is dealing is, in its raw, neutral state, a population of events in the space of discourse in general.[3]

It could be said of MacColla's writing that, through its deliberate erasure of formal and generic categories, it puts into effect the propositions stated here by actively dislocating the familiar divisions between this or that form of discourse. It is the aim of this thesis to demonstrate that these operations are not the weaknesses but the strengths of an author and historian who refused to be bound by the expectations of the publishers, the critics and the reading public.

As a consequence of this, it is not always easy or even expedient to segregate MacColla's work into distinguishable categories appropriate for any structured critical analysis. However, whilst exploring MacColla's maverick disregard for established modes, this thesis is divided into two sections - the first focusing on his theoretical writings and the second focusing on his fictional work - which will allow us to explore the tendencies of each in isolation. Given that MacColla's theories and fictions tend often to interact and overlap, this cannot be done with any strict degree of differentiation, so that it becomes necessary at certain points to allude to each simultaneously. But that is precisely the point: by exploring the theoretical and fictional aspects of his work in separation we can perhaps throw into relief those areas where a significant interaction is achieved.

By the same token, history, nationalism and religion are contingent issues and, so, cannot be explored in isolation without reference to one another. The first section, then, going under the title of 'Facing the Facts', will assume a format which attempts to examine each in its own right whilst exploring the relationship between them. The first chapter concentrates on MacColla's historiography - that is, on his development of a method of reading history which enables him to re-read (and re-present) the institutionalised versions of Scottish history which he considered (not without good reason) to be invalid. These, as far as MacColla was concerned, were rather designed to inundate the nation with a misguided opinion of itself. They deflected away from the Gaelic inheritance underlying the emergence of the Scottish nation and emphasised, instead, its subordinate role in the development of a history and culture extending from England.

Hardly radical in themselves, it is the method employed in substantiating these claims that sets MacColla apart from any mainstream theoretical trend. Above all, MacColla's historiography aims at restoring an accurate historical basis for Scotland's re-emergence as an independent nation. In setting about the task, MacColla is characteristically original and idiosyncratic in combining a metaphysical approach with an empirical one. For MacColla, the motivations underlying the actions and events which constitute history are located in the dynamics of agency, which he is able to define through a practical inquiry into human psychology and the nature of 'the will'. Through a process of empathy, he says, it becomes possible to re-present the motivations and interests which precipitate as history - or to establish a spatial rather than temporal view of historical processes which enables us to construct an accurate conception of past events within the context of the present day.

It is through this approach, summarised briefly here, that MacColla is able to re-emphasise the Gaelic foundation, as well as demonstrate the reasons for its attempted erasure. Likewise, it is an approach that allows him to trace the causes of Scotland's political evaporation under the self-aggrandising policies of its bigger neighbour and the ideological tenets of indigenous political or religious groups, such as the sixteenth-century Reformers. These, of course, are the areas where MacColla has provoked some controversy and dispute. Putting this aside for the moment, the fact that MacColla is committed to a partly metaphysical view of history would appear to put him at odds with any contemporary theoretical programme. This, I wish to argue, is an assumption which does not exclude his relevance to theories and theorists of the present epoch. Accordingly, the first chapter establishes some significant parallels and contrasts between MacColla's theories and those of Michael

Foucault, as expressed in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. The comparison, which may seem a strange one, is in fact highly relevant, given that MacColla's metaphysical approach, as we shall see, is accompanied by a seemingly incompatible belief in historical discontinuity (which both resembles and differs from Foucault's). In exploring these issues, the first chapter considers them in relation to MacColla's fictions and, in particular, to *And the Cock Crew* and *The Ministers* (which remained unpublished during his lifetime). It will show how MacColla attempts to dramatise the psychological conditions underlying the historical development of Scotland, which he has located, he suggests, through a process of empathy. In this sense, it is equally the case that, for MacColla, fiction becomes a means of re-enacting and exploring past states, so that it becomes, as he describes it, 'a method of inquiry'.

The second chapter, meanwhile, deals particularly with MacColla's ideas on nationalism and on his concern with the status of 'smaller' nations - given that they are liable to be absorbed by the expanding frontiers of 'bigger' ones. Continuing with MacColla's reading of the political and cultural reasons for Scotland's demise prior to and after the union with England, this chapter concentrates on MacColla's definition of nation and nationhood. The issue, of course, is a complex one, extending to (MacColla's view of) the role, within the nation, of the individual and the role, in turn, of the individual within the community, the ultimate determinant, in MacColla's view, of nationhood. In keeping with his general theoretical outlook, MacColla's ideas on nationhood and nationalism appear to be invested with certain paradoxes - among which is the seemingly incompatible interpretation of the individual as an indeterminable historical agency acting within the trans-historical determinations of the community (which, for MacColla, is always an absolute and

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immutable concept). In exploring and resolving these issues, the second chapter introduces Homi K. Bhabha's model for the interpretation of national identities (which distinguishes between the inclinations of 'pedagogical' and 'performative' 'people'), which will allow us to clarify and contextualise MacColla's ideas more readily. Likewise, Colin Kidd's analyses of the political, cultural and ethnic composition of Scotland are incorporated into this chapter, which are further relevant given their treatment of the effects of the Reformation on the Anglicisation of Scotland. Some additional attention, moreover, is given to MacColla's novel on the Clearances, *And the Cock Crew*.

The third chapter of the first section considers MacColla's ideas on historiography and nationalism in relation to those expressed by two of his contemporaries - namely, Edwin Muir and Lewis Grassic Gibbon - whose views contrasted sharply with his. As a devoted communist, Gibbon, according to his creed, tended to savagely criticise any country - more especially his own - which aspired towards the distinction of nationhood; and to this extent he stands completely opposite to MacColla. Muir, on the other hand, because of his simultaneous praise and condemnation of Scotland's historical and national condition (often underlined by an ambiguous depreciation of anything Scottish, and a rarefaction of anything that is not), appears to occupy a position of uncertainty (amounting to evasion) which, whatever it might be, is certainly not nationalism. Both Gibbon and Muir, one way or another, professed an internationalist outlook which they considered superior to the aims of re-asserting Scottish nationhood. For MacColla, however, nationalism and internationalism were far from incompatible; nor did the assertion of one necessitate the negation of the other. If MacColla was a nationalist, he was also, like

MacDiarmid, an internationalist, an aspect of his work which is often overlooked or, more to the point, ignored. For MacColla, in fact, the possibility of an international unity among nations could only be achieved through maintaining (and, if necessary, re-establishing) their diversity as self-contained political and cultural groups. It is, then, the aim of this chapter to clarify MacColla's theories on history and nationalism by comparing them with those of certain contemporaries and countrymen who expressed an opposing view. It is also intended, moreover, to demonstrate the full scope of MacColla's position in relation to Scotland's prospective co-existence with other nations, which stems from more general ideas concerning the status of nations as autonomous parts of an international heterogeneity.

Overall, then, the first section concentrates on MacColla not so much as an author of fiction but as a man of ideas and, in doing so, draws on some of the most prominent historians and cultural theorists of the modern epoch. It is the aim of this section both to clarify and contextualise MacColla's ideas in relation to contemporary theories of history, culture and nationalism and to evaluate his role in the attempted reassertion of Scotland's place as a nation among nations. The second section, meanwhile, considers MacColla as an author of fictions which incorporate the issues he has raised in his capacity as a theorist, although the two, as suggested, are impossible to separate with any finality. Focusing on three particular novels, this section, 'Facing the Fictions', will show, among other things, how MacColla's theoretical ideas are represented within the context of narratives which become, for MacColla, dramatic centres of ideological contention. MacColla's novels, that is to say, are by no means limited to the one-dimensional didacticism of which he has

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often been accused. They are, rather, the fictional manifestations of contrasting mental states which - precipitating as actions - represent for MacColla the originary causes of the particular episodes that constitute history. The second section, moreover, explores MacColla's attempt to construct a narrative method which allows an unbiased and unadulterated re-presentation of the motivations underlying historical events - meaning that his novels act as illustrations of the processes of history in the sense of revealing the actuality, not of what actually occurred, but of the psychological conditions that prevail as 'history'.

Inasmuch as his fictions were attempts to reveal the causes underlying the effects of history, they were, as a consequence, intended to emerge as narratives which acted 'outside' of the author's personal agenda. They were written, not so much as objective interpretations of history, but as demonstrations of a *means* of interpreting history - not history seen through the eyes of the author, but history seen *in itself*. It is necessary to recognise, of course, that, while MacColla was intent on implementing a strategy that would remove the presence of the author from the text, his auditors tended to think otherwise. So much so, in fact, that the accusation of didacticism still stands as an insurmountable obstacle to MacColla's success as a novelist. Such accusations have been expressed even by fellow writers like Edwin Muir (who certainly admired MacColla), as well as by those publishers who, on similar grounds, were reluctant to publish what they otherwise considered to be publishable material. There has, however, been no real attempt (apart from those of John Herdman in his introductions to MacColla's novels) to make a critical assessment of MacColla's narrative strategies and, so, no accurate basis from which to begin in offering an outright evaluation of the active or passive authorial tendency

in MacColla's novels. I wish to show that accusations about didacticism are arguably misplaced in that they fail to address the full scope of MacColla's narrative programme. They fail to address, for example, the extent to which his narratives are structured around contentious and often controversial themes which are bound to produce an incendiary mix of critical responses. Indeed, a story about the Reformation can hardly make for bedtime reading when it necessarily refers to bitter theological or political disputes or embroils itself in murders resulting from fanatical acts of usurpation or patriotic deeds. It is perhaps the effectiveness with which MacColla is able to present these themes, and his ability to convey the opinions underlying them, that have given the impression that these opinions are exclusively his, raising questions about his fidelity to what was often regarded, in the twentieth century, as a requirement of fiction - namely, objective representation.[4] Positions *are* stated in MacColla's novels which, considering their subject matter, ought to be stated as a matter of course: but they are not only his, if his at all, and they are far from being unwholesomely opinionated.

Much of the pretext for MacColla's didacticism rests on the assumption that the voices of his characters are actually his, or that their voices pertain, not to a series of hypothetical personalities, but to the arguments waged by MacColla in his decidedly one-sided but far from ill-informed theoretical discussions. This, however, is to underestimate the value of the techniques that MacColla was attempting to introduce, however well or unsuccessfully he introduced them, which have a value in themselves as experiments with narrative. More to the point, though, I wish to show how MacColla's own voice becomes part of an interactive tableaux of voices which

feed into and out of his narratives which become, in turn, a dialogic assimilation of the various themes and ideological positions they engage.

Such an analysis becomes possible, at least, if we are to examine in detail what MacColla himself has to say about his novels, particularly in relation to the processes of narrative production; and this is an issue which the second section will address. By using the term 'dialogic', moreover, we instantly invoke the terminology used by Mikhail Bakhtin in his posthumous collection of essays *The Dialogic Imagination*, which allows us to extend our analysis of MacColla's narratives beyond the terms by which he has described them. Through Bakhtin, we can begin to see how MacColla's authorial presence in the text becomes part of a series of correspondences which contain the author's voice as only one among many with which the text is dialogically invested.

Bakhtin, then, will play a vital role in the second part of this thesis, offering a means through which we can theorise MacColla's narrative techniques to much fuller effect. The second section, in fact, will begin with a short introduction which offers a summary of Bakhtin's methods of interpretation, though strictly in relation to the summary given of MacColla's narrative strategies. The subsequent chapters, of which there are three, will each concentrate on one of MacColla's novels whilst retaining the key ideas identified in the introduction (though applying them in different ways depending on the novel). They will also retain and refer to the ideas and issues explored in the first section of this thesis, which deal specifically with MacColla's theoretical material.

Of the three chapters in the second section, the first focuses on MacColla's most prevalent work about the Scottish Reformation, *Move Up, John*, and seeks to

illustrate the ways in which MacColla applies a narrative method based on (what he calls) 'post-factual empathy'. As we shall see, 'post-factual empathy' refers to the author's ability to reach a fundamental understanding of the motivations underlying historical events by constructing, in turn, a psychological template of the motivations underlying the actions of men more generally. The method, taking its cue from the extensive essay *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*, in which MacColla reveals his method in full, and from various unpublished fragments stored in the National Library of Scotland, is not without its potential incongruities or limitations. But it shows us one thing: that MacColla was intent on producing, not an objective account of history through fiction, but a fiction which revealed the psychological processes underlying the formation of events that constitute history. In *Move Up, John*, these processes refer to the Scottish Reformation and the religious opposition between Catholicism and Protestantism which, in this case, becomes translated in narrative terms as a dialectic, rather than didactic, determination of plot which, entering the spatial and temporal parameters of the narrative structure, forms the dialogic core of the work. By incorporating Bakhtin's criticism into the context of *Move Up, John*, it becomes possible recognise the extension of a dialogic impetus throughout the text as a whole, as it begins to yield to the Bakhtinian premise of the modern novel as an intersection of voices, among which the author's voice is only one.

The second chapter of the second section undertakes an analysis of a novel which has never reached any stage of publication. Yet *Facing the Muzhik* (of which I am fortunate enough to have a copy) remains one of MacColla's most successful novels in an artistic sense in that it manages to combine a thematic arrangement of ideas with a balanced narrative which is compelling both as a plot and as an

exploration of political and cultural objectives and motivations. The novel is especially interesting from the point of view of this thesis in that it includes particular tropes which have been identified by Bakhtin as 'chronotopes' - that is, as dramatic centres of contention, formed by a fusion of spatial and temporal narrative elements, which reveal the functions of dialogism in their most typical aspect. By exploring their impact on *Facing the Muzhik* it becomes possible to see the extent to which MacColla's fictions do not inhibit but, in fact, enable dialogism to occur as a structural determinant of narrative. But *Facing the Muzhik* is also a highly self-conscious and often self-reflexive work which parodies the issue of authorial presence by integrating it into the novel as part of its subject matter, though in such a way as to expose the presence of the author as one of the effects of dialogism. One of the more idiosyncratic aspects of this novel, meanwhile, is the comparison it makes between the Reformation in Scotland and the Communist Revolution in Russia, both of which, according to MacColla, reveal similar psychological causes underlying specific events which, later, produced an effect of history. Finally, we will also explore an issue which, for MacColla, becomes a crucial aspect of the formation of history - namely, the relationship between the individual and the community - which, while it is treated at length in *Facing the Muzhik*, is much more pronounced in the final novel this thesis examines - *The Albannach*.

Looking lastly at *The Albannach*, we take retrospective shift in focus. While *Move Up, John* was written around the midway point of MacColla's career and *Facing the Muzhik*, probably, towards the end, *The Albannach* was MacColla's first novel which, with the help of Hugh MacDiarmid, was published without much difficulty. Of particular interest is the approach *The Albannach* takes in seeking to

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convey some of the most crucial arguments in MacColla's repertoire through its highly effective use of satire. Satire, M. H. Abrams has noted, 'differs from the *comic* in that comedy evokes laughter mainly as an end in itself, while satire "derides"; that is, it uses laughter as a weapon, and against a butt that exists outside the work itself. That butt may be an individual (in "personal satire"), or a type of person, a class, an institution, a nation, or even [...] the whole human race'.[5] Satire, then, refers to a referential foundation outside of the work itself; and it is by the same token that *The Albannach* delivers a microcosmic enhancement of the modern Scottish nation which, in this case, serves as the butt of the novel's satirical scorn and reprobation. The general object of its attack, not surprisingly, is the effect of Calvinism on the Scottish community at large. However, its particular emphasis is on the role of Calvinism in the spread of the English language throughout Scotland and on the eradication of Gaelic as part of an institutionalised programme of Anglicisation which, as the novel shows, ruptures the social and cultural, as well as linguistic, integrity of Scotland.

But *The Albannach* is far from being limited to a blatant satirical assault on the Anglicisation of Scotland: satire, rather, becomes part of a strategy aimed at resolving the contrasts that impair the development of a modern Scottish identity appropriate under the circumstances. To this extent, *The Albannach*, as the final chapter seeks to reveal, opens up a conceptual 'space' within which modern Scottish identity can be conceived as a viable notion, in spite of the seemingly incongruous elements with which it is invested – through language, especially, but also through other familiar dichotomies (Highland / Lowland, past / present, landscape / industry, and so on). By setting up a confrontation between opposing cultural or social

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positions, the novel, ultimately, engenders a dialogic interaction between them. In doing so, it constructs the model for an identity capable of facilitating incompatible cultural fields while sustaining them as basis for the modern Scottish nation.

The Albannach, meanwhile, is also intended by MacColla to function as an allegory for the Scottish nation which it represents, in miniature, through the portrayal of the community of Achgarve. To this extent, the novel presents an obvious paradox in that allegory is 'contrived to make coherent sense on the "literal," or primary, level of signification, and at the same time to signify a second, correlated order of agents, concepts and events.... in which the literal characters represent abstract concepts and the plot exemplifies a doctrine or thesis'.[6] Allegory, in other words, is didactic and exists, by definition, in order to serve that function. It is a narrative technique that allows little room for manoeuvre in terms of interpretation, as Northrop Frye, for one, has pointed out: 'The commenting critic is often prejudiced against allegory without knowing the real reason, which is that continuous allegory prescribes the direction of his commentary, and so restricts its freedom'.[7] Given that, as allegory, *The Albannach*'s semantic frame of reference ought to be limited to a specific ideological message, it seems strange that it should serve as a conduit for the dialogical interactions of incompatible states within the Scottish nation, which can hardly be said to form any kind of ideological consensus other than that of difference. Certainly, *The Albannach* functions as an allegory in the sense that it imparts or conveys a particular view on a monologic level – the view that Scottish national identity must be recovered at all possible costs: but the view *in itself* is one that expresses the dialogic possibility of Scottish identity as a unity based on

diversity - that is, as a condition defined by its accommodation of the various aspects of itself.

The final chapter will explore these issues in some detail whilst also considering the influence of the Scottish landscape on the formation of a uniquely Scottish identity. The role of landscape in the formation of 'the landscape inside'[8] is prioritised by several Scottish writers of the period – most notably by Neil Gunn and Hugh MacDiarmid. In *The Albannach*, too, MacColla examines the psychological implications of the environment which, in this case, arise from a dialectical interplay between the influence of landscape and the impact of industry on the social dynamics of Scotland. As such, landscape and industry, like Gaelic and English, become dialogic features of the multiplicity which informs the Scottish sense of selfhood.

The chapter on *The Albannach* will conclude a thesis which, importantly, does not attempt to situate MacColla within a specific context, other than that of his role within the twentieth-century Scottish Renaissance Movement. Where the ideas of certain theorists not normally associated with Scotland or the Scottish Renaissance are used, it is chiefly for their illustrative value in terms of how they can offer, through contrasts or comparisons, a further means of interpretation for MacColla's work. The overriding aim of this thesis is to identify and explore the conceptual content of MacColla's theory and fiction as part of a need to consolidate a greater understanding of a writer who, at best, has only been dealt with fleetingly in the Scottish canon. Critical evaluations of MacColla's work have been so scarce that any done now must begin at the beginning. And while it is true, as implied, that MacColla's writings can be related to theoretical developments within a wider

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European or post-colonial context, it is the main object of this thesis to bring them out of the relative obscurity that, otherwise, envelops them.

Notes

[1] Isobel Murray and Bob Tait, *Ten Modern Scottish Novels* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1984), p. 55.

[2] MacColla, 'Scots Nay-Saying', *Scottish Literary Journal*, 11-12, Vol. 11, no. 1, May 1984, p. 70.

[3] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Rivkin J. and Ryan M. (eds.), *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (Malden, Mass.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 422 - 423.

[4] The claim that objectivity is a requirement of 'good' fiction abounds in twentieth-century studies of fiction. Critics like F. R. Leavis (*The Great Tradition*) and Wayne Booth (*The Rhetoric of Fiction*), relying heavily on theories originally produced by Henry James, all advocate objectivity as necessary to the function of fiction. Lionel Trilling, similarly, states that fiction 'achieves its best effects of art often... when it is fixed upon effects in morality, or when it is simply reporting what it conceives to be objective fact'. Taken from Wallace Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986), p.18.

[5] M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (New York: Hardcourt Jovanovich College Publishers, 1993), p. 187.

[6] M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, p. 4.

[7] Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 90.

[8] The phrase comes from Gunn's essay of the same name, 'The Landscape Inside', in Neil Gunn, *Landscape and Light – Essays by Neil M. Gunn* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987).

Chapter one

Metaphysics and Discontinuity in MacColla's Reading of History

I

In the following chapter, I attempt to illustrate the relationship underlying Fionn MacColla's metaphysically-inclined reading of history and his tendency to embrace a discontinuous model of historical interpretation. By no means problematic *in itself*, MacColla's theorem of historical discontinuity is problematic not so much in a theoretical sense, but in a practical one. I am referring to the (appropriately) discontinuous condition of MacColla's discursive writings on historical discontinuity which are mainly to be found as fragments in some unpublished papers, scraps and book margins on deposit at the National Library of Scotland, and which seem to complement his more general theorisations of history as illustrated in *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*. This clearly precludes our critical judgement and inhibits the task of constructing a coherent analysis of his ideas, ideas which, despite their intrinsic importance, were never really developed by MacColla beyond their embryonic stages. As a consequence of this, one wonders whether MacColla's under-valued and unstable reputation, either as a significant representative of the Scottish Renaissance movement, or as a reliable member of the Scottish canon in general would have taken a more favourable turn, had these precious fragments been made public earlier.

However, before continuing it is necessary to define what is meant by 'metaphysics' and why it is perceived, in the context of this thesis, to be in clear contrast with discontinuity. It can be suggested that MacColla's notion of

metaphysics, applied to the psychology of being in history and to his understanding

of historical truth, derives from the philosophical doctrines of the medieval

philosopher Duns Scotus. In *The Age of MacDiarmid*, David Daiches, referring to

MacDiarmid's expression of the perception of the individual object, gives a brief but

clear definition of one of Scotus' crucial terms: 'What Duns Scotus called the

haecceitas, the "thisness" of the individual natural object, was the sign both of its

individuality and its capacity to serve as microcosm, a complete world in itself.'[1]

Underlying the notion of *haecceitas* is Scotus' notion of metaphysics, with particular

reference to the relationship between 'universal' and 'individual' forms:

> The problem of universals may be thought of as the question of what, if
> anything, is the metaphysical basis of our using the same predicate for
> more than one distinct individual. [...] Those who think there is some
> actual universal existing outside the mind are called realists; those who
> deny extra-mental universals are called nominalists. Scotus was a realist
> about universals, and like all realists he had to give an account of what
> exactly those universals are: what their status is, what sort of existence
> they have outside the mind. [...] Scotus calls the extra-mental universal
> the "common nature" (*natura communis*) and the principle of
> individuation the "haecceity" (*haecceitas*). The common nature is
> common in that it is "indifferent" to existing in any number of
> individuals. But it has extra-mental existence only *in* the particular things
> in which it exists, and in them it is always "contracted" by the haecceity.[2]

Broadly speaking, then, metaphysics implies the conception of all things as part of a

totality which they themselves contain, denoting the absolute integration of all things

as things in themselves. In the same way, MacColla's theory of history conceives of

individuals as part of a totality which they themselves, acting freely, determine. More

to the point, it will be shown in this chapter how 'common nature' – which,

translated in historical terms, reflects the understanding of history as man's universal

experience - and 'haecceity' - here to be understood as the quality of the 'single'

event occurring within its spatio-temporal context – form the basis of MacColla's notion of 'history', as theorised in his essays and represented in his fiction.

It is important to underline that the metaphysical component in MacColla's sense of history is not comparable to a teleology of historical development: history for MacColla does not follow 'laws' of Progress, nor those of a Designer. In his novels, for instance, we notice how individuals become universal figures standing out against a historical background, but they are not representative of a historical development nor of any kind of progressive history. They epitomise a single moment in history which seems to exist *in itself*, outside of any historical framework. More generally, the historical element in MacColla's prose, both in his novels and his essays, does not suggest a link between the past and future on the imaginary line of history, but implies, instead, a single point in a convoluted and fragmented historical context.

According to recent theories, metaphysics and the anthropocentricity of history, which MacColla seems to support, are interpreted as incompatible with historical discontinuity. The discrepancy lies in the fact that while metaphysics necessarily deals with the problem of the universalization of time, discontinuity intrinsically implies a fragmentation of any temporal development. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, for example, Foucault suggests:

> Making historical analysis the discourse of the continuous and making human consciousness the original subject of all historical development and all action are the two sides of the same system of thought. In this system, time is conceived in terms of totalization and revolutions are never more than moments of consciousness. In various forms, this theme has played a constant role since the nineteenth century: to preserve, against all decentrings, the sovereignty of the subject, and the twin figures of anthropology and humanism.[3]

MacColla's study of discontinuity seems to detach itself from Foucault's on two fundamental aspects: metaphysics and the periodization of history. Discontinuity, according to Foucault, allows the historian to escape the chronologies dictated by 'the rise and fall of civilizations [or] the great ages of the world', and to develop a history of series and different strata ordered according to 'the specificity of their time and chronologies'.[4] MacColla, on the other hand, whilst rejecting any form of causal consequentiality in history, still seems to perceive history according to some 'traditionally' established chronological consequentiality. His focus, however, is principally on the motivations that generated the single event which, once extrapolated from this 'canonical' periodization of history, suddenly acquires a discontinuous and non-causal status in relation to events prior to it. To use a Foucauldian terminology, discontinuity, in MacColla's system of thought, is manifested through the 'types of events', or series, underlying human motives which, in his view, can only be revealed at a metaphysical level.

My intention here, however, is not to attempt to reconcile the disparate aims of what appears to be a philosophical paradox. The purpose of this chapter is to form an understanding of how these contrasting conditions - metaphysics and discontinuity - might constitute not a negotiable duality, but a single front, performing a single function, and allowing for the compact application of an homogenous idea. In order to demonstrate how the discontinuous element operates within MacColla's system of thought, I wish to draw upon Foucault's theories on truth and historical discontinuity, as expressed most proficiently in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and in his reading of Nietzsche's 'Genealogy'.

The correlation between Fionn MacColla and Michel Foucault, as suggested above, may seem highly improbable: how is it that we might find a common ground between, on the one hand, a figure like MacColla – a self-proclaimed metaphysician and an oftentimes extreme nationalist – and, on the other, a figure like Foucault - the authoritative voice of 'effective' history, destroyer extraordinaire of the traditional, the institutionalised, the established?

In view of this, juxtaposing the two requires a prompt explanation: if a common ground exists, we are likely to find it in the overlap of their respective historiographies. It is the general aim of this discussion to elicit the similarities while recognising the overriding differences between them. Foucault will remain, however, a peripheral influence on the following analysis inasmuch as it is primarily concerned with MacColla and his understanding of history. Adopting Foucault's theories in order to illustrate MacColla's position in twentieth-century Scotland, therefore, ought not to be interpreted as a forced comparison nor as surrogate means of justifying MacColla's inclusion within contemporary theory. Rather, it should be perceived as an interpretative key to our understanding of his writing within ongoing theoretical debates.

II

Discontinuity represents a moment of union and, at the same time, of separation between Foucault and MacColla. On a syntactical level – which regulates the arrangement of historical events - they both describe a history of fractures and share common views on the study of history as epistemology, rejecting classifications and

philosophies of history. In this respect, the following fragment contains MacColla's most unambiguous reference to discontinuity:

> It is imperative to understand that history has not followed any "line" which was either present in the motivation of those whose acts made history or, still less, laid down by any extra-historical force... The chronological presentation of history, then, is at any time informed with the danger of giving the impression that what has characterised history is continuity. Whereas a real acquaintance with history in the wide sense shows that it has been at least equally characterised by discontinuity.[5]

On a semantic and methodological level, however, their interpretations of discontinuity in history differ substantially. According to MacColla, it is only through the study of man as the ultimate subject of history that we can fully grasp the significance of those moments of stasis, interruption and regression which, he claims, characterise history. Foucault, on the other hand, rejects such an anthropological position and underlines how discontinuity has, at last, 'broken up the long series formed by the progress of consciousness ... the teleology of reason, or the evolution of human thought'.[6]

In the essay *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*, MacColla explores a wide range of themes, which include the impact of the Scottish Reformation, the interrelation between Anglicisation and the irreparable loss of Gaelic culture, and the value and consequences of Scottish nationalism with the context of Europe. In spite of their diversity, these themes are arranged by MacColla under the common denominator of a strict analysis and prioritisation of the human psyche on the basis of MacColla's metaphysical approach. For MacColla, in other words, any event in history is to be perceived as the physical manifestation of psychological imperatives. As he explains in one of his unpublished fragments: 'History does not begin with history. The beginning of history is *outside* history – *in the human psyche*, where lie the deep

motivations of the events which make up history…'[7] In the remainder of this exegesis, I wish to remain faithful to MacColla's intention and to focus on his analytical prioritisation of the individual state of mind which, when combined with a metaphysical approach to the 'dispersed events'[8] of history, denotes the essentials of MacColla's understanding of the latter, and illustrates, in turn, the fundamental principles of his fictional writing.

At the Sign of the Clenched Fist also contains two among the main aspects of MacColla's historiography; first, a rejection of deterministic philosophies, in particular, of Dialectical Materialism, Hegelian National Idealism and Divine Providence, and, second, an emphasis on the agency of the subject as the causal arbiter of events. As we see in the extract below, MacColla is very staunch in his repudiation of the historian's tendency to apportion causal agency to anything 'other or more than human':

> The fact is that *every* "philosophy of history," whether those that see in history a continuous unilinear "progress" … or those that discern a wavy, up and down advance, or those that perceive a dialectical or side to side and upward movement, or those that see history as a series of contiguous completed circles or as reproducing again and again the life-story of plants - every Philosophy of History is a version of what we may call the Myth or Fallacy of the *Third Party Necessarily Present* - a sort of Undistributed Muddle. That is to say … they all agree in one thing, that they imagine or presuppose or claim to see in any historical moment more than the human occupants varyingly employed, something […] acting *directly* on the situation, irrespective of the objectives, fully or otherwise comprehended, of the humanity of the place and time.[9]

Distancing himself from these systems of thought, MacColla adds a relevant clause to his anthropological model by discarding the concept of 'historical man' as nothing more than a 'mental abstraction', an *a fortiori* and subjective definition given by partisan historians, and exalting instead the study of man 'as he *is*'.[10] This is mostly

carried out in his historical fiction, where MacColla, paradoxically, operates a movement of de-historicisation of the subject with the intent of retracing his/her deepest motivations underlying the event. In this respect, the following references to Dostoevsky – one of many in MacColla's fragments - are illustrative of MacColla's method of enquiry in the study of the psychology of being as a basis for the study of history:

> What Dostoevsky showed was the 'metaphysical significance of pathological phenomena'. What he did for persons I attempt to do for history. [...] As his study of individuals in state of stress and imbalance casts light in human personality, so I aim to cast light on society in its 'normal', non-eruptive moments.[11]

MacColla's predilection for Dostoevsky is supported by an element which he regards as quintessential to the Russian writer's study of the individual, and that is, as MacColla himself puts it, 'the quality of the minute'. According to MacColla, what enabled Dostoevsky to grasp and reveal such profound perceptions of the human psyche was his affirming or yea-saying movement towards the being not-'I', best exemplified in his proneness to 'cast himself down in awe of the humanity and godlikeness he perceived even in the most degraded of men'.[12]

In *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* MacColla introduces the distinction between the 'yea-saying' and the 'nay-saying' attitudes, emphasising their universal value as factors, not external, but intrinsic to mankind. By 'Yea' and 'Nay' MacColla means the given response of any human being when confronted with a being not-'I', an entity opposed to the being 'I' (the self). A total acceptance of the being not-'I', embodied in another human being or in any other object existing outside the consciousness of the being 'I', implies an affirmation, a Yea-say, of the being not-'I' itself: 'The *being*, 'I', affirming, that is, saying Yea to or embracing at the level of the

being an other *being*, is interpenetrated by that 'other', becomes one with it, is enriched by it in the degree in which in a sense it *becomes* that other' (*CF*, p. 119).[13] A negation of the being not-'I', meanwhile, gradually impoverishes the essence of the self which is now prevented from enfolding the other and absorbing its positive effects. But what are the effects of a 'nay-saying' attitude? And what is its application within MacColla's system of thought? In *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* MacColla's theory acquires a concrete texture when applied to the historical contours of the Reformation:

> The Reformation would still have been the Reformation had there been no advantage to England – although in that case of course, it would not have succeeded: the point is irrelevant as regards the question we have decided we must concerned ourselves with, namely what the Reformation was *in itself*, as an event in the human person, or at any rate in some particular human persons, whether in the conscious or subconscious regions of their personality, in their intellect, their emotions or their will. (*CF*, p. 51)

MacColla, carrying on his analysis of man's psyche, points out the parallel between the 'nay-saying' attitude and the doctrines of Presbyterianism, mainly attributable to the concept of predestination, which implies a rejection of those who are not among the elect. Rejecting the being–not 'I', and anything that stands below them, the Presbyterians rid themselves of all obligations towards the being not-'I' and, at the same time, create a society based on reticence rather than communion. According to MacColla, the immediate effect of Presbyterianism is the tendency to avoid confrontation and to obliterate the voice of the other. The effect of such an annihilation, he goes on, is a self-aggrandizement within a Manichean framework of 'good' (the being–'I') against 'evil' (the being–not 'I'):

> It goes without saying that in the act of criticising, censuring or denigrating an "other", his being or acts or works, actual or imputed, one

is translated into a status or condition of superiority in his regard, knows oneself as "good" in comparison with his "bad". "Knowing" oneself as "good" is the end-product of the act of negation. (*CF*, p. 179)

The Russian Revolution was, to the writer, another manifestation of the denial of the being–not 'I', just as the advance of Presbyterianism. The following explicit references to the Russian revolution provide an example of how MacColla's ontological strategy is couched in political and social terms. Moreover, in what follows MacColla exposes himself as a declared antagonist of any actualisation of dialectical materialism:

> [The Russians' advance], in ways which even in the West would be regarded as 'Progress', was tremendous; they were 'advancing' far faster than the troika under the aspect of what Gogol saw as Russia rushing into the enigmatic future. [...] What happened was that the Revolution stopped their advance dead. Now, this is absolutely crucial, it is utterly, absolutely necessary to understand or one understands nothing: the Revolution was not an Advance, it was not a Progress, it was not inevitable, it was not a Development, it was something which stopped the advance of the Russian people dead. Communism was the clenched fist which smashed clean through the Russian people's democratic future.[14]

Elsewhere he describes the revolution as the disclosure of destructive forces which, driven by the desire to impose an a priori perception of history, carry out what we have described as an operation of the negation of the *other* which causes a fracture with the past: '[The Communist] immediately "recognises" the "truth" of a doctrine which at one stroke sets him free of all obligation to every overshadowing reality or "other" whether of the present or of the past' (*CF*, p. 154). It is clear from this brief reference to the Russian revolution how MacColla's perception of the historical event concentrates primarily on the individual's will as the principal cause for the manifestation of the event itself. But another important element, this time more strictly related to historical discontinuity, can be extrapolated from MacColla's

exegesis of the Russian revolution and more specifically of the doctrines of dialectical materialism underlying such a social movement. The significant rupture with the past, which is embodied in the occurrence of the revolution, appears to MacColla to be ideologically incompatible with the dialectical aspect of Marxism. What MacColla seems to suggest is that the driving force which animates the metaphysics of the will of the revolutionaries is nothing more than a desire to perpetuate the immanent dialectic of history in the name of Progress, but also that such a desire has its climax in a moment of fracture. Discontinuity, in other words, is paradoxically necessary to the Communists for the perpetuation of a dialectical understanding of history, although is, in MacColla's own analysis, neither 'inescapable' nor justifiable within the historical coordinates of the time.

What can be inferred from such observations is that, according to MacColla, discontinuity is simply and solely a mode in which history can manifest itself, and, as such, it must be taken into account in the reconstruction of the historical event. In relation to this, we can delineate two levels of interpretation concerning discontinuity in MacColla's system of thought which remind us to Foucault's own affirmations in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*.[15] Discontinuity, in this sense, is translated by MacColla into an instrument of research. I am referring, in particular, to the methods employed by the author, especially in his fiction, towards the reconstruction and illustration of discontinuity. So far, in the present discussion, we have dealt with the first aspect of discontinuity, with particular emphasis on the psychological component which characterises it. And, as has been shown in relation to MacColla's analysis of Communism, it is in the relationship between the will and the intellect

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that the motivations of the historical event are to be traced, including those for its discontinuous condition.

III

To resume our comparison with Foucault, it is worth emphasising, once again, how the French philosopher distances himself from any anthropological approach, such as the one undertaken by MacColla, and that he insists, instead, on the active role of the document as the only reliable object of historical investigation:

> History now organises the document, divides it up, distributes it, orders it, arranges it in levels, establishes series, distinguishes between what is relevant and what is not, discovers elements, defines unities, describes relations. The document, then, is no longer for history an inert material through which it tries to reconstitute what men have done or said, the events of which only the trace remains; history is now trying to define within the documentary material itself unities, totalities, series, relations.[16]

Most importantly, according to Foucault the document allows history to be in a constant state of mobility, so as to avoid a static and dogmatic notion of truth. In the essay 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History', for instance, Foucault challenges the metaphysician's ultimate deference to the conception of truth:

> The historian's history finds its support outside of time and pretends to base its judgments on an apocalyptic objectivity. This is only possible, however, because of its belief in eternal truth, the immortality of the soul, and the nature of consciousness as always identical to itself. Once the historical sense is mastered by a suprahistorical perspective, metaphysics can bend it to its own purpose and, by aligning it to the demands of objective science, it can impose its own "Egyptianism". On the other hand, the historical sense can evade metaphysics and become a privileged instrument of genealogy if it refuses the certainty of absolutes. Given this, it corresponds to the acuity of a glance that distinguishes, separates, and disperses, that is capable of liberating divergence and marginal elements - the kind of dissociating view that is capable of decomposing itself, capable of shattering the unity of man's being through which it was thought that he could extend his sovereignty to the events of his past.[17]

Foucault's discourse supports the decomposition of the historical narrative through an overall movement of the decentralisation of the subject. In the Foreword to the English edition of *The Order of Things* Foucault states very clearly: 'If there is one approach that I do reject, however, it is that ... which gives absolute priority to the observing subject, which attributes a constituent role to an act, which places its own point of view at the origin of all historicity – which in short leads to a transcendental consciousness.'[18] On the other hand, MacColla's approach to history revolves around the subject as the founding unit of all historical discourses. In the light of such considerations, it is now easy to see where Foucault's and MacColla's positions differ – in their diametrically opposed consideration of man – and where such contrasts may lead – namely, a discrepant evaluation of metaphysics and, in particular, of the teleological argument of the origin. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, according to Foucault, metaphysics is strictly related to the relationship between the continuous unfolding of history and the self-reflexive subject, namely, the *Cogito*. History, for Foucault, 'is the concrete body of a development, with its moments of intensity, its lapses, its extended periods of feverish agitation, its fainting spells; and only a metaphysician would seek its soul in the distant reality of the origin'.[19] MacColla, however, while embracing the idea of origin, by him perceived as the 'First Cause or Creative Absolute', and thus affirming the possibility of transcendental contingencies, seems to evade historical totalizations, emphasising the unique and unrepeatable nature of the historical event and the necessity of studying it in its actuality, that is in its isolated and inorganic moment of separation. It is necessary, therefore, to ask ourselves how a metaphysical

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potential and an affirmation of man as the ultimate subject of history can interact, within the same system of thought, with a categorical rejection of any 'suprahistorical perspective' and a firm insistence on the discontinuous nature of history. This question becomes even more necessary if we consider Foucault's association of continuous history with human consciousness, an equation that, as it has been shown so far, is rejected by MacColla's historical discourse.

It would not be inappropriate to define MacColla's metaphysical notion as *sui generis*, in that it rejects any teleological impulse. In relation to Foucault's argument, then, we could say that, while it is possible to trace in MacColla's understanding of metaphysics a movement of descent towards the depth of the origin of the subject, there is, nevertheless, no intention to formulate an *a priori* standard of absolutes nor to universalise such a movement as the sole access to historical truth. MacColla's metaphysical model, in other words, reinvents itself on a constant basis, being extremely sensitive to the variable parameters of space and time, and, precisely because of its idiosyncratic nature, is not geared towards the imposition of any 'suprahistorical perspective', be it religious, philosophical or historical. In this sense, we might suggest that MacColla's understanding of metaphysics is not a means of feigning objectivity. MacColla's analysis refutes what underlies Foucault's assumption regarding the apparent interdependence between man's unity of being and his power or 'sovereignty' over the past. In order to substantiate further MacColla's refusal, it is worth remembering how, in *Clenched Fist*, he denounces those doctrines which, in his analysis, allow the being 'I' to exert a sense of superiority over the past due to a prior operation of the dualisation of 'external reality', or of division from and consequent negation of the being not-'I':

The simple dualising approach, with only two rigid categories into which everything has perforce to be divided, liberates us at a stroke from all the complexities, not to say perplexities, all the nuances, all the difficulties of access to evidence, all the doubts and doubtfulnesses and necessary suspensions of judgement of actual history "out there," and confers on us the satisfying sensations of knowledge at the cost of no more effort than is required to distinguish between yes and no. *To dualise your material is the quickest and easiest way to feel you possess it and have power over it.* (*CF*, pp. 26-27)

MacColla here insists on the of unity of the subject as arbiter of historical events but on such grounds as he denies historical universalisations and suprahistorical approaches; he allows for oneness only through a temporal suspension of 'the event', which resembles Foucault, though with the essential modification of a metaphysical grounding. The theme of the unity of the human being had briefly appeared in *The Albannach* (1932), but it is in a paper, part of twelve lectures on philosophy given by MacColla for the New University Society of Edinburgh (between 1935 and 1938), that we encounter its more extensive theorisation. 'Aristotle restored the substantial unity of the human being which had been denied in the platonic system,' MacColla explains in his lecture on Plato and Aristotle; and then he continues defining the ephemeral concept of 'form'. 'The *forms* of things, being immaterial or spiritual, are therefore also intelligible, and the intellect, being itself spiritual, is able to know or possess them. Our ideas are not innate memories of pre-natal experiences of the soul, *but are derived from the senses by an activity of the mind.*'[20]

In relation to this, it is easy to understand what is the philosophical matrix of Maighstir Sachairi's frame of mind, as described in *And the Cock Crew*. As a Presbyterian minister of a Gaelic community in danger of being evicted, Maighstir Sachairi finds himself crucially involved in the final decision on the future of his flock. With reference to the quotation above, we could argue that Sachairi's dilemma

revolves around the interdependent relationship between senses and ideas, whereby his passionate intention to establish a correspondence between the two, results, instead, in a tragic and incommensurate dichotomy:

> The natural disposition of Maighstir Sachairi's mind was towards the inhabiting *forms* of its objects. He tended to be little conscious of parts and divisions in the things he saw. What his mind quested was totalities, what it sought to grasp in things was that which made them living and intelligible wholes – that which they were in themselves, not that of which they were composed. [...]
> And because the forms in Nature pass into each other, overlap, spread out and continue themselves in every direction, only finally completed within the total scheme of visible things, Maighstir Sachairi's habit was to imagine for himself limits within which the things at which he looked would make by themselves a harmonious whole. [...]
> The life of the glenpeople in its yearly round and seasons possessed in his eyes a shape and harmony; it appeared as a natural work of completion of unassisted Nature, on which it rested as on a base properly proportioned to it and with which it formed a single, ordered, intelligible whole. To destroy it seemed an outrage and a violation, the triumph of chaos over order.[21]

Sachairi's 'natural disposition' towards the appreciation of forms is evident, but its manifestation appears somehow abnormal, and most importantly, not 'contemporary' with the occurrence of ideas; ideas which, because based on religious dogmas, necessarily pre-empt the senses. The seizure which has separated his will from his intellect will not be filled up, nor be compensated by the minister's obsessive attraction to the vision of an harmonious and organic whole: 'Constantly, everywhere he looked, he had been seeking the satisfaction of an inner craving of his mind for harmonies, for the beauty shed by intelligibility in created forms. And as the natural man is in Sin, and the natural mind seeks what is contrary to God, *he had been sinning.*'[22]

However, we should not forget that what animates the entire plot is, precisely, Sachairi's psychological turmoil and it would be a mistake to overlook its dialectical

nature so early in the story. In fact, it is only after the dialogue between Fearchar the Poet, the intellectual representative of the community, who will try to dissuade the minister from aligning with the oppressor, and Sachairi himself, that the minister will fall back into an irreversible dogmatism. As MacColla suggests in the essay 'Mein Bumpf', 'the section where Maighstir Sachairi and Fearchar the Poet argue things out is central to the book in more ways than one'.[23]

In view of this, borrowing a definition from Mikhail Bakhtin's study of Dostoevsky, we could argue that the confrontation between the poet and the minister represents a 'dialogic communion *between* consciousnesses'.[24] In other words, Fearchar's and Sachairi's 'ideas' on Scotland's past, on man's free will, on poetry and on the future of the community become, at last, 'living images': 'The idea', Bakhtin asserts, 'begins to live, that is to take shape, to develop, to find and renew its verbal expression, to give birth to new ideas, only when it enters into a genuine dialogic relationship with other ideas, with the ideas of *others*'.[25] This is what happens to Sachairi's dogmatic belief in predestination. In coming into contact with Fearchar's progressive stance and faith in man's free will, the minister's conscience loses – temporarily - its ideological, and monologic, stance, whilst opening up to a different voice. The powerful effect of such a confrontation is dramatically revealed in Sachairi's immense effort, both physical and psychological:

> A sense almost unbearably heightened. For it happened then. Without pause or anything intermediate his mind achieved that knowledge which had been intimated, the transforming vision in a timeless instant. He understood how Fearchar and he had lived in different universes. He saw that universe that was Fearchar's, the world that was the world as Fearchar saw and felt it, and it had an actuality and clearness that made it eternally true, and for Fearchar. But by no means had he himself passed into it, to live in it henceforward. Far, far from that; for he saw his own world simultaneously and it was true also with an equal actuality.[26]

The metaphysics of being manifests itself in the crystallisation of a moment of awareness, which is now dense, static and invariable: 'In a timeless instant' the minister has allowed his being 'I' to penetrate the being not-'I', that is Fearchar's vision of life, but has, at the same time, rejected it. As Bakhtin might put it, in the end the minister's ideas have relapsed into 'ideological monologism'.[27]

Destroying the life of the community, in Sachairi's mind, is equal to a movement of cultural and geographical displacement and temporal rupture – '...given over to sheep and shepherding the life of the district would be meaningless by itself, its centre would lie outside it far away in the wool markets and factories of the south; it would decline at once from an intelligible whole and become no more than an insignificant and not even necessary point on the circumference of a life centred elsewhere.'[28] As anticipated above, however, Sachairi will eventually abandon his community to the factors and thus be partly responsible for its fragmentation. MacColla's categorical dismissal of the doctrines of predestination, which he aligns with other philosophies of history, finds in Sachairi's behaviour its most turbulent and yet convincing expression. The minister's overriding vision of history perceives the event as inscribed, predetermined and therefore inevitable; its occurrence lies outside of time, in the will of God: 'For in the light of that moment, that Simultaneous, he saw this that was coming and must come *as if it had been already past*. And therefore it could no longer appear before him as something about which he must decide or act.'[29]

In the following quotation we will recognise some of the predicaments about history put forth in *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*. In particular, the dichotomy

between an understanding of history conducted through the doctrines of reprobation and predetermination over fate, exemplified by Sachairi's teleological perception of history, and a vision of history, such as Fearchar's, which endorses an unconditional exertion of free-will and develops 'in time', that is, historically:

> Maighstir Sachairi's mind by the direction given to it even in infancy, as well as by his later training and long discipline, was able to act only (as it were) on the vertical plane: he thought of '*God*,' and '*man*' or '*men*,' and understood events only as produced in the tensions between the Divine and human wills; and not otherwise was he able to understand the world. Hence he was unable to think historically, for that is as it were horizontally; incapable from the very nature of his mind of recognising the validity of a view which might seek to explain events as the product of factors working out in a process that must be called historical. In effect, Fearchar's reasoning swayed him not at all, for it followed a line which led it always outside its accustomed categories. He could not see that there might be causes other than what might be called theological for the act of this destruction; no more could he see that destruction as an event which would itself enter into the process of history and let loose a train of others leading of necessity, if unprevented, to an end that was predictable.[30]

At this stage of our discussion, it would be useful to evaluate another essential element which characterises MacColla's historical model and which is contained in the speculations on historical time as expounded in *And the Cock Crew*. I am referring to the 'vertical' quality of MacColla's historical analysis, an analysis which, as mentioned above, prioritises the human psyche rather than the circumstantial event; an analysis, in other words, which, inspired by Dostoevsky, descends into the depth of the subconscious as a means of representing the event. It is essential, however, not to confuse such a 'vertical' quality with Sachairi's own perception of time. MacColla, in this respect, seems to invoke a crucial distinction between the temporal plane in which occurs the apprehension of the historical event – that is the horizontal plane - and the temporal plane in which the understanding of the motives

which lead to the occurrence of the event take place – in this case we should be talking of a vertical plane. MacColla's 'verticality' is not dictated by a religious dogma, as it is for Sachairi; in MacColla's case the synchronic approach to history is a necessary and direct development of the diachronic one. His intention, then, is not to negate the occurrence of the historical event 'throughout time', but to penetrate its significance in an instant of temporal suspension.

In order to familiarize further with such a concept, it is worth referring to another character, Ewen MacRury, from MacColla's later novel, *The Ministers*. As the new young minister of a small Highland community, MacRury upsets the spiritual and social routine of his congregation by falling into epiphanic trances and experiencing moments of intense contemplation through which he is able to reconstruct past events. Needless to say, such behaviour is strongly reprimanded by his Presbyterian peers as well as by his congregation, so that he is forced to abstain from it. In what follows, the narrator is especially eager to underline the margin separating the two temporal levels on which MacRury operates: 'There was in him still only a desolation of yearning towards those contemplations lost and forfeited, the feeling of emptiness lingering after the "normal" use of time, unfilled with consciousness or more conspective thought...'[31] MacRury, in being confined to the horizontal plane, has been denied the synchronicity of the event and denied, therefore, the possibility of reconstructing the historical event in its most vivid and exhaustive form.

From such examples, we can suggest that the compression of time, concerning human motives, in a single fraction, or 'flash of vision', becomes the defining trait of MacColla's fiction. In relation to this, J. B. Caird's concise definition

of MacColla's understanding of history effectively expresses its use also in fictional terms: 'History for MacColla is very much a matter of happenings (to use the word in its Hardyan sense).'[32] Similarly, Valentina Poggi underlines a fundamental distinction between the concepts of *being* and *becoming* in MacColla's understanding of history:

> In his novels MacColla is concerned far more with rendering the perception of *being* than the experience of *becoming*; this is perhaps another aspect of his quarrel with history, because history involves motion, development, change, while the contemplative eye strives to get at the still essence of being, to grasp the *haecceitas*, as Duns Scotus defined it, or the *inscape*, as Gerald Manley Hopkins called it, of the object. [33]

The individual's acute perception and internalisation of time occurs in MacColla's fictional texts with such a preponderance as to become often identified with the narrative structure of the text itself. In relation to this, a detailed exegesis of MacColla's narrative strategies and the relative problems of authorship will be discussed in another chapter, where Michael Bakhtin's theory of chronotopes will allow us to create a framework within which to operate.

IV

'History is man's,' MacColla asserts in *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*, though adding, 'History [...] was in the first instance written only by man. Unfortunately it has been written all over again by historians' (*CF*, p. 42).[34] Such statements open MacColla's fervent invective against the category of professional historians but, more importantly, suggest a crucial distinction, in MacColla's 'reading' of history, between man taking part in the historical event and the historian's *a fortiori* account of history. MacColla's accusations are directed towards the latter's reconstructive methods – methods which often fail to reinstate and reproduce evidences of its

accounts; a method which does not take into consideration those moments of interruption which are intrinsic to history, but rather enhances its own absolute validity. With specific reference to Scottish history writing, MacColla declares: 'The error… has been… to present actual events which marked the process as having been part of a 'necessary' development representing 'Progress', although as we have demonstrated that both of these terms are subjective, conceptual, superstitious, loaded with illicit value judgements, and have nothing whatever to do with history' (*CF*, p. 187).

The following fragment exemplifies MacColla's position toward professional historians, although its 'unfinished' condition impedes a fully coherent exegesis:

> It is given to few men to stand outside their age, to understand the true significance of contemporary forces, to anticipate the end towards which events are really moving. The men who wrote histories of Scotland in the 19th and first years of the 20th century were not of that type or calibre… Like almost all their contemporaries they regarded the bewilderingly rapid developments of the 19th century with pride and a sort of awed reverence. With more excuses [?], perhaps, than the men of any previous time they invested the features of their own age with an absolute value and the quality of permanence.[35]

Most evidently in the conclusive part of this fragment, MacColla is questioning the fallacious representation of the historical event as repository of certainties and ultimately of truth. More specifically, his criticism is directed towards the so-called 'official' view of history, which establishes itself according to a principle of continuity and necessity, consisting of a deliberate misinterpretation and misrepresentation of Scottish history, many examples of which are given by MacColla in *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*.[36]

> In brief the [historian's] method has the effect of causing the factual (or fictional) elements of "history" which it is desired the population should

"know" to be more real in the mind or solid in consciousness, and consequently more evocative of consent, than other factual elements, *not* desired to evoke consent, which will by comparison be reduced to a less reality in the mind by less frequent mention and in a less affirming or even a subtly derisive tone – the method of Falsification by Inflation on the one hand and a corresponding Falsification by Diminution on the other. (*CF*, p. 43)

Despite such criticism, MacColla never excludes the possibility of approaching history through a cognitive act; the possibility, in other words, of allowing the intellect to lead a reconstructive process. This is, however, a rare phenomenon. More often, historians are conditioned and subconsciously driven by the necessity to retrace and canonise a history of victory and winning sides. MacColla's perception of the historical fact appears somewhat controversial. On the one hand, he sees it as the only vehicle to historical truth; on the other, he regards it in all its weakness and total dependence on man's interpretation of it. That is why he is often prone to suggest that, when supported by the work of the will rather than that of the intellect, the acquisition of factual knowledge is deceptive and can only lead to subjective, partial and often fallacious conclusions. For MacColla, any event in history, which, as a recorded example of human activity, might seem impossible to misinterpret, hides a layered structure which reveals itself (if it ever does) only to a very attentive and perceptive eye. In relation to this, MacColla poses such questions: 'What is this view of the past which is assumed on all sides to have an absolute validity, to be the obvious and self-evident truth about history, and how did it come to be formed and then imposed?' (*CF*, p. 19) The answer, according to MacColla, has to be sought in a combination of psychological and socio-political conditions. 'We can hardly fail to begin to perceive that our own structure of historical "certainties" can be nothing more than ... a falsehood agreed upon, a structure of historical certainties devised

with a view to their own self-justification and self-perpetuation by some party or "side" which at some point or other were the winning side' (*CF*, p. 21). What model, then, does MacColla suggest in order to retrace and re-present the historical event?

Despite the Messianic vision with which Walter Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History* are imbued, and which immediately distance MacColla from the German philosopher, they nevertheless contain a significant reflection regarding the status of the victor in history which might help us define the paradigms of MacColla's model. Far from suggesting any philosophical similarities between Benjamin and MacColla (their respective understandings of Materialistic philosophy and historiography could not be further apart) I would like to invoke, nevertheless, one of Benjamin's most vivid images as a means of clarifying MacColla's position. I am referring, in particular, to the task which Benjamin ascribes to the historical materialist in order to contradict the claims over the past as advanced by historicism. The adherents of historicism, Benjamin points out, empathize with the victor and have a 'stubborn faith in progress';[37] in contrast to this, a historical materialist's task is 'to brush history against the grain',[38] to detect traces of barbarism amongst traces of civilisation. It is in this tendency to revisit history with the intent to disrupt the uniformity of 'truth', to reject the assumption of progress as tenable principle, and to 'escape the error of prematurity of systematisation' (*CF*, p. 21) that MacColla's and Benjamin's historical visions reach an affinity which can only be partially justified by a reciprocal aversion towards historicism. Having said this, I wish to reinforce the unsustainability of any further similarities between MacColla and Benjamin, given that the latter's understanding of history is based on a Marxist-Messianic model which is irreconcilable with MacColla's own system of thought.

42

MacColla's stance against historicism, which represents one of the pivotal aspects of his historical analysis, is clearly stated in the following article, written early in his career for *The Free Man*, in 1933:

> Historicism is a pernicious heresy which consists in regarding objective truth as merely the expression of the historic process, the sum of events occurring in time, and the crude-evolutionary form it so commonly takes in our day consists in regarding all history, and particularly human history, as an uninterrupted unilateral progress on the horizontal plane from the unutterable darkness of early times to the magnificence that is to-day. It is a vulgar attitude which judges events according to their lateness in time and regards the figures of the past as grotesque eccentrics ridiculously agitated about trivial concerns devoid entirely of the awful significance that invests contemporary affairs. Whereas in fact and on the contrary human greatness relates to elements to which time is always irrelevant; human action is great in exact proportion as it triumphs over time.[39]

Of the three salient points mentioned in the article – antagonism against historicism, the primary role of human agency in history and the irrelevance of time – it is the latter which has been most flagrantly neglected by the critics. Arguably, however, it is the most crucial to MacColla's fictional and non-fictional programme. The reason for this is twofold. Firstly, it confirms, once again, how detrimental the concept of Progress is in MacColla's system of thought, especially when exemplified in the intellectual supremacy of man over his predecessor in history. Strictly related to this first aspect is the second. Anticipating the conclusions of the present study, we could say that the element which allows metaphysics and discontinuity to coexist in MacColla's writing lies precisely in a deliberate decomposition of the (continual) temporal element in favour of the psychological component of the motives which activate man in history.

A full grasp of MacColla's twofold notion of time is also essential in order to understand another aspect of his system of thought. I am referring to his critical

position towards the professional historian and the methodological choices he makes in order to distance himself from such a figure. In relation to this, the following fragment undoubtedly ought to be considered as *sine qua non* in our discussion:

> Certainly, where history is concerned, there must be a preparatory period of the acquisition of factual knowledge. But in the end, it is a case that, in Hugh MacDiarmid's phrase: 'Truth isna seized, it dawns". True knowledge of history is in a certain sense or apprehension of a taste in experience or flavour of life which lies beyond no matter how solid or accurate a mass of the 'facts'. It is because they never reach beyond the region of their 'facts' to the essential thing, the unique flavour, taste or aroma of the life of a particular past of history or area of the past - because they remain, as it were, in the area of the truth that can be seized and never reach (or suspect) the truth that dawns - that historians, almost invariably, so often remain confined among their... accumulations of 'facts'.[40]

That MacColla endorses the compelling necessity to attain historical truth is well illustrated above: but, after having as clearly rejected that of the professional historian, what is his mode of historical investigation? Despite the rigour with which he carries out his documentary historical research, MacColla firmly believes that the ultimate historical "truth' ought to be traced through a movement of 'post-factual empathy',[41] the attempt to issue a mode of consciousness which reaches beyond historical factual knowledge. In the same fragment MacColla gives more specific instructions on how to reconstruct the historical event and to enter the being not-'I' of those taking part in it: 'One has to have an ear for nuances in their utterance, an eye for what they saw, some knowledge of their language ... so as by all means to participate in their consciousness, otherwise no matter how great the accumulation of facts about people, our knowledge in their regard continues to be like a mouthing of voiceless words in the dark'.[42]

The application of this method of enquiry has produced some of the most interesting characters in MacColla's fiction, such as the afore-mentioned Maighstir Sachairi and Ewen MacRury, but also the controversial reformed priest, John Tod, in *Move Up John*, and the mysterious Nikolay Parfenovich, in the Russian-Scottish novel *Facing the Muzhik*.

MacRury's 'reconstructive imagination' presents MacColla's most successful exemplification of what was defined, at the beginning of this chapter, as a 'compact application of an idea' in relation to the coexistence of metaphysics and discontinuity in MacColla's historical representation. As demonstrated below, it is these two elements, bound together, which underlie and inspire MacRury's perception of time and which appear to be activated, according to the terms by which MacColla describes it, by an exertion of post-factual empathy:

> Everyone ought to pause not once but twice or thrice in the course of every day and pose himself at the centre of his own sense of the motion of time, allowing the beam of inward perception to sweep back through the ages, whose solidity after all was composed of nothing either more or less flimsy than this present flickering moment, a rapid conspective view of way of life after way of life, city after city built up with infinite striving and labour, as it were sculptured out of the gross and inert material of life by the mind, the spirit, the consciousness of the mass of persons concerned, and which for a time seemed a structure in which that spirit, that mind might take up permanent habitation, but which none the less passed away along with the mind that had been unable to think such an event. It was now all the same out of the active world, and perhaps even out of the memory let alone the partial apprehension of a later mind.[43]

MacColla significantly charges MacRury's meditations with historical connotations so that his mystical visions are often to be discerned as 'culminations' of Scotland's past. In the following instance, MacRury is conversing with some peers about the Jacobite rebellion when suddenly the reader is transported onto a different level of

narration. The point of view shifts from MacRury's external circumstances to a kind of cross-fertilisation between his external and internal perceptions:

> Soundlessly through the room, between them, came marching a regiment of those dead ghosts. Mud-stained and their tartans tattered from the campaign. Coming from their deeds and advancing with urgency upon their fate. The light was clear on their accoutrements and antique panoply, a surge in all their motions, but their expression "inward", averted and inscrutable; nothing they gave away of the thought in every mind that made their faces "set", and poured over all their forms that air of resolution. A long minute they kept passing... not an army, some detached portion, all of the same badge and tartan... till the last stragglers passed through the fireside wall and away, their backs and swinging tartans and bonnet-covered heads darkening, contracting to a point, becoming nothing. Soundlessly... what they knew they had taken with them'.[44]

The concrete, almost cinematic, texture of this scene is not only appropriate, but also functional to the rendering of the different time-scales in the novel. The temporal planes of the narration overlap, whereby a minute of 'normal' time is dilated to such an extent that the image looks still in all its detailed limpidity, but then dissolves again gradually to a point of non-existence.

If we accept post-factual empathy as MacColla's most congenial method of enquiry, we could reasonably claim that it is through his fiction that MacColla identifies the reliable site of historical truth, as it is in fiction that post-factual empathy releases all its potentialities and is able to consolidate the delineation of general patterns through the characterization of the individual. In this respect, MacColla's position finds an authoritative echo in the words of Nicola Chiaromonte who, in his study of the historical discourse in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, posits: 'It is only through fiction and the dimension of the imagery that we can learn something real about individual experience. Any other approach is bound to be general and abstract.'[45]

Chiaromonte's observations appear even more to exemplify the function of post-factual empathy within the medium of fiction if we take into account the following 'instructions' as illustrated in the early pages of *The Ministers*:

>…now the world is full of those who have none of the knowledge, for whom all time prior to the day beyond yesterday is shrouded in a dense mistiness, impenetrable except that here and there in its depths loom a few distorted forms of past events – and a good few looming shapes that never were events at all but myths, which serve many in place of events for they look as solid as anything else in the general gloom of impenetrable ignorance. Equally, merely factual knowledge, dry-as-dust, statistical, without the imagination, is of little worth for judgement forming, for it is without life and therefore reality, relevance, significance for *us*. Perhaps worst of all is imagination without knowledge, imagination to picture solidly, as if it had been real, a false version of the past, thence to derive sanction for lines of action that can only carry the interior judgement that accompanies unrealism in action.[46]

According to MacColla, then, it is in this delicate, but essential equilibrium between reconstructive imagination and knowledge of the past, which is itself based on a knowledge of documents, that the attainment of historical truth is possible. But in order to manifest itself, historical truth requires a twofold perception of time. MacColla's repudiation of aprioristic philosophical systems, leaves us with only one option, which can be expressed through the borrowed definition from Chiaromonte, and that is that historical truth acquires its significance while the fact is being accomplished.[47] In this respect, historical truth is firmly set within the coordinates of 'normal' time, to use MacRury's temporal evaluation scale, and is contemporary with and intrinsic to the historical event. But in order to grasp such a 'truth', we need to project ourselves on a different temporal plane or, more specifically, to transcend time altogether. Indeed the medium of fiction allows MacColla to 'play' with such variable temporalities, as well as with his characters' individual perceptions, so that the historical scenario which he delineates becomes inherently devoid of temporal

and qualitative universalisations. This transcendental approach, in contradistinction to Foucault, allows for historical discontinuity; in fact, each – metaphysics and discontinuity – makes the other a necessary condition for history.

V

MacColla's historiography has revealed itself as evading conventional categorisations. In this exegesis I have tried to illustrate how metaphysics and discontinuity in MacColla are not mutually exclusive, but are functionally dependent on one another. It is necessary to stress this interdependence as the key element in our understanding of MacColla's reflections on history. It is, indeed, through a chaotic and casual past, animated by single and contingent events, that MacColla motions his descent into or emergence from the origin, First Cause of all historic events and eventualities.

Also, particular emphasis has been placed on the fact that MacColla's perception of discontinuity in the reading of history, and the discontinuous methods he adopts to reconstruct the historical event, do not question the indissoluble bond between past and present: they simply epitomise a rejection of progressive history. To understand this means to be able to conceive MacColla's interpretation of Scotland's present history in a different light from that of his contemporaries, for example, Muir and Gibbon, to anticipate the subject of the next chapters.

Some of the controversial statements contained in *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* have resulted, critically, in MacColla being identified with images of self-hatred towards Scottish history. Cairns Craig, for example, suggests in *Out of History*: 'In Scotland our cultural analysis has been obsessed with images of our self-hate. Depending on our particular choice of protagonists within our history we will heap

odium upon Calvin for perverting our original character, upon Knox for making us think in English, upon the Enlightenment for seeking a European cosmopolitanism'.[48] Craig, then, elects MacColla as epitomising such an attitude, which, he says, is conveyed in the conclusion to *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*: 'Fionn MacColla probably put it at its most extreme in his attack on Calvinism when he asserted … that "what the reformation did was to snuff out what must otherwise have developed into the most brilliant national culture in history."'[49] Further on in his analysis, after showing how history has evaded 20th century Scottish narrative, Craig infers: 'In Gibbon, in Gunn, in Naomi Mitchison, in George Mackay Brown, the failure of history is turned into a positive virtue instead of a cultural disaster, but in their vision of a historyless world always on the point of collapse into history they are the mirror image of the paradigm of a Scottish history which lapsed into a historyless present.'[50]

Indeed, as we have analysed above, MacColla's insistence on the study of nay-saying movements would not include him amongst his peers for his efforts to illustrate history's 'positive virtue'. Nor, however, can his vision of the world be described as 'historyless'; if anything, it is excessively charged with history. But what is most relevant is that MacColla, unlike most of his contemporaries, aims at an understanding of Scotland's present through the reconstruction of past events. In his unpublished introduction to the 1971 edition of *The Albannach*, Hugh MacDiarmid seems to underline this crucial aspect of MacColla's understanding of history, and does so citing Kurt Wittig's chapter on MacColla, included in *The Scottish Tradition in Literature*. With particular references to MacColla's novels on the Clearances - *The Albannach* and *And the Cock Crew* - Wittig writes:

These novels do not approach the clearances primarily as a means of creating a picture of past history, but as the buried root of contemporary Highland difficulties, and as the immediate cause of the crofting problem that the present generation is desperately trying to solve. History is here regarded as the matrix of the present.[51]

It should be added that, as it has been illustrated above, it is not cyclic, progressive, or primeval modes of historical perception that MacColla invokes, but an intimate insight into the metaphysics of the will. Hence the question posed by the narrator in *The Ministers*: 'Without such a wide, conspective vision, without the power to reconstruct the fragments of past ages solidly and livingly in the imagination, what basis is there for judgement of the present case?'[52]

In conclusion, such observations lead us to a fundamental, and yet, as Craig's commentary implies, too often overlooked, or misunderstood, aspect of MacColla's understanding of history; and that is, to put it simply, to the recognition of a constructive impulse and a profound belief in the potentialities of Scotland's future. After all, without such an intellectual conviction, his life-long activism within the Scottish National Party could hardly have found reasons for existing.

Notes

[1] David Daiches, 'Hugh MacDiarmid and the Scottish Tradition', in *The Age of MacDiarmid - Hugh MacDiarmid and his Influence on Contemporary Scotland*, Scott P. H. and Davis A. C. (eds.) (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing Company, 1992), p. 62. Daiches' remarks refer to the concept as it was originally perceived by MacDiarmid in *Lucky Poet* where he says: 'I am constantly on the *qui vive* for every trace of that peculiar individuality which Duns Scotus called *haeccitas*... agreeable to his love of objects between which minute distinctions can be made – and, further, the concrete individuality of each object known in at least a confused way intuitively; everybody having not merely a material form, but also a vital form; a special element of its being in its activity and movement'. H. MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1972), p. 310.
[2] Williams T., 'John Duns Scotus' in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (www.plato.stanford.edu).
[3] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969; London: Routledge, 1994), p. 12.
[4] Foucault, *Archaeology*, p. 8.
[5] MacColla, fragment in National Library of Scotland, Deposit 265, Box 23.
[6] Foucault, *Archaeology*, p. 8.
[7] Ibid.

[8] See *Archaeology*, p. 8

[9] MacColla, *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* (Edinburgh: M. MacDonald, 1967), pp. 33-34. Further references in the text.

[10] MacColla, NLS, 265/35.

[11] MacColla, NLS, 239/18.

[12] Ibid. It is likely that MacColla had in mind Dostoevsky's *Memoirs from the House of the Dead* when he wrote this fragment. The Russian's account of his exile in Siberia was to MacColla an immensely useful and inspiring text during the writing of his Russian novel, *Facing the Muzhik*.

[13] As developed further in Chapter 4 of this thesis, MacColla's understanding of the being not-'I' can be seen to correspond to Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the *other*, particularly when applied to Dostoevsky's novels where, according to Bakhtin, the emergence of a 'plurality of consciousnesses' evidences Dostoevsky's ultimate acceptance of the not – 'I'.

[14] MacColla, NLS, 265/1.

[15] See note 1.

[16] Foucault, *Archaeology*, pp. 6-7.

[17] Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), pp.152-153.

[18] Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. xiv.

[19] Paul Rabinov (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p. 80.

[20] MacColla, NLS, 239/12.

[21] MacColla, *And the Cock Crew* (London: Souvenir Press, 1983), pp. 33-34.

[22] Ibid., p. 35.

[23] MacColla, 'Mein Bumpf' in *Essays on Fionn MacColla* (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1973), p. 25.

[24] Mikhail Bakhtin, 'The Idea in Dostoevsky' in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, quoted in F. Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (New York – London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989), p. 644.

[25] Ibid. What Bakhtin is delineating here could be characterised as an all out yea-saying exercise, to use MacColla's own terminology, and a great conglomeration of beings – not 'I'.

[26] *And the Cock Crew*, p. 130.

[27] Bakhtin, 'The Idea in Dostoevsky', p. 644.

[28] *And the Cock Crew*, p. 35.

[29] *And the Cock Crew*, p. 143.

[30] Ibid., pp. 127-128.

[31] MacColla, *The Ministers* (London: Souvenir Press, 1979), p. 110.

[32] J. B. Caird, *Scottish International Review*, August 1968, No 3, p. 54, NLS, 239/4.

[33] Valentina Poggi, 'History and the reconstructive imagination in Fionn MacColla's works', in *Études Écossais* 1 (Grenoble: Actes du Congrès international d'études ecossais, 1991) p. 270.

[34] The influence of Thomas Carlyle on MacColla's historical method ought to be acknowledged especially in relation to the agency of the subject in history and to historical periodization. In his 'Essay on History', Carlyle writes: 'A talent for History may be said to be born with us, as our chief inheritance. In a certain sense all men are historians. [...] Thus, as we do nothing but enact History, we say little but recite it. [...] The most gifted man can observe, still more can record, only the *series* of his own impressions: his observations, therefore... must be *successive*, while the things done were *simultaneous*. [...] Narrative is *linear*, Action is *solid*'. Thomas Carlyle, 'On History' in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, 4 vols. (London: Chatto & Hall, [n. d.], ii, pp. 168-177. As explained later in the chapter, MacColla's aim is to subvert the linearity of historical narratives through the creation of non-linear 'historical fiction'.

[35] MacColla, NLS, 239/4.

[36] Our intention, in the present chapter, is to put forth MacColla's theorems on history and discontinuity; a detailed discussion on Scottish history and Scottish nationalism will be carried out in Chapter 3.

[37] Walter Benjamin, 'Theses of the Philosophy of History' in *Illuminations* (London : Fontana Press, 1992), p. 250.

[38] Ibid., p. 248.

[39] MacColla, 'Towards a more real history' in *The Free Man*, February 11, 1933.

[40] MacColla, NLS, 265/35.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

[43] *The Ministers*, p. 4.

[44] Ibid., p. 57.

[45] Nicola Chiaromonte, *The Paradox of History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1985), p. xxi.

[46] *The Ministers*, p. 5.

[47] According to Chiaromonte, Tolstoy's doubts on the modes of attaining historical truth found a final solution in the *fait accompli*. By no means 'necessary' in itself, the historical event becomes 'true' by the simple fact that it has been made actual. Hence his affirmation: 'truth is to be found in accomplished facts, and is proved by the facts that are being accomplished', *The Paradox of History*, p. 42.

[48] Cairns Craig, *Out of History* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996), p. 13.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid., p. 60.

[51] Kurt Wittig, *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* (Edinburgh: Messrs Oliver and Boyd, 1958) quoted in Hugh MacDiarmid's 'Introduction' to *The Albannach*, NLS, 239/3b.

[52] *The Ministers*, p. 5.

Chapter two

MacColla's Idea of the Nation

I

In his recent essay '"Emerging as others of our selves" – Scottish Multiculturalism and the challenge of the body in postcolonial representation', Berthold Schoene-Harwood carries out an analysis of the detrimental effects of Calvinism both on human identity and on historical perspective. In commenting the apparent apathy pervading the people of the Highlands during the evictions, as described in Fionn MacColla's *And the Cock Crew*, he writes:

> Insidiously, Calvinism annihilates the two most vital components in the make-up of human identity: the actual physical presence of the body as well as the historical narrative of the self... At the same time as their body is deprived of its language and thus severed from the immediate experience of its own reality, the identity-bearing significance of the people's historical narrative is nullified by Calvinism's introduction of the concept of a disembodied, ahistorical predestined soul.[1]

Such references to the relationship between Calvinism and history introduce the present discussion on MacColla's theorisations of nationalism and on his political involvement with the Scottish National Party. More specifically, the following investigation will emphasise how the nature of such nationalism is deeply engendered by the complementary activity of the causes and effects of the Reformation. In the concluding paragraph to the previous chapter, we had implied a connection between MacColla's activism as a Scottish nationalist and his (re)constructive understanding of Scottish history. Such an analysis necessarily

entails a study of the interdependence of the political and the cultural components of MacColla's nationalism and its modes of manifestation, with particular attention to his considerations of the Scottish reformation; for MacColla's nationalism, both in its cultural and political aspects, must be seen first and foremost as a protest against Calvinist doctrines and their implications and impingement on Scottish life.

However, before dealing with the modes of application of MacColla's nationalism in relation solely to the Scottish milieu, it is necessary, in this early stage of my discussion, to tackle the subject of nationalism on a more theoretical level, with particular reference to the concept of community, as perceived by MacColla, but also in the light of recent theories on nationalism.

The ideas of community and of nationalism grew interdependently in MacColla's writings since his first novel *The Albannach*, and went through a process of theorisation which culminated in *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* and in *Too Long in this Condition*. What binds these two concepts together is the Gaelic cultural and linguistic component and it is precisely through Gaelic that MacColla allows a movement from the particular – the community – to the universal – namely, Scotland.[2]

Through this progression, it has become clear how MacColla's understanding of metaphysics, as outlined in the first chapter, constitutes an indispensable basis for my argument. I am referring to that unusual association MacColla establishes between transcendental imperatives and a tendency to reject the totalizations of any 'suprahistorical perspective'. The first question which I will pose, then, is how MacColla's perception of community and his understanding of metaphysics interact in order to substantiate his nationalist stance. This premise is essential in view of the

following quotation: 'The unique individual cannot appear in a vacuum. The unique human community is what incarnates the absolute';[3] a quotation which, despite its fragmented nature and lack of contextualisation, will accompany us along the present study, as it implies two crucial concepts in the study of the theories of nationalism: that of time, and the relationship between the individual subject and the totality.

In the same essay on Scottish multiculturalism, Schoene-Harwood contrasts Homi K. Bhabha's concept of 'in-between space' with Fearchar's role in *And the Cock Crew* 'as a representative of the Highlanders' traditional heritage'.[4] Bhabha's concept of 'in-between space', as Schoene-Harwood describes it, implies that 'all people(s) are essentially unrooted beings without a fixed traditional identity, that culture – located in a negotiable split-space of enunciation – is by definition non-territorial, that we could never fulfil ourselves as human beings without continuously encountering what is not in us: the extra-territorial, the cross-cultural, the inter-personal'.[5] However, as Schoene-Harwood points out, this model collapses when applied to the account of the Clearances given in *And the Cock Crew*: 'it is striking how little communication actually occurs between the colonised and the agents of colonisation... The 'in-between space' in which, according to Bhabha, culture is engendered does not once open up'.[6] It is not our task here to assess the validity of Bhabha's model. Nevertheless, what Bhabha suggests in the essay 'DissemiNation: Time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation'[7] provides us with some challenging interpretative material which can be adopted in order to analyse the model offered by MacColla. It should be pointed out, however, that our intention is not to establish a correspondence between Bhabha's and MacColla's models. Just as Foucault assumed an illustrative role in our discussion on metaphysics and

discontinuity in history, so Bhabha's theories can be introduced to the same purpose in relation to MacColla's treatise on nationalism and community.

More concretely, I would like to refer to the distinction developed by Bhabha between 'pedagogical' and 'performative' people, the implications of which can be indirectly referred to MacColla's theorisation of the being not-'I', and more generally to his understanding of the Other. Underlying the difference between the pedagogical and the performative, Bhabha points out, is a tension

> signifying the people as an *a priori* historical presence, a pedagogical object; and the people constructed in the performance of narrative, its enunciatory 'present' marked in the repetition and pulsation of the national sign. The pedagogical founds its narrative authority in a tradition of the people... encapsulated in a succession of historical moments that represents an eternity produced by self-generation. The performative intervenes in the sovereignty of the nation's *self-generation* by casting a shadow between the people as 'image' and its signification as a different sign of Self, distinct from the Other and Outside. In place of the polarity of a prefigurative self-generating nation itself and extrinsic Other nations, the performative introduces a temporality of the 'in-between' through the 'gap' or 'emptiness' of the signifier that punctuates linguistic difference. The boundary that marks the nation's selfhood interrupts the self-generating time of national production with a space of representation that threatens binary division with its difference. (Bhabha, pp.146-147)

It is precisely in the interaction and dialectic which is established between the concept of pedagogical people as objects and performative people as subjects of the nation that Bhabha localises the space of the nation in its renewable and anti-historicist aspects. Bhabha is recalling here that 'in-between' space which Schoene-Harwood, with reference to *And the Cock Crew*, sees as failing to be filled by any interactive sign between Highlanders and Lowlanders. According to Bhabha, however, the creation of such a space is necessary in order to prevent the infiltration of metaphysics within the political discourse:

Such a space of cultural signification as I have attempted to open up through the intervention of the performative... would ensure that no political ideologies could claim transcendent or metaphysical authority for themselves. This is because the subject of cultural discourse - the agency of a people – is split in the discursive ambivalence that emerges in the contestation of narrative authority between the pedagogical and the performative. (Bhabha, p. 147)

The most relevant implication of this pedagogical/performative ambivalence is reflected on the question of the Other, which is itself strictly related to the definition of community. The community, continues Bhabha, is no longer characterised by a 'horizontal and homogeneous' authority: 'The people will no longer be contained in that national discourse of the teleology of progress; the anonymity of individuals; the spatial horizontality of community; the homogeneous time of social narratives; the historicist visibility of modernity' (Bhabha, p. 150). As a consequence of the splitting of the subject between pedagogical and performative, the community has rejected certainties and the continuist concept of Tradition. This displacement, infers Bhabha, occurs, rather paradoxically, within that political unity of the nation-state, which identifies with 'the patriotic, atavistic temporality of Traditionalism' (Bhabha, p. 148). Given Bhabha's delineation of community, an important shift seems to take place: 'once the liminality of the nation-space is established, and its "difference" is turned from the boundary "outside" to its finitude "within", the threat of cultural difference is no longer a problem of "other" people. It becomes a question of the otherness of the people-as-one' (Bhabha, p. 149). Once such a differential becomes active within the nation, it will be impossible to refer to a static time, be it the immanent present or the eternal past; it is therefore alongside a reinterpreted nation-space that Bhabha acknowledges multifarious temporalities, such as 'modern, colonial, postcolonial, "native"' (Bhabha, p. 151).

MacColla, too, poses questions of the ontological argument underlying the concept of community, with particular attention to space, time and the otherness of the people. In view of what has been illustrated above, MacColla's dictum - 'The unique individual cannot appear in a vacuum. The unique human community is what incarnates the absolute' - appears now extremely controversial; for these two 'decontextualised' sentences complement and, at the same time, contradict one another, revealing an apparent indecipherability of the time factor within the community and a discrepancy between the concepts of contingency and universality. In order to unfold their meaning and understand their position in relation to MacColla's theoretical writings on nationalism, we need to turn to his perception of metaphysics and apply it here on the level of discourse pertaining to identity. In the first chapter, we pointed out how MacColla's metaphysical model is extremely sensitive to the variable parameters of space and time. This is visible in the first sentence of the afore-mentioned unpublished fragment, where MacColla insists on the need to establish spatial and temporal conditions relating to the impossibility of existing in a vacuum. The subject is therefore asked to make his/her *appearance* in a connoted space and, more importantly, in a constantly re-definable time, incarnated by the community. By discarding the concept of vacuum, MacColla affirms his anti-historicist and, indirectly, his anti-Calvinist position. It would be reasonable, in this respect, to interpret such an appearance as an embryonic counterpart of Bhabha's performative function, where the individual acts as a receptive subject within the mobile coordinates of the nation-space. However, such a function is never fully reached in MacColla's model and the explanation for this resides precisely in the second sentence of his fragment – 'the unique community is what incarnates the

absolute'. The metaphysical perspective, which permeates this statement, problematizes our discussion, evidencing a discrepancy in MacColla's theorisation of the relationship between the individual and the community. The inscription of the community in an absolute time/space relationship immobilizes the 'enunciatory' nature of its being, and consequently of the subject's being in it, causing therefore an annihilation, to use Bhabha's terminology, of the performative and an advancement of the pedagogical. However, the most relevant consequence of MacColla's model, typified in this fragment, is the condition of tension thus generated between these two contrasting forces. It is not a fully achieved displacement that is disclosed in MacColla's understanding of community, but rather a tension between the disappearance of time and its renewable function; or, as MacColla explains in another fragment, between the 'universality of the community' and the 'non-intellectual, unconscious being of the individual'.[8] In the previous chapter on MacColla's historiography we pointed out how the single event is perceived in its actuality and is analysed within its variable spatial and temporal parameters, but becomes 'fully' reconstructible only when the metaphysical medium of 'post-factual empathy' is introduced. Likewise, here, MacColla conceives an interdependence between the individual subject, 'free to perform' in a variable temporality, and the metaphysical framework within which he/she operates, exemplified in this context by the universality of the human community.

When we introduced Bhabha's theorisations at the beginning of this chapter, we mentioned their relevance in relation to MacColla's understanding of the Other. In the splitting of the people between pedagogical and performative, Bhabha identifies 'a space that is *internally* marked by cultural difference and the

heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities, and tense cultural locations' (Bhabha, p. 147). According to Bhabha, the creation of this double narrative, or displacement, *within* the nation is strictly necessary in order to avoid the occurrence of antagonism towards the Other or the Outside.

In view of this, what is MacColla's position on the matter? Do we recognise in his writings the necessity to diversify the composition of the community in order to affirm the being–not 'I'? If so, how could we reconcile such a splitting with the metaphysical concept of absolute community? Such questions will be answered in the light of Schoene-Harwood's own considerations on the subject. As intimated above, Schoene-Harwood's analysis of *And the Cock Crew* appears to acknowledge Scotland's controversial division between Highlanders and Lowlanders, underlining how such a splitting, far from fulfilling Bhabha's 'visionary idea of culture',[9] imposes itself as an insurmountable obstacle for any attempt at mutual identification.

II

The first section of this chapter has left open questions on the concept of community. We have suggested an interaction between MacColla's understanding of metaphysics and his perception of community as fundamental to his nationalist stance, but we have yet to provide all the elements needed to validate such a suggestion. In order to do so, our analysis will move now from the theoretical to the historical, as to grasp MacColla's nationalism in its entirety, we need to introduce the intellectual milieu of Scotland in the nineteen-thirties.

In 1928 MacColla was in Palestine working as a history teacher on behalf of the Church of Scotland. It was while he was there that he learnt about the formation

of the National Party of Scotland. Despite a promising career and his previous intention to settle in Palestine, MacColla decided to return to Scotland. As he wrote in *Too Long in this Condition*, 'It was a case of *J'y suis, j'y reste*. Or as the heroic Hungarians used to say in 1956, *This is where I live, this is where I die*. With my arrival back in Scotland and final decision at all costs to remain and either help navigate it into the waters of prosperity or go down with the ship, started an entirely new part or chapter of my life'.[10] The conflicting nature of MacColla's relationship with his country, a deep attachment to Scotland, coupled with a feeling of uneasiness towards it, provides the reader with an impassioned, but critical view of Scottish history: 'there has been an ache in me, a continuous sense of belonging to an abnormal society, a human community bleeding into the wide world'.[11]

In spite of some fundamental differences (which will constitute the topic of the following chapter) between MacColla's nationalism and the political vision of contemporary intellectuals, such as Edwin Muir and Lewis Grassic Gibbon, there was no divergence of the formative elements that generated the Scottish nationalist movement of the nineteen-thirties. As Cairns Craig points out:

> It has often been noted that the Scottish nationalism of the period up until the 1960s was extraordinarily 'literary' in ethos: among the founder members of the National party were Hugh MacDiarmid and Compton MacKenzie; Neil Gunn was a leading figure in the SNP in the 1930s… Scottish 'nationalism' in this period is being propelled not by inner dynamics of nationalist revolt, but rather by its being the political expression of the centrifugal pull upon Scottish literary culture of that outward explosion of the English imperium.[12]

Above all, it is from this perspective - where political means are adopted to vindicate a cultural autonomy - that we are to situate and interpret MacColla's nationalism. There is no more explicit reference to the complementary activity of politics and

culture in MacColla's understanding of nationalism to the one included in his autobiography: 'There was writing, to which for years I had known I was born, but judged that in addition the situation desperately needed something arising more directly out of the practical intelligence, the part for instance that concerns politics pure and simple'.[13]

Given this interaction between politics and culture, where should MacColla's nationalism be positioned in the ongoing debate regarding issues of ethnicity and national identity?

In order to answer this it may be useful to introduce Colin Kidd's theories as expressed in *Subverting Scotland's Past*, as well as in his recent study *British Identities before Nationalism – Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600-1800*. Kidd's contributions offer a thorough socio-historical background which may serve as a reliable reference for the study of MacColla's nationalism. The central question in his later work is not directly relevant to the present study; however, in discussing the place of ethnicity before the rise of nationalism, Kidd introduces arguments relevant to our analysis. In the Introduction to *British Identities*, Kidd outlines concisely, but effectively, the two most significant schools pertaining to the study of nationalist movements. This brief précis will provide us with the broad contours delineating the concept of cultural nationalism and allow us to view MacColla's own model within a wider, and scholarly established, movement.

Kidd distinguishes between the 'modernist' school, to which scholars as diverse as Gellner, Hobsbawn and Anderson belong,[14] and the 'primordialist', led by Anthony Smith. According to Kidd, the primordialist approach distinguishes itself from a multifaceted modernist understanding of nationalism insofar as it emphasises

the relevance of continuities, not so much biological as myth related, 'in the long-term evolution of national consciousness'.[15] The main point of contention between the two schools lies in the different perception of the nature and role of cultural nationalism within the nation-community: the modernist perceiving it as incapable of enacting the process of modernization; the primordialist, instead, advancing a conception of cultural nationalism able to incorporate its ethnocentric ethos into modern scientific culture. In relation to this, the primordialist John Hutchinson claims that

> Kohn and Gellner are surely right to identify cultural nationalism as a *defensive* response by educated elites to the impact of exogenous modernization on existing status orders, which may result, in a reassertion of traditionalist values in the community ... But they are wrong to perceive the celebration of the folk as a retreat into an isolated agrarian simplicity free from the disorders of civilization.[16]

The driving force behind MacColla's nationalism is the desire to reinstate the concept of 'culture' at the forefront of the national discourse, and this is confirmed by the following fragment: 'From the point of view of the nation of Scotland – to be or not to be – the most important question at every period during the whole process of history is: how is it with the national culture? For if it goes, the nation goes';[17] in it MacColla is clearly establishing an inextricable connection between the perpetuation of a national culture and the perpetuation of the nation itself. Nevertheless, while, on the one hand, it can be argued, with Hutchinson, that 'cultural nationalists... are frequently driven into state politics to defend the cultural autonomy of the nation',[18] it would be inaccurate to perceive the political aspect of MacColla's nationalism as subordinate to the cultural one. MacColla, indeed, believed in the institutional value

of what Foucault defined as 'the coldest of cold monsters',[19] which we may less dramatically define as the concept of state:

> [movements of national autonomy and self-determination] are naturally considered retrograde by those who, by a natural reaction from the national exclusivism which has wrought so much evil in the modern world, have fallen into the opposite error and[,] failing to perceive that the State has its necessary functions to perform[,] have concluded that the way to cure the imperialist excesses of some nations is to suppress all nationality.[20]

It should be emphasised, however, that MacColla's cultural and political commitment to the nationalist cause is perceived by him first and foremost in metaphysical terms, principally because underlying such a commitment there lurks the metaphysical concept of nation. In the same way as he associates culture with the being of the nation, MacColla identifies political activity, which he defines in metaphysical terms as 'something enjoyed by the very nature of being itself',[21] with an affirmation of the community, that is of the being not-'I'. The affirmation of the metaphysics of the will in nationalist terms is, to MacColla, the starting point for any discussion on the issue of nationhood, as expressed in another fragment: 'Contemporary Scottish Nationalism is to be understood as in essence a revival of the attempt to say Yea (though deep down and often unapprehended in full consciousness)'.[22] Indeed, what appears rather perplexing, especially in the context of contemporary theories, is precisely the lack of controversy in MacColla's perception and affirmation of the 'nation', as he claims in this unpublished fragment: 'In turning to the question of nationalism and its analogy to the problem of the individual it will be necessary... to make the assumption that such a thing as nationality exists'.[23] Despite an acceptance of the space within which the community operates, and,

consequently, of its boundaries, MacColla, nevertheless, acknowledges the necessity

of establishing a contact with the Other or the Outside:

> No one will take up the attitude that each individual or nation should live
> only to himself or itself (assuming that to be even possible) and refuse to
> derive anything from other individuals or nations. It is precisely the
> mutual benefits that will occur to all that is the second argument for self-
> realisation – the other being... the well-being and mental harmony of the
> individual himself. What must be stressed is that the influence of another
> must only be allowed to act so far as it continues to enrich the self and
> encourage self-expression, and becomes dangerous and destructive of
> personality when it begins to dominate, hamper it and prevent self-
> expression.[24]

What MacColla seems to suggest, here, is that the affirmation of boundaries and

nationalities does not *in itself* constitute a receptacle of 'aggressivity' towards the

Other, as postulated by Bhabha.[25] On the contrary, MacColla's political nationalism

relies precisely on political boundaries as the means of avoiding the fall into a state

of 'abnormality'. MacColla, however, does not rule out the existence of an aggressive

potential underlying the concept of nationalism; but in order to disclose such a

potential, he suggests, we need to study the ontological structure of nationalist

movements. Accordingly, MacColla identifies a fundamental distinction between,

what he calls, movements of national self-affirmation and movements of self-

assertion:

> Nationalism, which consists in a movement of national self-affirmation,
> must be a benefit and an advantage to the community of nations, while
> the nationalism which consists in the self-assertion of a nation is a
> disadvantage and a danger. Nationalist movements of the self-affirming
> order are directed to nothing more than the intensive cultivation of
> interior resources - principally cultural resources, but also all resources
> including economic. Such movements are therefore precluded from being
> the occasion of disorder and strife between nations except insofar as
> another nation may interfere to prevent the movement from achieving its
> object. Such totally unjustifiable interference would represent
> nationalism of the self-asserting order, which, however, is more correctly
> termed imperialism.[26]

Imperialist politics, elsewhere defined by MacColla as '*horizontal* assertion' - as opposed to a '*vertical* affirmation' of being[27] - have figured highly throughout the twentieth century, which includes the whole of MacColla's lifetime. Nationalism and imperialism have often come to merge in one ideological thrust. And consequently, an adverse reaction to the word nationalism has been expressed in most of the contemporary writings on the subject. MacColla's argument seems to find an echo in more recent studies on the subject, such as Cairns Craig's *Out of History*:

> Through the connection with fascism, nationalism's commitment to 'spiritual' values, to the spirit of the people, has been allied with fascism's devotion to the irrational; in its insistence on the rights of autonomy for individual peoples, nationalism has been seen to subscribe to fascism's world of race conflict in pursuance of economic power; its search for roots in the past is at one with fascism's apparent overturning of progress and regression to barbarity.'[28]

What Cairns Craig describes here is the monocular view of nationalism as a device, which is deceitfully incorporated into imperialist or fascist movements in their attempts to exert a power over, or to even destroy, 'unacceptable neighbours'.[29] Such an attitude shows a tendency to define nationalism only in self-asserting terms and the epistemological propensity to view history according to the Law of Progress. According to MacColla, then, as a consequence of the limited understanding of nationalism and its identification with imperialist politics and historicist approaches, internationalism is advancing as a sort of panacea aimed at diminishing the significance of political autonomy and levelling the cultural discourse *amongst* nations:

> Most of the history written in the 19th century was little more than nationalist propaganda... Every excess or exaggeration of this kind produces in time, and by way of reaction, a movement towards the opposite extreme. And thus we have at the present time, among those

who have begun to realise the evil consequences of the exaggeration of the national element, a pronounced and equally vicious tendency to move in the opposite direction and deny to the national unit even the exercise of its legitimate and necessary functions. Hence the advance in modern times of a false and spurious "internationalism" which is in reality only a vulgar and colourless cosmopolitanism, which would deny the right of national autonomy, replace the rich and fruitful diversity of types and peoples with a dull and stultifying uniformity, and sterilise the roots of creativity that lie within racial and cultural *differentiae*.[30]

In the next chapter, we will look more thoroughly at the issue of internationalism by comparing Lewis Grassic Gibbon's cosmopolitan stance with MacColla's nationalist one. For the time being, however, it is necessary to point out that, far from suggesting an inward-looking approach, MacColla's understanding of nationalism complements and interacts with that of a wider cultural and political arena and, in particular, with a European one. The excerpt from the following article underlies a vision of Europe, in its political and cultural spheres, of an almost prophetic import: 'Europe is not external to Scotland, as the whole is not external to the part. Scotland is by her nature European; by the fact of existence Scotland is a part of Europe. Only by the accident of temporary political and economic arrangement is she a part of the British Empire'.[31] Unfortunately, MacColla does not provide us with a definition of 'Europe', which would be as controversial as it would be useful to this discussion. The identification of Europe with the concept of the whole is, indeed, crucial to his argument, in that it shifts the political axis underlying the relationship between a 'British' Scotland and the Empire to the one between an independent Scotland and a homogenous Europe. In spite of the conceptual vagueness of MacColla's terminology, he clearly emphasises the metaphysical existence of Scotland outside its own geo-physical boundaries and its place within a 'whole', which itself seems to acquire a transcendental meaning beyond its geographical and political significance.

Nevertheless, MacColla's concern about Scotland's isolation from a European context, in his view due to its being 'absorbed' by England, is palpable throughout his writings, as shown, for instance, in the following fragment:

> The worst of what happens when a nation-community loses its power to shape its own destiny and becomes a mere dependent province of another nation-community is that it loses all direct contact with the whole range of other people, and only receives from without what trickles down to it from the superior nation-community through the filter of its peculiar leanings, predilections, aptitudes, which may not at all be the natural leanings, predilections and aptitudes of the dependent community. The result is intellectual life in the client nation is debased, diluted and moves to a slower tempo. And one would expect it at any one moment and on any subject to be far behind the leaders of thought internationally: it is no longer a guest at the intellectual feast of the peoples, but lives perforce on the crumbs that fall from its masters' table.[32]

Once again, MacColla seems to refer to the abnormal status of his country both from a political and an intellectual point of view; a degree of abnormality which appears magnified once Scotland's 'being' needs to be validated beyond its geographical boundaries. But what are the causes and effects of such an abnormality, as perceived by MacColla? At this stage of our discussion, we need to substantiate such implicit references with a clear explanation.

III

As anticipated earlier, MacColla's perception of abnormality at a social level finds its causes principally in Calvinism; his attention, however, as he expresses adamantly both in published and unpublished writings, is addressed mainly towards the non-religious implications of the Reformation on contemporary Scottish society. This is effectively reiterated in this unpublished fragment, probably intended as an introduction to *Move Up, John*:

The Reformation is not a matter of "extinct religious controversies" but of present and psychological realities. […] Just because the Reformation stands in a causal sense massively in the background of the modern world it is not only "something that happened in the 16th century" but something that is happening in our society and in ourselves – none the less that we are unaware of it or may be factually ignorant of the events of the 16th century or without interest in history, or without personal belief in the Christian religion, or any religion… Nowhere did the elements in the 16th century made for the creation of a new, "modern" world, our world, come more completely at the top and in more undiluted form than in Scotland, and in Scotland they most securely established and perpetuated themselves to the most complete exclusion of opponents and competitors, and nowhere else therefore than in Scotland is their nature likely to be more conveniently studied or clearly identified.[33]

As already noted in the previous chapter, when couched in religious terms, MacColla's ontological strategy presents itself as an original and polemical approach to and repudiation of the Reformation. A matter evidenced in the following letter to his friend J. B. Caird, relating to the publication of *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*:

I think I remember your saying you found some of the *Clenched Fist* baffling, which didn't surprise me - mea culpa! So long as you don't leave the impression that, as they have said, it is "a Catholic view of the Reformation". It isn't even about the Catholics or the Reformation except as it were accidentally; i.e. because the enquiry starts off in a period when those terms were all about. It isn't even strictly about "religion" - if anyone would define that term for us. It is simply about what it says it is about - the human psyche.[34]

In point of fact, according to MacColla, when read from a philosophical perspective, the Reformation assumes a universal status, for its repercussions, devoid of any historical element, are to be found in the psyche of the individual. It is the case, for example, of what MacColla defines the 'mechanism of the Valve': a built-in mechanism which operates in the region of the subconscious. The mechanism of the Valve finds its origin in and is easily comparable to, although in a less visionary form, Hugh MacDiarmid's application of the concept of aboulia on a national level.

As the poet writes in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, while describing the repulsive aspects of the thistle:

> *This* Freudian complex has somehoo slunken
>
> Frae Scotland's soul – the Scots aboulia –
>
> Whilst a' its *terra nullius* is *betrunken*.[35]

Undoubtedly, MacColla was influenced by MacDiarmid's image of the country's contaminated symbol when claiming that Scotland had fallen, as a consequence of both the Reformation and Anglicisation, into 'the condition of the greatest cultural desert in Europe'.[36] We might suggest, then, that the mechanism of the Valve was developed from the same philosophical matrix as MacDiarmid's illustration of the country's intellectual paralysis, a paralysis which, according to MacColla, was first generated as a result of the Calvinist doctrine of total negation: 'It is easily seen how such a doctrine... would act as a Valve; that is to say, would automatically and infallibly shut off or divert the vital energy as soon as it was moved to ascend in the personality towards any creative objective'.[37] Following MacColla's analysis, the most significant implications of the Valve are to be traced to the Scottish political forum. By preventing the actualisation of any ideas occurring in the region of the metaphysics of the will, the Valve has impeded a full realisation of the movement of Scottish independence. So much so, that in contributing to the Anglicisation of Scotland, the Kirk has allowed the acceptance, based on the negation of the will, of some kind of subservience to England to pervade the Scottish consciousness. Hence MacColla relates in his autobiography, establishing, as it were, a bilateral bond between politics and psychology:

The notion of an identity of a Scottish nation was disposed of. The result was an irresolvable conflict in the personality: - that we were one people we knew in our entrails; that we were simply a congeries of discrete elements – none of them Scots – we knew among our notions. The identity of Scotland as a basis for action was disposed of, and replaced by confusion of impulses and a frustrating, action-arresting struggle in the personality.[38]

Colin Kidd's work is again relevant here. In particular, we will focus on Kidd's study of the role of the Kirk in the Anglicisation of Scotland and of the related historical process which has led, according to MacColla, to a 'trans-identification of concepts' from Scotland to England. A historical account of such a trans-identification of concepts is presented by Kidd in *Subverting Scotland's Past*:

Scotland's was only a half-baked medieval mixed constitution which, consisting only of aristocratic and monarchic elements, was, unlike England's, incapable of generating or protecting the liberty and property of the commons... thus eighteenth-century Scottish history was reinterpreted as a discrete break from its feudal past involving the absorption of Scotland within English history at least a century ahead in social development. Scottish history pre-1707 could not explain the present; the long sweep of English history could... A division of spheres occurred. While Scots retained an emotional bond to the Scottish past, the history to which they had been admitted was more relevant to an understanding of institutions, politics and society. England was in the van of commercial progress, and her history came to stand proxy for Scotland's.[39]

Kidd's commentary stands as an example of how a later analysis illuminates an earlier one. What he describes in historical terms as a crucial transformation of Scotland's political history after 1707 is translated by MacColla in psychological terms as a displacement of the Scottish political psyche. According to MacColla, therefore, even at the present time

English politics retains an association of reality and permissibility in the Scottish subconsciousness at the same time as Scottish politics, or politics concerned with the welfare of the Scottish nation-community as such, retains a status in consciousness as of something unpermitted or unreal, not licitly entitled to call up the supporting action of the will. This

explains in great part why among a people still overwhelmingly Scottish in sentiment, a (Nationalist) movement which has been in the political field for the past forty years, aiming at nothing more than the resumption of autonomous national status, has had up to the present so moderate success.[40]

Such an incontrovertible process of Anglicisation of the country, according to MacColla, exacerbated the detrimental role of Calvinism on the community, resulting in an intellectual – and physical - displacement of the Scottish people. This is expressed in *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*, where MacColla declares: 'The Scottish Reformation... was a successful stroke of English policy'.[41] The Reformers, he continues, ensured that a 'transvaluation of values' would take place in Scotland so that the winning side, or the triumphant power, would be associated with the concepts of truth and liberty. Such unwarranted assumptions, claims MacColla, despite their fallacies, developed into a widespread notion of Progress and progressive history. In spite of later disagreements between Presbyterian Scotland and Episcopalian England, 'the assimilation of "England" into the compound concept of Protestantism = Truth = Liberty, etc. remained as firmly planted as ever in the Scottish consciousness and subconsciousness ... *Protestantism with its 'liberties' was safe ultimately insofar as the country leant to England*'.[42] What in the sixteenth century was a mere absorption of 'nay-saying' Presbyterian doctrines, had become, by 1707, a conscious acknowledgement of the economic and political benefits that Scotland would enjoy within the Union of the Parliaments. This, however, was a misleading condition, since, according to MacColla, it originated from a negation in the mind of the individual psyche, as if behind the 'mask' of imperial expansion and economics lay the 'face' of 'nay-saying' Calvinism.[43]

The strict relationship between the advancement of the Reformation in the fabric of Scottish life and a progressive Anglicisation of the country, as predicated by MacColla, also finds correlations in Kidd's recent study of *British Identities before Nationalism*. Kidd, importantly, takes the argument a step further, by linking the Anglicisation of the country with the establishment of the so-called Lowland-Highland divide – a position which we recognise as analogous to the one depicted in Schoene-Harwood's essay, as well as in *And the Cock Crew*, where it is implied that the economic motivations which animated the Lowlanders in their pursuit of the Highland evictions would not have arisen had Protestantism not spread north of the border:

> The Reformation exacerbated the division between Gaeldom and the rest of Scotland. Indeed, according to Victor Durkacz, 'linguistic repression sprang from the Reformation'. Given that the church had been a genuinely national institution bridging the divisions of Highlands and Lowlands, the Reformation removed a vital point of contact. Henceforth the Highlands – perceived as a lost world of Catholicism and superstition – became a prime target of the Lowland Protestant mission. The Union of the Crowns also brought the opportunity to co-ordinate action against the Gaelic societies of Ireland and the Highlands. The Union of the Crowns led to the pacification of the Borders; from a tense frontier zone they became the Middle Shires of the British dual monarchy. This led to a greater focus on the Highlands as a source of disorder in Scotland.[44]

The socio-historical scenario illustrated by Kidd in theoretical terms appears to be analogous to the one MacColla perceived and reproduced in fictional terms in *And the Cock Crew*, where the presentation of two separate discourses – those of the Lowlands and the Highlands - and the consequent creation of an internal boundary within the country are suggested as *faits accomplis* around which the plot revolves. It is from this assumption that Schoene-Harwood's non-recognition of an in-between

space originates, leading, then, to a complete estrangement of the two parties' reciprocal identity, language, and location:

> As far as the factor is concerned, the real power struggle is not over a handful of Highland valleys but over the *terra incognita* of the colonial other's inscrutable identity. The unknown, mysterious space of the native signified is so intensely and irresistibly provocative to him because it is clearly not a blank that can be filled up at will, but an inaccessible, elusive presence entirely impervious to colonisation.[45]

When analysed from a post-colonial perspective, as is Schoene-Harwood's exegesis, *And the Cock Crew* leaves little doubt concerning the well-defined socio-historical connotations that the Lowlands and the Highlands acquired during the Clearances. In doing so, there emerges a rather recognisable series of binary forms of representation classifiable in coloniser and colonised, active and passive subject, being 'I' and being not-'I', etc., all strictly separated by the impossibility, in Schoene-Harwood's words, to establish any 'genuine intercommunicative exchange'.[46]

That the course of history has led to the establishment of Scotland's internal division is acknowledged by MacColla as an irretrievable event following the Reformation and Anglicisation of the country. But such an event, according to the writer, can only have a contingent or accidental significance for it is not, as it were, 'intrinsic' to Scotland. This latter aspect is manifest in his autobiography where, in reply to the conviction inculcated in Scottish schools that Scotland's multifarious origin is the cause of its disunited status, he claims:

> *The Scots were one, and that One was unique...* But at the same time we all retained from our 'education' a *notional* conviction that we were not one at all... I am not thinking here of the famous Lowland-Highland supposed division which never had any ethnic and only very limited cultural justification – the justification, such as it was, was social... In other words the sense of unity of most of us did not feel brought into conflict by the mention of the lamentable – and purely historical –

Highland-Lowland distinction: the sense of unity could accommodate that.[47]

What emerges from this statement is MacColla's perception of the Lowland-Highland divide as an accidental event, which, beyond its 'purely historical' significance, does not have a correspondence on a metaphysical level, the only level where, according to MacColla, Scotland can be affirmed as a 'unique human community [incarnating] the absolute'. The question, therefore, is how MacColla reconciles these two contrasting views of his country: one historically divided and the other metaphysically united? The answer appears to be contained in the unpublished fragment quoted at the beginning of this chapter: 'The unique individual cannot appear in a vacuum. The unique human community is what incarnates the absolute.' As we mentioned above, the first part of the fragment expresses the necessity of inscribing the individual in a generally accepted historical context where the being 'I' interacts, through a sort of trans-identification, with the being not-'I'. The outcome of such an interaction, however, is not obvious and can be translated as an act of acceptance or refusal; the Clearances, as narrated in *And the Cock Crew*, epitomise the latter. The second part of the quotation, instead, conceals a tendency, occurring at a metaphysical level, towards the establishment of the concept of oneness. This is not to be translated into a desire to obliterate, in socio-historical terms, the Lowland component in order to homogenize or unify the idea of Scotland. On the contrary, what lies behind MacColla's vision of 'absolute human community' is the intention to affirm, on a metaphysically united level, the being not-'I' in its historical manifestation. In other words, that 'oneness' and 'uniqueness' professed by MacColla are to be intended as an infinite sum of multifarious individualities

creating, on a metaphysical level, a plethora of common or overlapping 'spaces'. This is precisely what happens to Maighstir Sachairi during his conversation with the poet when, for a brief, but significant moment, he experiences the creation of an 'in-between' space while the metaphysics of his being 'I' embraces Fearchar's being not-'I':

> Maighstir Sachairi was suddenly filled full with this admiration, seeing the Poet in that instant as all his life a fine and noble spirit, big-natured, sorrowful, alone, and kind, almost heroic. And because this generous wave and impulse came directly from his heart spontaneously and was entirely a movement of his being *outward*, an impersonal act of homage and recognition, and far above self; so it liberated, and was accompanied in his mind by a sense unbelievably heightened of freedom, of an illumination.[48]

IV

Recognised, nowadays, particularly in post-colonial studies, as a vital form of dialectic, the co-existence of different cultural discourses within a defined geographical space was considered, in the period in which MacColla was writing, to hamper the cultural organicity of a country. However, contrary to any analysis which considers the presence of a Gaelic and a Scots heritage as an obstacle to the formation of a Scottish 'organic' culture,[49] MacColla advances a different approach according to which the Gaelic and the Scots element do not clash but complement one another in the creation of a national culture. On a more superficial level, we could argue that he overcomes such an 'obstacle' by, as it were, embodying both cultures and languages. As J. B. Caird relates, in reference to MacColla:

It is not fanciful to trace the dual influence of the Gaeltachd and the north-east on his personality at work... he shows an equally sure command of the idiom and vocabulary of Lowland Scots, both contemporary and of an earlier date, as is evident in the two fragments "Scottish Noël" and "Ane Tryall of Heretiks". He is unique in the twentieth-century Scottish novel, in that he is at home with both these cultural and linguistic traditions, in a way that Neil Gunn, for instance, is not.[50]

MacColla's efforts to establish a united, but anti-organic, national culture coincide with his rejection of the concept of homogeneity if, by its definition, it is to be understood as the imposition of one cultural model over another for the sake of cultural uniformity. As he suggests in an unpublished fragment: 'One thing requires to be said again and again for it is the first principle of all historical understanding - *there is no absolute standard in matters of culture...* which is not in the least the same as to say that one culture may not lack elements of value present in another, or that these cannot be a useful trans-fertilisation of cultures.'[51]

MacColla's idea of a 'trans-fertilisation of cultures' finds a reference in Craig's spatial approach to the concept of culture:

It is not in this unity or disunity, its continuity or its discontinuity that we should value a culture... culture *takes place*... culture is a place of dialogue, between self and other, between inner and outer, between pasts and present... Cultural analysis can be conducted from within a single culture, but... most of the time, in most places, cultural analysis is the analysis of what happens between cultures, and in the ways in which cultural space is penetrated and shaped by the pressure of other cultural spaces.[52]

According to MacColla, already within the peripheral geographical space it is possible to encounter two or more cultures in dialectic with one another. As we have seen, MacColla acknowledges, in historical terms, the occurrence of an *internal* trans-fertilisation of cultures - as can be defined by the exchange of information that takes place between two or more cultures within a geographical space - such as the

one between Gaelic and Scots. But MacColla also accepts that a trans-fertilisation of cultures can manifest itself *outside* a defined geographical space - for example, the trans-fertilisation of Scottish culture with other cultures *outside* of Scotland. This explains MacColla's opposition to the Anglicisation of Scotland, an event not so much criticisable *per se*, but under scrutiny because of its 'unilateral' nature. In point of fact, MacColla laments the fact that, despite the extent of cultural dialectic created within Scotland's boundaries, the Anglicisation of the country has occurred only in the 'peripheral' space, favouring the unconditioned infiltration of one culture over another, but without generating a reciprocal trans-fertilisation of *cultures*. Hence MacColla's vindication of a Scottish cultural and political autonomy, for it is his conviction that the condition *sine qua non* for any cultural dialectic to take place is the political autonomy of the countries involved.

Notes

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[1] Berthold Schoene-Harwood, '"Emerging as others of our selves" – Scottish Multiculturalism and the challenge of the body in postcolonial representation', in *Scottish Literary Journal*, May 1998, Vol. 25, No. 1, p. 63.

[2] In the essay 'A Note to *The Albannach*', Tom Scott claims that Murdo's redemption is symbiotically connected to his reassertion of the Gaelic cultural tradition and that consequently such a redemption is projected onto the small highland community: 'The individual talent finds its salvation in the salvation of his community, in the re-identification with it, and revitalizing it', in *Essays on Fionn MacColla*, p. 66. Scott's observations on the interdependence between the individual and the community are echoed by MacColla in the fragment 'The unique individual cannot appear in the vacuum. The unique human community is what incarnates the absolute', of which we will give further account in the chapter.

[3] MacColla, fragment in the National Library of Scotland, Dep. 265, Box 43.

[4] Schoene-Harwood, p. 64.

[5] Schoene-Harwood, p. 64.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Homi K. Bhabha, 'DissemiNation: Time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation' in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994). Further references in the text.

[8] MacColla, NLS, 265/20.

[9] Schoene-Harwood, p. 60.

[10] MacColla, *Too Long in this Condition (Ro fhada mar so a tha mi)* (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1975), pp. 25-26.

[11] MacColla, 'Mein Bumpf' in David Morrison (ed.), *Essays on Fionn MacColla* (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1973), p. 12.

[12] Cairns Craig, *Out of History*, pp. 176-77.

[13] MacColla, *Too Long in this Condition*, p. 84.

[14] In relation to this Colin Kidd writes: 'Many of the differences between leading modernists, Gellner and Anderson, which lie at the heart of the current debate over identity construction revolve around their respective understandings of fiction and authenticity. Gellner imputes a degree of pejorative inauthenticity to the invention of modern nationalisms. Anderson, however, argues that all communities larger than face-to-face groups ... are in a sense imagined. Thus, according to Anderson, all ethnic and national identities are, of necessity, artificial constructs, though none the less authentic facets of the human experience.' Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism – Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 4.

[15] Ibid., p. 3.

[16] John Hutchinson, 'Cultural Nationalism and Moral Regeneration', in Hutchinson J. and Smith A. D. (eds.), *Nationalism* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 128.

[17] MacColla, NLS, 239/4/c.

[18] Hutchinson, p. 125.

[19] Michel Foucault, *Technologies of the Self*, ed. by H. Gutman *et al.* (London: Tavistock, 1988), p. 162, quoted in Homi K. Bhabha, 'DissemiNation: Time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation', p. 150.

[20] MacColla, NLS, 239/12.

[21] MacColla, NLS, 265/37.

[22] MacColla, NLS, 265/38.

[23] MacColla, NLS, 239/13/b.

[24] Ibid.

[25] In 'DissemiNation', Bhabha affirms: 'So long as a firm boundary is maintained between territories, and the narcissistic wounded is contained, the aggressivity will be projected onto the Other or the Outside', p. 148.

[26] MacColla, NLS, 239/12.

[27] MacColla, NLS, 239/18. Interestingly, Bhabha uses to the same term, "horizontal", in order to refer to hegemonic movements: '[marginal voices] non longer need to address their strategies of opposition to a horizon of "hegemony" that is envisaged as "horizontal" and "homogeneous"', in 'DissemiNation', p. 149.

[28] Cairns Craig, *Out of History* (Edinburgh: Polygon Press, 1996), p. 85.

[29] Ibid.

[30] MacColla, NLS, 239/12.

[31] MacColla, 'In Praise of Sanity' in *The Free Man*, April 22, 1933.

[32] MacColla, NLS, 239/18.

[33] MacColla, NLS, 239/7.

[34] MacColla, 'Scots Nay-saying', printed in *Scottish Literary Journal*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (May, 1984), p. 70.

[35] Hugh MacDiarmid, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1923; Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987). Quoting from note no. 319, p. 29: 'The Decay of the Doric and the failure of Doric drama and prose was due to... a "specific aboulia" caused by the suppression imposed by the rigours of Puritanism and accentuated by Anglicisation', (Report of MacDiarmid's lecture on 13 Feb. 1924 in *Burns Chronicle*, no. 33, p. 122).

[36] MacColla, *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* (Edinburgh: M. MacDonald, 1967), p. 204.

[37] MacColla, 'The Valve' in 'Catalyst', Vol. 3, No. 1, Winter 1970, p. 15.

[38] MacColla, *Too Long in this Condition* (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1973), p. 23.

[39] Colin Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 209-210. An analogous study of English history is to be found in Cairns Craig's *Out of History*. According to Craig's thesis, in British history, the writing of history according to the Law of Progress warped the reality of English society so that gradually the history that was being narrated became detached from 'real' events. England's role within a British context was then magnified out of proportion. 'The idea of English history and the idea of progress were intertwined' (*Out of History*, p. 42) and, as a consequence of such syllogism - England equals Progress, Progress equals History - England came to be seen as History itself.

[40] MacColla, *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*, p. 196.

[41] Ibid., p. 51.

[42] Ibid., p. 195.

[43] For a definition of 'face' and 'mask', see chapter 3.

[44] Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism – Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600-1800*, p. 126.

[45] Schoene-Harwood, p. 62.

[46] Ibid.

[47] MacColla, *Too Long in this Condition*, p. 22-23.

[48] MacColla, *And the Cock Crew* (1945; London: Souvenir Press, 1977), p. 130.

[49] As Craig points out, Scotland was not considered as an 'organic' culture, for example by T. S. Eliot or W. B. Yeats, because it broke the tradition and any sense of continuity with the past: 'The internal division between Scots and Gaelic deprived it of that fundamental unity which Eliot requires and on which cultural nationalism throughout Europe was based.' (*Out of History*, p. 15). As it will become clear in the next chapter, Eliot's argument reappears in the pages of *Scott and Scotland*, where Muir identifies in Scotland's lack of organicity the cause of its malaise.

[50] J. B. Caird, 'The Twofold Heritage', in *Essays on Fionn MacColla* (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1975), p. 31.

[51] MacColla, NLS, 265/35.

[52] Craig, *Out of History*, p. 117.

Chapter three

MacColla, Gibbon and Muir on Scotland

I

In his introduction to *Edwin Muir: Uncollected Scottish Criticism,* Andrew Noble writes: 'My purpose... has been to demonstrate Muir's life as that of a modern writer of genius in a Scottish society which did little to nourish him and much to thwart and impede. From this biographical account I have developed an account of Muir's historical vision of the misalliances between the Scottish writer and his society'.[1] The tormented, or even apathetic, relationship between Scottish writers and their community - as Muir depicts it in *Scott and Scotland* - was not only confined to the Orcadian writer: an analogous discrepancy between Scottish writers and society was perceived by other members of the Scottish Renaissance Movement. In reviewing Fionn MacColla's first novel *The Albannach,* MacDiarmid expresses as much enthusiasm for the novel as evident scepticism for its readers: 'it is a difficult position for a writer to feel that all he has to say of real value is so inconceivably alien in its background, so unfamiliar in its essential virtues, so dependent upon intellectual integrity and acuity of appreciation which are excessively rare even in relation to first class work...'[2] If such novels as *The Albannach* and *And the Cock Crew* received a lukewarm reception from the public, MacColla's critical essay *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* was virtually ignored. As MacColla himself comments: 'In *Clenched Fist* I believe I succeeded in my aim of reaching a new understanding of

human nature or the human psyche. I failed in the achievement of any recognition of this fact by others'.[3]

Since the death of Edwin Muir in 1959, his reputation as a critic has been significantly re-valued and his critical works have been canonically acknowledged as fundamental to twentieth century Scottish historicism. Such texts as, for example, *Scottish Journey, Scott and Scotland, Contemporary Scottish Studies, An Autobiography* are nowadays recognised as seminal reading in the study of Scotland's ambiguous status as a nation in the modern world. Interestingly, however, MacColla's posthumous fame has not developed along the same lines as Muir's. Hence the purpose of this chapter: through a comparison between, first, Muir's and MacColla's, and then between the latter's and Lewis Grassic Gibbon's abstract and fictional writings, I intend to demonstrate MacColla's crucial position in the debate which animated the members of the Scottish Renaissance Movement concerning the impact of the Protestant Reformation in Scotland and the nature and aims of Scottish nationalism.

As will become clearer throughout the chapter, Muir's intellectual position in relation to contemporary Scottish culture and politics reasonably distances itself from MacColla's in its modes of manifestation and content. Muir's stance, however, stimulates a challenging debate for it introduces, often without apparent solution, themes which MacColla later develops in a radical and controversial fashion – the most evident of which is MacColla's personal involvement in political activity.

The following chapter, then, will begin with an exploration of Muir's critical essays concerning his understanding of Scotland in relation to England. Borrowing the definition from Margery McCulloch's essay '"My Second Country": Edwin Muir

and Scotland',[4] Muir's relationship with Scotland can undoubtedly be interpreted as being 'equivocal'. As McCulloch points out, in a letter written in May 1927, Muir declared himself 'a good Scandinavian' whose true country is 'Norway, or Denmark, or Iceland, or some place like that', but certainly not 'a Scotch'; whereas only a few years later in *The Story and the Fable* he drastically changes his previous definition, declaring 'I am a Scotsman'.[5] In the present chapter, such indisputable ambiguity is neither a concern nor a source for criticism. On the contrary, the purpose behind the presentation of Muir's most significant political writings is precisely to apprehend his 'equivocal' and yet challenging standpoint and to compare it with MacColla's own argument about the Scotland/England dichotomy. (Such a comparative process will lead us to many apparent analogies between the two writers - as, for instance, the corresponding analytical references to Bolshevism and Calvinism - contrasting, though, with dissimilar and, at times, clashing conclusions). In spite of a significant theoretical engagement with political discourses, Muir's refusal to participate actively in any political scene proves to be the defining element of his opposition to MacColla, who had a direct political involvement – either theoretically or actively - with nationalism.

In the second section of this chapter, other comparative elements will be brought into contention, including contributions from Lewis Grassic Gibbon – taken mostly from his valuable collaboration with Hugh MacDiarmid in *Scottish Scene* - on the role of small nations and his political understanding about the future of Scotland. Gibbon's contributions challenge MacColla on two fronts: namely, the political and the historical. His Communist stance and propensity towards the advance of cosmopolitanism will be compared with MacColla's plea for small self-governing

units. On the historical front, a contrasting vision regarding the concept and role of origins in contemporary society, and, more specifically, on the nature of Gaelic culture in Scotland, will illustrate the respective and incongruous positions of Gibbon and MacColla. After debating the consequences of Muir's neutral political standpoint, the introduction of Gibbon's views offers an alternative as well as a radical perspective for us to relate to MacColla, favouring, thus, the introduction of yet another perspective in relation to MacColla's study on the history of Scotland. A relevant contribution to our discussion on origins and on the function of Gaeldom in early modern Scotland will be provided by Colin Kidd's recent study *British Identities before Nationalism – Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600 – 1800*, already encountered in the previous chapter.

II

Muir's concise analysis of Scotland, published in the article 'The Functionless of Scotland',[6] epitomises his position in relation to Scotland's affairs. Scotland is, according to Muir, nothing more than a 'hypothetical unit', whose potential cannot be expressed because of the absence of an 'independent central organ', i.e., a government. Following T. S. Eliot's definition of culture and tradition,[7] Muir sees in England the community *par excellence*, 'real' and 'organic', a nation possessed of a 'centre' and a sociological, as well as a cultural, function. 'Hypothetical', 'unreal', 'imaginary', Scotland is for Muir an unfulfilled aspiration. Hence his provocative suggestion: 'If Scotland were really capable of merging with England, there would be no difficulty at all, and the hypothetical nation north of the Tweed would vanish, and the inhabitants of what was once Scotland be freed from the curse of a hypothetical

existence and become active and genuine members of an organic civilisation'.[8] From

being a non-entity Scotland would then acquire the features of the 'real' entity, the

existing entity, that is England. This 'spatial' disparity between Scotland and

England, as perceived by Muir, becomes even more emphatic when the 'temporal'

factor is taken into account:

> Scotland's past is a romantic legend, its present a sordid reality. Between
> these two things there is no organic relation: the one is fiction, the other
> real life. The past does not enter into the present as it does in England; for
> Scotland's development ever since the Reformation has consisted in
> giving away its past piecemeal, until it squandered almost all its old
> heritage. While England was growing out of itself, Scotland renounced in
> turn its existence as an independent nation and as a separate community.[9]

Some of the significant aspects of Muir's cultural analysis of Scotland are contained

in the above quotation: Scotland's dependency on England, the detrimental role of

the Reformation in Scotland, and, more generally, a sense of absence and negation

ingrained in contemporary Scottish society.

The apparent simplicity of Muir's dichotomy between Scotland and England

proves more problematic than it at first suggests. England, in Muir's view, is

characterised by organicity; it is a homogeneous body which organically grows

without experiencing any moment of arrest. Present day Scotland, on the contrary,

stands devoid of any 'value' which can justify its being and falls ineluctably into a

category of non-existence. The problem with this analysis lies in the assumption that

'homogeneous', 'real' and 'organic' inexplicably become terms, not only endowed

with a precise definition, but also with intrinsically positive connotations. Moreover,

Muir's comparative approach, expressed through the spatial and temporal opposition

between the two countries, appears to be employed in order to disclose a subjective

vision of history. In more than one instance, for example, Muir refers to the Industrial

Revolution as the watershed between past and present. And while the Industrial Revolution did not appear to impinge upon the English tradition, but in fact became part of its organic growth, when related to Scotland it 'cut across and killed' the country's past romantic imagination and 'robbed it wholesale even of its racial characteristics'.[10]

Muir's general argument in *Scott and Scotland* is based on the assumption that Scotland can only assert its identity by discovering a unity, and that it can only find such a unity through the use of Scots, the homogeneous language which the country lost, as an official language, at the time of the Reformation. The coexistence of Scots and English, the former for literary purposes and the latter for a critical as well as pragmatic usage, acts, according to Muir, as an obstacle to the re-creation of a Scottish unity, for he seems to infer that social, political and literary unity have to stem, first and foremost, from linguistic unity.

The question of unity is, also to MacColla, of the uttermost importance: in his analysis, unity transcends any institutional considerations and refers primarily to the metaphysics of the being, which, he believes, has undergone a fatal dualisation through the advent of the Reformation. But, additionally, MacColla theorises a 'national Scottish unity', which he identifies with the cultural discourse pertaining to Gaeldom. In the next section - when dealing with Gibbon's conception of Scottish origins - MacColla's position will be reanalysed in the light of Colin Kidd's commentary on Highland culture provided in his later work *British Identities – Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World 1600 - 1800*. Returning, for the time being, to Muir and MacColla, it is noticeable that MacColla's cultural and linguistic analysis of Scotland distinguishes itself from Muir's on two primary counts: the

controversy over Scotland's linguistic history, with particular attention to the function of Gaelic, rather than Scots, as a unifying language; and the issue concerning Scotland's relationship with England.

With regards to the former, it is important to ask whether MacColla's speculations on the role of a single language as representative of a single culture resemble Muir's own argumentations on language, with the exception that they revolve around Gaelic as opposed to Scots. The matter, in fact, is not so straightforward. As suggested in the previous chapter, one of the *leitmotifs* of MacColla's writing overall can be identified with the denunciation of the Anglicisation of (Gaelic) Scotland which occurred as a consequence of the Reformation. As MacColla explains it in 'Mein Bumpf':

> When and as long as Gaelic – and for that matter its near-descendant 'Scots' – were spoken, a beauty and sensitivity, a light and tenderness, a wit and wisdom clothed not only the Scottish mind and sensibility, but as it were Scotland itself. This the imposition of English – our precious 'Scottish Education' – has totally done away. It is as a result of Anglicisation that modern Scottish man goes dwarf-like among the cathedral-names of his places.[11]

It would be a mistake, though, to consider MacColla's position as self-pitying. MacColla was aware of the partial responsibility that the Scots had over their country's Anglicisation and the disintegration of their cultural matrices, as is illustrated in his short story *In the Schoolhouse*. A schoolmaster, Alec Iain, is discussing with a few guests on a winter night the problems of modern Gaeldom. The following passages reveal MacColla's disenchanted, almost self-condemning, view on the matter, here expressed respectively by the schoolmaster and one of the guests:

> '[The national revivalist] creates the impression, and probably believes, that the present-day inhabitants of the Highlands, and especially of the Islands, are saturated to the marrow with the proud old culture of the

race, conscious of ancient traditions of freedom in every breath they draw… Whereas the truth is almost the very opposite, and I'll guarantee there's hardly a man on this island who wouldn't sell the Gaelic language and the Gaelic culture (in so far as he is aware of it at all) for a shilling a week on his pension or parish assistance, or... over the bar... That's the sort of people we *really* are!'

'Well, but what's the cause of all this, Alec Iain? Who taught us to be ignorant of our own culture, and to think English culture so superior than in its presence we are ashamed of our own? Pointing a stout forefinger, 'Who but you, the race of schoolmasters?'[12]

The disappearance of the Gaelic component from Scottish culture is, to MacColla, a twofold tragedy, referring to the personal and national. As a teacher, MacColla blamed himself, in deep frustration, for having contributed to the annihilation of the Gaelic language and culture; and as a nationalist, he felt the sense of loss magnified throughout the country. Having said this, it does not seem too far-fetched to suggest that such a sense of loss acquires significant weight principally because Gaelic, in MacColla's theoretical writings, often appears as a synecdoche for Scotland - as shown in the following extract referring to the Lowland-Highland division, which has been partially anticipated in the previous chapter:

Even there, though we accepted there had been such a division, we defeated the idea of division in it by the profound (and absolutely justified) conviction that the Highlanders were simply those of us who had *retained* the language and customs of the Scots in their purity.[13]

In the following section of this chapter, we will situate MacColla's position within a specific historical background - as the one laid out by Kidd - which seems to support the function of Gaelic as evocative of the 'whole' of Scotland. However, what ought to be emphasised here, especially in relation to Muir's monolingual stance, is MacColla's legitimisation of the plurality of modes of expression. Already in the previous chapter it has been pointed out how Scots and Gaelic, far from constituting a division in MacColla's writings, coexist in the same narrative space. But

MacColla's trilingualism is also evident in *And the Cock Crew*, as J.B. Caird observes:

> Byars, the Factor, expresses himself in a brutal northeastern Scots. Lachlan MacMhuirich in broken Scots interspersed with Gaelic phrases, Maighstir Sachairi, the protagonist, is given an eloquent, persuasive English when he is represented as speaking in Gaelic, as in the striking controversy with Fearchar, the Bard. When he confronts Byars on behalf of his persecuted flock, the Scots he uses is the language of a man whose customary mode of expression is Gaelic, but who is also steeped in the language of the Authorised Version.[14]

In MacColla's fiction, rather curiously, there emerges an indissoluble bond between Gaelic and English, whereby the latter often appears more as a vehicle for carrying Gaelic significations. This is manifest, most notably, in *Move Up, John*, where MacColla expressly declares: 'Where conversations are not obviously in Braid Scots (called English up till the century of this book) it is to be understood that they are in the Scottish or Gaelic language.'[15] In view of this, our main objective is to register the interaction between the three languages and their significance in relation to the concept of unity. In his autobiography – where the vast majority of his considerations on language are found – MacColla enlightens on the relationship between Scots and Gaelic, both on a personal and on a national level. As a Scots native speaker, MacColla realised early in his life that 'Scots pointed to and implied another language which was *ours* too, but within which we should be able... to bathe and disport our sensibilities and this time completely and comprehensively to the uttermost that was in us'.[16] The expansion of the pronoun, from an implicit 'mine' to an explicit 'ours' corresponds to a desire towards the re-possession of Gaelic, though this time on a national basis. According to MacColla, then, Gaelic enters the realm of metaphysics by transcending subjectivities and becoming Scotland's 'native'

language, even to those, including MacColla, whose 'first' language is Scots or English, regardless of the evident impracticability of its becoming the future language of Scotland.[17] This is best exemplified in the first pages of *The Albannach*, where the protagonist, the young Murdo Anderson, is introduced as being momentarily projected onto a metaphysical level:

> At the moment Murdo had crossed over into the other world which overlays this one, and which most men find so difficult to enter because there is no space or time in it and you have first to be able to see that God and the Devil are really the same... You have almost to be an Albannach, or perhaps a Eireannach, to feel readily at home in it.[18]

The possession of a national idiom, albeit conceivable only in metaphysical terms, becomes indispensable not only *per se*, but principally for the re-establishment of a Scottish national identity. It is worthwhile noting that Gaeldom does not figure in Muir's analysis, for its presence clearly would have subverted his entire argument: one country cannot express its cultural discourse in more than one form, for the coexistence of two or more languages or cultural forms of expression within a nation is disruptive and detrimental to the perpetuation of homogeneity. According to Muir, what Calvinism has erased from Scotland is, as we have seen, its language – Scots – and, consequently, its indigenous literature. Therefore, following his argument in *Scott and Scotland*, since the loss of Scots, Scottish writers have simply not been able to reproduce that unity of thought and emotion which characterised the literary production of the Makars and, more generally, articulated the cultural life in pre-Reformation Scotland:

> The Scotland of James IV shows a coherent civilization, and in the individual writer of thought and feelings harmoniously working together. Calvinism drove a wedge between these two things, and destroyed the language in which they had been fused. Dissension can take strange forms, and Calvinism was prolific in dissensions; and I think it is

plausible to assert that the splitting up of the Scottish language into a host of local dialects was merely a final result of radical internal conflicts, civil and religious, working continuously for over a century. That conflict was so bitter and remorseless that it finally tore to pieces the living fabric of language itself, and left nothing but the shreds with which Scottish poetry has had to content itself since.[19]

Berthold Schoene-Harwood depicts a substantially different linguistic scenario by suggesting, in contrast to Muir's belief in a homogeneous pre-Reformation Scotland, that the Highland Clearances mark the cessation in Scotland of a heterogeneous cultural society. Thus he relates:

> The Lowlanders' clearance, appropriation and adaptation of Highland culture, instigated and sanctioned by England, effectively homogenises the erstwhile ethnic diversity of Scotland into one uniform whole, thus emboldening an ideological discourse of essentialist differentiation which ultimately functions to consolidate England's status as the normative referent of all cultural identification.[20]

According to Schoene-Harwood, however, the presence, prior to the Clearances, of an ethnic diversity within Scotland was never synonymous to '*inter*culturalism', as shown in MacColla's *And the Cock Crew*, where Schoene-Harwood recognises the elements which comprise the Lowlands/Highlands polarity. Such a polarity, continues Schoene-Harwood, withstands Homi K. Bhabha's postmodernist concept of the existence of a 'Third space between different, equally enfranchised selves [which] never cease to engender themselves and each other in an incessant process of mutual articulation'.[21] *And the Cock Crew*, epitomising the alienation of the Highlanders' 'indigenous signifiers' as well as the destruction of their 'cultural signified', invariably excludes the possibility of any interactive discourse between the anglicised Lowlanders and the Gaelic Highlanders within, as Bhabha would call it, an '*in-between* space'.

In relation to our exegesis, Schoene-Harwood's analysis of Scotland helps us to understand the radical transformation which the country has undertaken as a consequence of the Clearances: from the coexistence in different geographical spaces of Highland and Lowland culture to the absorption and demobilisation of the former at the behest of the latter. It is important to note, though, that MacColla's depiction in *And the Cock Crew* of such transformation does not encompass his vision of Scotland as consisting only of Gaelic culture and Gaelic language.

In the light of such considerations, we should stress the importance of the difference between the political visions of Scotland of Muir and MacColla; and in particular, we should understand MacColla's nationalism as an attempt, if not to create a hybrid 'third space', at least to re-establish the role of Gaeldom within the linguistic diversity that animated pre-Reformation Scotland.

Cairns Craig's analysis of the role and meaning of self-hatred among Scottish writers and cultural analysts links the first and second points of contention between Muir and MacColla – the second aspect concerning the cultural and social dynamics between Scotland and England. Following a perverse association between parochialism and self-hate, Craig claims, Scottish writers and cultural analysts have become obsessed with images of the latter, exemplarily embodied Calvinism, which would, as it were, justify 'the faults of being Scottish':

> Depending on our particular choice of protagonists within our history we will heap odium upon Calvin for perverting our original character, upon Knox for making us think in English, upon the Enlightenment for seeking a European cosmopolitanism... What [our cultural analysts] seek... is a historical scapegoat upon whom to offload the limitations and the contradictions of not being English or French or Russian.[22]

Craig is critical of a cultural framework which instead of facing Scotland's present as it is, develops around hypotheses of what the country might have become. In particular, Craig accuses MacColla of employing his antipathy towards Calvinism as a scapegoat to justify any frustration of the contemporary Scot: 'Fionn MacColla,' he suggests, 'probably put it at its most extreme in his attack on Calvinism when he asserted […] that "what the Reformation did was to snuff out what must otherwise have developed into the most brilliant national culture in history"'.[23] What Craig's analysis fails to suggest, however, is that MacColla's cultural and political vision of Scotland is fundamentally concerned with the future of the country. This is expressed through the prioritisation of the potential relationship between Scotland and Europe, as illustrated in the previous chapter, and the avoidance of an analysis based on the dichotomy between England and Scotland. In this respect, as opposed to Muir, MacColla's perception of England is far from being emulative. For if, on the one hand, MacColla insists on the cultural limitations of contemporary Scotland, he certainly does not aspire to any identification with the country south of the border and its alleged organicity, nor with any of the so-called 'core' countries cited above.

From what we have gathered so far, we can suggest that Muir's analysis of Scotland is undoubtedly ambiguous. However, in order to avoid falling into any sort of misinterpretation, we should distinguish between what Muir regards as potentially, and hypothetically, ideal for Scotland, and what he almost passively accepts as Scotland's 'factual reality'. Only thus can we understand Muir's statement: 'The only remedy for this state of things is either for the whole Scottish people to become English, or for Scotland to become a nation. The first has proved impossible'.[24] In

failing to merge with England or in failing to move from the imaginary to the real, Scotland has found itself in the midst of a dilemma:

> There are two main streams in the development of civilisation at present. One is in the direction of supernationalism; the other in that of nationalism. The first is essentially hostile to the old, complete human tradition; the second, in spite of the excesses and crimes of Chauvinism, is friendly to it. The ultimate aim of the first is uniformity, or, as it is correctly termed, standardisation; the second demands diversity as well. It is possible to fight for either ideal from the highest motives. But every one must make a choice, one way or the other.[25]

But if, on the one hand, we should interpret this final exhortation as an attempt to awaken Scotland from the unassailable limbo in which, according to Muir, the country has lain for centuries; on the other, it is difficult not to express a fundamental scepticism about the writer's intentions - that Muir 'himself' abstained from choosing 'one way or the other'. This is exemplified in the last paragraph of *Scott and Scotland* where Muir expounds on Scottish Nationalism:

> Scott saw Scottish manners inevitably melting into those of England, and he accepted the Union. Scottish manners have melted still more since he wrote, and now there is an increasing tendency to repudiate the Union. Scottish Nationalism has arisen mainly as a protest against this inevitable dissolution of manners. I do not believe in the programme of the Scottish Nationalists, for it goes against my reading of history, and seems to me a trivial response to a serious problem. I can only conceive a free and independent Scotland coming to birth as the result of a general economic change in society, after which there would be no reason for England to exert compulsion on Scotland, and both nations could live in peace side by side.[26]

Muir's exegesis, then, appears to reiterate his belief in Scotland's lack of function - be it political, social or cultural - as a nation. But, in view of this, we cannot help pointing out some incongruities. After detecting what, he believes, is the cause of Scotland's malaise - the country's non-homogenous status - and having acknowledged the unfeasibility of what would be the ideal panacea for such a malaise

- that is, Scotland 'becoming' England – Muir presents two entirely contrasting positions with regards to Scotland's future. In the end, though, without favouring either the Communist[27] or the Nationalist causes, Muir appears to lean towards the *status quo*, almost as if resigned to the idea of a perennial imaginary Scotland. Speaking more cynically, we could argue that he provides all the diagnoses without recommending a suitable cure.

In order to understand Muir's dialectic on Scotland, Andrew Noble suggests that we should turn to Muir's own biography: 'Highly relevant to his understanding of Scotland is that he saw it relative to the nature of English and European life'.[28] Muir's close acquaintance with Prague led him to compare Czechoslovakia's tragic history, a history of repression under Germany and Russia, with that of Scotland. This parallelism proved to be a determining factor in Muir's vision of Scotland's future. As Noble puts it: 'Scotland, consequently, was for him less the occasion for a sense of tragedy, it was more the stuff of the bathos of half-hearted suicide. The destruction of its inner being he believed had been largely self-destruction so that, for example, the perverted heroism of Knox's reformation had degenerated into the complacent, stagnant mood of modern Scotland'.[29]

Such observations, however, seem to lead us to a dislocation in Muir's analysis of Scotland. One wonders, first of all, why Muir does not apply a similar sense of tragedy to the systematic and deliberate annihilation of Gaelic culture as an example, not of self-destruction, but of the repressive imposition of one force over another. As mentioned above, such an omission is as serious as it appears voluntary, a deliberate gap which, had it not been preserved, would have subverted Muir's analysis of Scottish history. Secondly, Muir's dismissive attitude towards Scotland's

present state of affairs, as expressed in 'The Functionless of Scotland', 'The Problem of Scotland', and, later on, in *Scott and Scotland*, shows the underlying tendency of the writer to pursue his argument in spite of its evident contradictions. As Allan Massie points out in his introduction to *Scott and Scotland*:

> Muir omits the one thing that Scotland certainly wasn't - that is to say, a State - and prefers to substitute the dubious assertion that it wasn't a nation. Since Muir, with his extensive knowledge of Central Europe, must have known that nations could survive without Statehood, one finds oneself asking why he makes this substitution; and it is not till the last pages of the book, when he rejects the Scottish nationalist solution for Scotland's ills, that the answer becomes clear. For it is then evident that, if the restoration of Statehood could repair "the broken kingdom", then much of Muir's general argument would dissolve. It is essential for his purposes to stress that Scotland's ills go deeper than, and precede, the effects of the Union.[30]

In the above quotation is contained the last and most significant point of contention between Muir and MacColla. I am referring to the delineation of two distinctive political backgrounds or, more specifically, to a divergent understanding of political nationalism in relation to Scotland's future. Interestingly, such a divergence stems from a mutual perception of the detrimental elements of the logical structure of Calvinism. And it is, precisely, from this initial convergence between Muir and MacColla that we will approach the concluding part of this section.

The perception of a form of pathology in the Scottish people appears recurrently both in Muir's analysis – and is manifested through the linguistic dislocation of the Scottish people – and in MacColla's own exegesis – namely, through the mechanism of the valve, discussed in the previous chapter. Both writers identify the causes of such a pathology with the advent of Calvinism in Scotland. As shown above, such a perception, which extends to other contemporary Scottish writers, has been widely criticised, especially in recent times,[31] as just another

example of the impossibility of the modern Scottish writer to accept his or her contemporary society. With specific references to Muir's *Scott and Scotland*, Tom Nairn, from his progressive Marxian stance, dismisses such an attitude as paradoxical and pathological in itself:

> [...] modern Scottish society does not fit in [romantic nationalism], and one has to explain why; since the idea-world (roots, organs and all) is all right, and has unchallengeable status, it has to be Scotland which is wrong; therefore Scottish society and history are monstrously misshapen in some way, blighted by an Original sin [...] The Reformation is the obvious candidate, so before that things were pretty sound [...] Start with Idealism and you end up embracing the Scarlet Woman of Rome. I do not wish to dwell longer on this paradox now [...] The aura of madness surrounding it is surely plain enough.[32]

What critics have failed to recognise, though, is that, underlying their perception of the same ills, Scottish writers have provided different remedies, and that through the analysis of such remedies it is possible, if not to justify, then at least to grasp their original perception. Muir's and MacColla's case is exemplary, especially in relation to their respective studies on Calvinism and Bolshevism. Both writers draw a parallel between the Calvinist dogmas and Bolshevism, and both writers insist on the analogous logic and psychological framework behind the two ideologies.

In the essay 'Bolshevism and Calvinism',[33] Muir conducts a short, but essential analysis of the two theories and practices. His objective is to show the resemblance between the two systems, whilst maintaining the stance, as he himself states, of an impartial observer. Muir regards Calvinism as a doctrine devoid of any religious or political power over contemporary society. However, because of its structural similarities with Bolshevism, it can still be adopted as a useful term of comparison: 'in content these two creeds are quite dissimilar, but in logical structure they are astonishingly alike'.[34] To start with, both Calvinism and Bolshevism revolve

around the centrality of a written text, be it religious or secular, the function of which is to set a logical structure which can combine theory and practice. In both systems the text justifies, through its theoretical elaboration, any practical policy including, as Muir suggests, repression and discipline. The other defining elements shared by Bolshevism and Calvinism are determinism, or the existence within both systems of a double-category society - a chosen class of the elect and the proletariat - and, as Muir defines it, a 'water-tight system', which, possessed of an absence of loopholes, confers upon the creed a sense of infallibility. However, according to Muir the most outstanding feature of both Calvinism and Bolshevism is exclusiveness. In such an attribute Muir recognises the strength and weakness of Calvinism. 'A civilisation within a civilisation', as Muir describes it, Calvinism brought, due to its efficiency, logic and focus, drastic political and ecclesiastical changes to Scottish society. It 'colonised' the New World, but, despite this, never managed to impinge upon the European tradition: 'it lived to itself and died of inanition'.[35] Can the same strength and weakness be identified in Communism? To Muir, writing in 1934, this was still an enigma. What he does, though, in 'Bolshevism and Calvinism', is to operate through hypothesis and deduction. Thus the following supposition:

> What if Calvinism had not lost finally in its main fight against the European tradition; what if, instead of contributing to modify that tradition in the long run, it had itself become the norm of European life...? This speculation may seem idle, but it is very apposite to the present situation, for if Communism triumphs something like this is bound to happen. Communism is not only an exclusive creed, like Calvinism; it becomes, once it has triumphed, an all-inclusive one... If Communism triumphs there will be no returning to the old European tradition.[36]

The conjunctive element of Muir's analysis is revealed in this last statement. His great concern to preserve 'the old European tradition', a concern which is extensively

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dealt with in *Scott and Scotland*, reappears here as the prominent feature of his argument. Muir recognises in both creeds an inclination to impose a new framework of thought over societies, and to dissociate from any existing tradition. Calvinism, first of all, breaks the unity and harmony that characterised pre-Reformation Scotland: 'The Scotland of James IV shows a coherent civilisation, and the individual writer thought and feeling harmoniously working together. Calvinism drove a wedge between these two things, and destroyed the language in which they had been fused'.[37] Once the means - the language - is lost, the civilisation which has stemmed from and contributed to the development of the European tradition disappears too. According to Muir, Presbyterian Scotland therefore becomes a centreless society, and, as a consequence of this, more exposed to the effect of the Industrial Revolution, which represents the ultimate point of physical and spiritual degeneration in modern Scottish history.

MacColla's and Muir's analyses converge on the logical nature of the two creeds, given that MacColla also recognises determinism and totalitarianism as the quintessential attributes of each, and the highly developed pragmatic vision that acts as the driving force behind them. MacColla's approach, though, involves a psychological introspection which is not to be found in Muir's. And it is to this psychological analysis that we have to turn to in order to fully understand the long-term effects of Calvinism in twentieth century Scotland.

MacColla writes in *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*: '*Neither Communism nor the Reformation can be understood until it has been perceived that initially and in the metaphysics of the will they are identical phenomena*'.[38] The introduction of the concept of 'Face' and 'Mask' will facilitate our comprehension of MacColla's

metaphysical approach. The 'Face' corresponds to the event in history: the occurrence, for instance, of Calvinism in Scotland or the revolutionary upheavals in early twentieth century Russia. The doctrines of the Reformation and the structure of the Kirk, meanwhile, represent nothing more than a Mask; and can be thought of as corresponding to the Communist system of thought, embodied in the political structure of the Apparat. What MacColla is determined to prove, in the latter part of *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*, is that, in spite of different 'Masks', behind Calvinism and Bolshevism lies the same 'Face', otherwise described as a common tendency to create a dualisation of reality. Thus the creation of a two-category society, as also pinpointed by Muir. This duality derives, following MacColla's analysis, from a rejection of the being - not 'I', or 'the other', from the being - 'I'. MacColla recognises in the action of rejecting, separating and eliminating the being – not 'I' a more simplistic process than that of including and affirming 'the other'. Elimination not only relieves the human being from responsibility, but it also accommodates the imposition of new norms.

To comprehend fully MacColla's analysis of the relationship between the state of the psyche of the individual and the event is essential if we are to understand, in turn, the role that he confers on Calvinism in twentieth century Scotland, and its consequent parallelism with Bolshevism. The following fragment exemplifies MacColla's insistence on perceiving the Reformation as, first and foremost, a psychological event, rather than a strictly religious one, the repercussions of which still impact on contemporary Scottish society:

> The Reformation is not a matter of religious controversies but of present social and psychological realities... Just because the Reformation stands in a causal sense massively in the background of the modern world it is

not 'something that happened in the 16th century' but something that is happening in our society and in ourselves – none the less that we are aware of it or may be factually ignorant of the events of the 16th century or without interest in history, or without personal belief in the Christian religion or in any religion… Nowhere did the elements that in the 16th century made for the creation of a new, 'modern' world, our world, come more completely to the top and in more undiluted form than in Scotland, and in Scotland they most securely established and perpetuated themselves to the most complete exclusion of opponents and competitors, and nowhere, therefore, than in Scotland is their nature likely to be more conveniently studied or clearly identified.[39]

It is, above all, the psychological framework which continues to support religious dogmatism that MacColla sees as the prevailing, and most dangerous, element of Calvinism in contemporary Scottish society. MacColla's argument converges here with Muir's, but in doing so, paradoxically underlines its incompatibility with Muir's in relation to the concept of a Scottish Renaissance, as shown in two extremely relevant articles published by the two writers in *The Free Man*. Their contributions are part of a symposium on the issue of nationalism; MacColla's piece, published the week after Muir's, ought to be interpreted as a response to the observations raised by the Orcadian. Accordingly, the two articles will be presented here chronologically:

October 15, 1932
It seems to me the main problem is still to rouse Scotland to a genuine (not merely conventional or sentimental) consciousness of itself. Until that is done nothing of much value can come of any Nationalist movement, practical or otherwise, except indirectly, such movements are extremely useful, for instance, as symbols. But symbols are at best makeshifts for the real thing, and unless Scotland transcends them, all that independence will mean to her, if she does achieve it, will be a little Edinburgh House of Commons as like two peas to the Westminster one, and that would not be worth lifting a finger for. It follows that an intellectual renascence is far more needed in Scotland than a political one – though that so far has been immensely useful. Ideally both should proceed side by side; but in practice political activity kills every other kind, and is particularly deadly to free intellectual enquiry. For that reason an energetic group of Scottish writers and intellectuals living in Scotland, with a popular organ in which to express their policy, is absolutely essential at present to the national revival; but so far as I can

see it is also an impossible dream. Nevertheless, without something of the kind I can see no future for the national movement in Scotland except a purely bourgeois one, in which case it would deserve no more attention than Prohibition or Empire Free Trade.[40]

October 22, 1932

Before any question can be argued clearly it is always necessary to state the principles involved on the highest plane on which they apply. Scottish Nationalism can be stated on the highest, i.e., metaphysical, plane to concern the principle of being; to assume the fullest degree of being which can be manifested in Scottishness. An absolute principle is therefore involved, from which it follows, first that all opposition to Scottish Nationalism so understood is ruled out by court, since it assumes the metaphysical absurdity that non-being or, so to speak, partial being is superior to complete being; and second, that all compromise or stopping short in the practical application of the principle is an imbecility, which is the same as to say that there can be no such thing as "moderate" nationalism except in the same sense as there is moderate intelligence. In the political sphere it ought obviously to work out in complete freedom in internal and external affairs, necessitating, I should imagine, a separate Scottish Kingdom or Scottish Republic... As Scottish Culture is the fine flower of expression of Scottishness, a true nationalism would act in this sphere in the way of removing barriers to the completeness and freedom of such expression, e. g., the exclusive and compulsory use of English constitutes definitively a barrier of this kind; therefore, I hold that there ought to be a return to Gaelic, which, while structurally and historically related to Irish, is nevertheless in its modern form the peculiar creation of the Scottish mind.[41]

MacColla's position with regards to the term 'nationalism' is clearly all-encompassing. In his view, nationalism is polysemous, ranging from the metaphysical to the pragmatic: its 'being' is undisputable and its application must be carried out comprehensively, in all spheres of society – political, cultural and linguistic - principally through the medium of Gaeldom. MacColla, then, does not seem to be afflicted by the insoluble dialectic which characterises Muir's argument; that is, the reciprocal annihilation of political and intellectual nationalism, whereby encouraging the latter necessarily implies an absence of the former or, conversely,

whereby the realization of political nationalism is equal to the neutralisation of its intellectual equivalent.

III

As we have seen in the first section, the critical writings of Muir and MacColla are, on a superficial level, deceptively alike, mainly because of the analogy of issues and references tackled by each in their studies. However, it has been shown how apparently similar premises can lead to a fundamental discordance such as a contrasting interpretation of nationalism and its role in shaping the future of Scotland. In the following section, our debate will acquire a more challenging tone with the introduction of Lewis Grassic Gibbon, whose contribution, both for its content and its style, indirectly aims at confronting MacColla's entire argument. Our discussion, then, will revolve around MacColla's nationalist stance and Gibbon's cosmopolitanism. Our task, however, is not to reconcile these two distinct accounts, but rather to analyse their incompatible visions and their implications in historical terms. More specifically, our intention is to show how, in relation to Gibbon's understanding of Scotland, MacColla's nationalistic model seems to offer a harmonious and coherent alternative both with regards to the political and the cultural sphere.

Gibbon's understanding of cosmopolitanism is provocatively exemplified in what follows:

> What a curse to earth are small nations! Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Finland, San Salvador, Luxembourg, Manchukuo, the Irish Free State. There are many more: there is an appalling number of disgusting little stretches of the globe claimed, occupied and infected by groupings of babbling little morons - babbling militant on the subjects (unendingly) of

their *exclusive* cultures, their *national* languages, their *national* souls, their *national* genius, their unique achievements in throat-cutting in this and that abominable little squabble in the past... Glasgow's salvation, Scotland's salvation, the world's salvation lies in neither nationalism nor internationalism, those twin halves of an idiot whole. It lies in ultimate cosmopolitanism, the earth the City of God... A time will come when nationalism, with other cultural aberrations, will have passed from the human spirit, when Man, again free and unchained, has all the earth for his footstool, sings his epics in a language moulded from the best on earth, draws his heroes, his sunrises, his valleys and his mountains from all the crinkles of our lovely planet.[42]

After reading Gibbon's invective, we are indeed not surprised at MacColla's recollection of Gibbon's contributions to the *Free Man*: 'He [Gibbon] used to infuriate me by the utterly irresponsible, jocular letters on the subjects he wrote at the time some of us were running the *Free Man*. His whole attitude was incurably and unforgivably frivolous and declared the lamentable fact that he was an intellectual *non-est*'.[43]

Underlying Gibbon's blatant devotion to Cosmopolitanism, as well as MacColla's exaltation of national identity is, as is the case with Muir, a different interpretation of the concept and nature of origins, both on an personal and communal level. Among the spectrum of contemporary critics, Julia Kristeva's *Nations without Nationalism*, and the specific references to Cosmopolitanism included in it, may act as a valuable theoretical framework through which interpret Gibbon's position. The core of the argument of Kristeva's study on nationalism presupposes a process of identification between the cult of origins, on the one hand, and a sense of hatred of origins, on the other. In Kristeva's opinion, this can be overcome, on a personal level, by recurring to psychoanalysis. The cult of origins is dissipated by the psychoanalytic discourse which allows us, first of all, to come to terms with and, then, to transcend, our origins. On a communal level, the

transcendence of origins is the first step towards a full acceptance of certain modes of universalization, such as Cosmopolitanism:

> The cult of origins is a hate reaction. *Hatred of those others* who do not share my origins and who affront me personally, economically, and culturally... *Hatred of oneself*, for when exposed to violence, individuals despair of their own qualities, undervalue their achievements and yearnings, run down their own freedoms whose preservation leaves so much to chance... As an expression of hatred the glorification of origins hence finds its matching opposite in the hatred of origins... The recourse to psychoanalysis entails, among other benefits, the production of one of the rare discourses that avoid such symmetry; it invites you to come back constantly to our origins (biographies, childhood memories, family) in order to transcend them.[44]

As Kristeva reveals in her analysis, she was first motivated to write *Nations without Nationalism* by Montesquieu's idea of *esprit général*: the general spirit, says Kristeva, is to be considered as the ideal condition, within a nation, to be constantly pursued. Kristeva believes that the 'series of differences', which are present in a nation, should give way to the 'general spirit', the soul of cosmopolitanism which contains, and, at the same time, obliterates individualities.

Given this succinct summary of her speculations, we should ask ourselves how can Kristeva's study be applied to elucidate Gibbon's own notion of cosmopolitanism? Although Gibbon does not refer to the kind of psychoanalytic discourse, which is central in Kristeva's analysis, there is an element in the latter which is also part of Gibbon's own argument – namely, the identification of *esprit général* with the concept of freedom or liberation from definitions, borders, confinements, origins. Just as Kristeva adopts Montesquieu's *esprit général* to surmount such, as it were, 'limitations', in the same manner, Gibbon turns to 'cosmopolitan freedom' to relieve the human spirit from, as he calls them, 'self-wrought, prideful differentiations' between nationalities. In view of this, we should

interpret the following quotation as an attempt by Gibbon to 'exploit' his origins in order to be able to transcend them and embrace cosmopolitanism:

> I am a nationalist only in the sense that the sane Heptarchian was a Wessexman or a Mercian or what not: temporarily, opportunistically. I think the Braid Scots may yet give some lovely lights and shadows not only to English but to the perfected speech of Cosmopolitan Man: so I cultivate it, for the lack of perfect speech that is yet to be. I think there's a chance that Scotland... may win to a freedom preparatory to, and in alignment with, that cosmopolitan freedom, long before England: so, a cosmopolitan opportunist, I am some kind of Nationalist.[45]

Gibbon's 'cosmopolitan freedom' ought to be understood as the aim and essence of his political conception. His argument is clear-cut: nationalism equals the interests of the bourgeoisie, and, precisely because of that, ought to be discarded as unable to cater for the community. This is where Gibbon's priorities lie, and this is why he defends so overtly his opportunism: 'I would welcome the end of Braid Scots and Gaelic, our culture, our history, our nationhood under the heels of a Chinese army of occupation if it could cleanse the Glasgow slums and give a surety of food and play - the elementary right of every human being - to those people of the abyss'.[46] Rather than *hatred for oneself*, such a confession should be perceived as transcendence of one's origins for the realisation of the common good. Gibbon's position indicates a radical refusal to reconcile the welfare of the community with the welfare of the nation, maintaining these two entities widely apart from one another. In dealing with the subject of origins, which underlies the political disparity between Gibbon and MacColla, it would be reasonable to suggest that Gibbon's cosmopolitanism and MacColla's nationalism respectively derive from their different perception of Scottish history and, in particular, of the role of Gaeldom and of the so-called British-Keltic culture.

In *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*, MacColla engages in a detailed description of the heroic feats and advanced civilisation of the Celts throughout Europe, emphasising their significant role in the development of Scottish culture and identifying the splendour of the 'Keltic Kingdom of Alba' with Gaelic speech and culture: 'early in the eleventh century', he writes, 'the nation had attained practically its historic shape...What is unquestionable is that Gaelic gave the nation its unity, and despite the later incursions of Northern English it continued to be the national language'.[47] Gibbon, on the other hand, could not offer a more different reading of history: '...the Kelts are a strain quite alien to the indubitable and original Scot. They were, and remain, one of the greatest curses of the Scottish scene, quick, avaricious, unintelligent, quarrelsome, cultureless, and uncivilizable'.[48] Rather opportunistically, we might suggest that MacColla's and Gibbon's diametrically opposed accounts of the history of the Celts in Scotland appears to facilitate our discussion with regards to their different observations on contemporary Scotland. When we look at MacColla's reconstruction of the history of Gaeldom we perceive that, together with a rather explicit revivalist approach - that of a Gaelic 'golden age' - there lurks another level of historical interpretation which cannot be overlooked and which relates to the identification of the Gaelic heritage with that of Scotland as a whole. This crucial point has been extensively dealt with in Colin Kidd's recent study *British Identities before Nationalism*.

In reading Kidd's analysis, it becomes clear that MacColla's stance is far from being unique, and, more importantly, that it coincides with the commonly accepted conception of Scotland's heritage which prevailed in medieval and early modern Scotland. At the beginning of his chapter on 'The Gaelic dilemma in early modern

Scotland', Kidd states the crucial paradox which characterises the peculiar relationship between the history of Gaeldom and that of Scotland:

> In early modern Scotland Gaeldom defined the historic essence of nationhood, yet also represented an alien otherness. The history, much of it mythical, of the Gaelic Scots of the ancient west Highland kingdom of Dalriada stood proxy for the early history of the whole Scottish nation... However, the early modern period also witnessed a conscious design on the part of the Lowland elites to extirpate contemporary Gaeldom, and to assimilate the Gaelic Highlanders to Lowland standards and values in every sphere of life: culture, public order, law, religion and language. This intolerance of Gaelic 'difference' transcended political and ecclesiastical divisions, which rested, ironically, on arguments drawn from the Dalriadic past.[49]

Kidd's thesis is relevant to our discussion on MacColla's exaltation of Gaeldom in contemporary Scotland precisely because, while insisting on the identification of the Gael with such concepts as 'alien', 'different', and 'other', it emphasises how, paradoxically, Gaeldom constituted, well after the regal union, the most representative signifier for the whole of Scotland. Particularly in relation to MacColla's afore-mentioned observation - 'we defeated the idea of division [between Lowland and Highland] by the profound (and absolutely justified) conviction that the Highlanders were simply those of us who had *retained* the language and customs of the Scots in their purity' – we can see how Kidd undertakes a thorough exploration of the historical motives which have produced such a commonly shared conviction amongst those in favour of national independence. The core of the matter as to why Scotland did not possess an alternative myth of national origins to the Dalriadic one, according to Kidd, lies in the fact that 'the principal argument for Scottish independence was historical and prescriptive' and, consequently, 'there may have been a suspicion that, if the myth of a single ancient line of institutional continuity were shattered, the very idea of nationhood independent of English suzerainty might

be rendered perilously fragile.[50] Not to be confused with chauvinism *per se*, Kidd

seems to suggest that such an insistence on ethnic continuity ought to be understood

as a fundamental necessity in order to defend and preserve an independent status.

It would not be too far-fetched to assume that MacColla's reconstruction of

the historical role of Gaeldom is easily identifiable with the early modern Scottish

belief that 'the primary good of national freedom dictated that the Scottish political

nation recognise one single ethnic origin',[51] and that that ethnic origin necessarily

coincided with 'a Dalriadic fantasy' – in Kidd's terms - or with a "metaphysical

Gaeldom", as we have defined it above through MacColla.

One of the most relevant implications of the Dalriadic site of origins, which

constitutes the nature of MacColla's nationalism, manifests itself in the writer's

antagonism towards a romanticisation of the Highlands, as was seen throughout the

late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Indeed, the motives underlying such an

adverse position can be traced to the Lowland-Highland divide, as it was developed

after the Forty-five rebellion.[52] In relation to this, MacColla extends his vision of

Dalriadic unity also to the Jacobite Risings, as it is illustrated in the following

passage from *The Ministers*, where Ewen MacRury, while conversing with another

minister, Macpherson Bain, denounces the belief according to which the Highland

people acted only in response to romantic motives:

> What I do think is that the Highland people then simply had a burning,
> compelling sense of 'right' where the royal house was concerned. That is
> my reading of facts, and I think it is the only one that explains them
> rationally, gives the Jacobite Risings a rational motivation... You and I
> who are of the stock that participated, and for whom moreover as Gaelic-
> speaking men the contemporary evidence, the songs etc, are accessible,
> and in which romance does not appear, are in a position to know better...
> that the motives of Gaelic Jacobitism were not romantic but *real*, that is,

they arose out of the moral realities involved in the contemporary situation as the people then saw them.[53]

Traces of MacColla's post-factual empathy – the ability to cast oneself into the past in order to reconstruct the historical event, as illustrated in the first chapter of this thesis – are recognisable here. But what concerns us most is the axiomatic implication emerging from MacRury's observations which assert the inextricable link between the Jacobites, Gaeldom and the Stewart line. According to Kidd, though, 'Jacobitism was not a Gaelicist ideology *per se* [and] despite the reasonable assumption that Jacobites would have felt a natural affinity with the Gaelic heartland of their military support, Jacobite literati were not committed exclusively to a Dalriadic idea of Scotland'.[54] We could assume that MacColla never pointed out this scenario of diversification simply because he was not aware of it. But his insistence on the harmonious collaboration of forces between Jacobites and Highlanders, and on the compact military and political front which they constituted, specifically aims at recreating a cultural and political unity of intentions between an independence movement and Gaeldom, as well as projecting it into a contemporary arena.

To return to our comparison between MacColla and Gibbon, one wonders whether, with regards to Gibbon's anti-Keltic stance, an exaltation of a Dalriadic past would not necessarily clash with his cosmopolitan tendencies. In point of fact, according to Gibbon's reading of Scotland's ancient history, the kingdom of Dalriada has had a negligible impact on the history of Scotland, especially when compared to the invasion of the Angles, towards the end of the sixth century.[55]

Once the focus is turned to culture, however, the differences between MacColla and Gibbon appear more substantial. As pointed out above, MacColla uses

the discourse concerning Gaeldom as the vital aspect of a Scottish Renaissance. The fact that Gibbon does not celebrate Gaeldom as the conjunctive element for such a Renaissance poses questions on his perception of the status and the function of culture in contemporary Scotland. In his analysis, Gibbon carries out a separation between politics and culture: once interacting and interdependent, nowadays fulfilling different functions within the community. In point of fact, according to Gibbon, culture no longer fulfils any function: 'There is nothing in culture or art that is worth the life and elementary happiness of one of those thousands who rot in the Glasgow slums'.[56] Rather than being viewed as anti-cultural *per se*, Gibbon's position should be perceived as revealing what he believes to be gap between the cultural discourse and the basic needs of the population. On the other hand, we cannot ignore that, driven by the compulsion of prioritisation, Gibbon chooses, in the end, to subjugate culture - a position, indeed, highly contentious, or simply provocative, considering that it pertains to one of the major representatives of the Scottish Renaissance Movement. In the opposite direction moves MacColla through his nationalistic approach, which, as discussed previously, endorses an integration of the cultural and the political discourses as the only possible solution for the deliverance of the Scottish nation-community.

Notes

[1] Andrew Noble (ed), *Edwin Muir: Uncollected Scottish Criticism* (London and Totowa NJ: Vision and Barnes & Noble, 1982), pp. 9-10.
[2] Hugh MacDiarmid, 'At the Sign of the Thistle' in *The Free Man*, June 25 1932.
[3] MacColla, fragment in the National Library of Scotland, Deposit 265, Item 13.
[4] Margery McCulloch, *Edwin Muir - Poet, Critic and Novelist* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), p. 86.
[5] Ibid.

[6] Edwin Muir, 'The Functionless of Scotland', *The Free Man*, 11.2 (1931), p. 6, in *Edwin Muir: Uncollected Scottish Criticism*, pp.105-7.

[7] See Cairns Craig, *Out of History* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996), pp. 14-16, where a close parallelism is observed between T. S. Eliot's *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* and Muir's *Scott and Scotland*.

[8] 'The Functionless of Scotland', p. 106.

[9] Edwin Muir, 'The Problem of Scotland', *The Spectator*, No. 5549, 2.11. (1934), p. 676, in *Edwin Muir: Uncollected Scottish Criticism*, pp. 111-12.

[10] Muir, 'The Problem of Scotland', pp. 111-12.

[11] MacColla, 'Mein Bumpf' in *Essays on Fionn MacColla* (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1973), pp. 14-15.

[12] MacColla, 'In the Schoolhouse', in *Scottish Short Stories* (London: Collins, 1980), pp. 22-23.

[13] MacColla, *Too Long in this Condition – Ro Fhada Mar So A Tha Mi* (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1975), pp. 22-23.

[14] J. B. Caird, 'The Twofold Heritage' in David Morrison (ed), *Essays on Fionn MacColla* (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1973), pp. 32-33.

[15] MacColla, *Move Up, John* (Edinburgh: Canongate Press, 1994), p. 5. Scotland's linguistic scenario as depicted in *Move Up, John*, finds an authoritative confirmation in the words of Colin Kidd: 'The Lowland vernacular was known throughout the later medieval period as *Inglis*; the first extant reference to it as *Scottis* dates from 1494. Gaelic had been the *lingua Scotica* or *Scotorum*. Now 'Scots' began to be appropriated by Lowlanders as a description of their language. There was an exchange of terminology and with it the ethnic affiliation of language. By the sixteenth century, Gaelic was increasingly described in alien terms as the Irish tongue – *lingua Hibernica* or Erse.' Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism – Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600 – 1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 124-125.

[16] Ibid.

[17] MacColla advances such a distinction in *Too Long in this Condition*, where he affirms: 'If my style has qualities they are in large part those of – if not positively my first – still my native language. If there is any magic in anything I have written, any express lucidity… they are derived from *that special sighting of Reality which can not be attained save through the window of the Gàidhlig*', p. 56.

[18] MacColla, *The Albannach* (London: Souvenir Press, 1984), p. 3.

[19] Muir, *Scott and Scotland*, p. 44.

[20] Berthold Schoene-Harwood, '"Emerging as the others of ourselves" - Scottish multiculturalism and the challenge of the body in postcolonial representation' *Scottish Literary Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 1, May 1998, pp. 65-66.

[21] Ibid., p. 57.

[22] Craig, *Out of History*, p. 13.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Muir, 'The Functionless of Scotland', pp. 106.

[25] Ibid., p. 107.

[26] Muir, *Scott and Scotland*, p. 113.

[27] We anticipate here the conclusions reached by Muir in his study of Bolshevism and Calvinism, of which it will be given an account further on in the chapter.

[28] Muir, 'The Functionless of Scotland', p. 12.

[29] Ibid., pp. 13-14.

[30] Allan Massie in the 'Introduction' to Edwin Muir's *Scott and Scotland*, pp. ii-iii.

[31] See note 19.

[32] Tom Nairn, *The Break Up of Britain* (London: Verso, 1981), p. 123.

[33] Edwin Muir, 'Bolshevism and Calvinism', *European Quarterly* I, May 1934, pp. 3-11, in *Edwin Muir: Uncollected Scottish Criticism*, pp. 123-130.

[34] Ibid., p. 125.

[35] Ibid., p. 127.

[36] Ibid., pp. 127-28.

[37] Muir, *Scott and Scotland*, p. 44.

[38] MacColla, *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*, p. 159.

[39] MacColla, NLS, 239/7.

[40] Muir, *Whither Scotland? - The Free Man Symposium*, 1st instalment, 15.10. (1932).

[41] MacColla, 'The Imbecility of Compromise', *Whither Scotland? - The Free Man Symposium*, 2nd instalment, 22.10. (1932).

[42] Lewis Grassic Gibbon, 'Glasgow', *Scottish Scene or The Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn* (Bath: Cedric Chivers, 1974), pp. 144-146.

[43] MacColla, NLS, 265/17.

[44] Julia Kristeva, *Nations without Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), pp. 2-4.

[45] Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *Scottish Scene*, p. 146.

[46] Ibid., p. 141.

[47] *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*, p. 46.

[48] Lewis Grassic Gibbon, 'The Antique Scene', *Scottish Scene*, p. 22.

[49] Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism – Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600 – 1800*, p. 123.

[50] Ibid., pp. 140-142.

[51] Ibid., p. 145.

[52] This is an argument which intrinsically appears to undermine MacColla's discourse on the unity of Scotland. It can be argued, as Kidd does, that such a divide was only canonised in the nineteenth century, but, in point of fact, it existed before then, although it was substantially ignored in order to perpetuate the institutional continuity of the Dalriadic past. In relation to this, Kidd affirms: 'The romantic Highlands of the Lowland imagination were not invented *ex nihilo* in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; rather they were reinvented after the dissolution of an earlier and equally fantastic vision of Gaeldom', *British Identities*, p. 145.

[53] MacColla, *The Ministers*, pp. 53-54.

[54] Kidd, *British Identities*, p. 135.

[55] See Grassic Gibbon, 'The Antique Scene', p. 23.

[56] Ibid., p. 119.

Part Two

Facing the Fictions

Authorial Boundaries
Introduction to the Second Section

The following introduction undertakes a detailed study of the role of the author in MacColla's fiction, with particular attention to *Move Up, John, Facing the Muzhik* and *The Albannach.* In order to do so, it is essential to establish an understanding of the theoretical considerations relating to MacColla's late fictional narration, and to gauge their distinct connotations, varied modes of application and variable degrees of impact on the narrative of each text.

The extreme difficulties which MacColla encountered with publishers throughout his life are scantily documented. However, as shown in the following quotations, it appears that the increasingly didactic tendency of his fictional prose, towards the end of his writing career, hampered almost any possibility of publication.[1] The letter by J. Alan White of Methuen & Co on *Move Up, John* is immediately followed by a letter to MacColla written by Edwin Muir. In it, the words of the Orcadian seem to echo, albeit in a more tactful fashion, those of the publisher:

> 22nd January 1952
> Dear Mr MacDonald, we have now carefully examined and considered your book *Move Up, John*, but I'm afraid that we cannot make you an offer of publication. It is only too plain that you have a polemical purpose in writing it, for this quite spoils its character as fiction. We can well believe that there is, as you say, an opening for a "straightforward work of historical criticism" on the subject, but we do not think that this novel is either readable and saleable in itself...
> J. Alan White
> Methuen & Co Ltd London[2]

> 4th January 1954
> [...] I think all the first part is magnificent, indeed far better than any modern book I have read for a long time; I mean particularly the battle scenes. Then in Chapter Three there is the trial of Heretics, which also

seems to me to be very good but not on the level of the first part. Then after that there is a sermon, which to be frank seems to me more designed to persuade the reader than the congregation it is addressed to. Then after that there is the theological discussion between John Tod and the persecuted Catholic. The book seems to me to decline progressively from the heroic temper of the first two chapters to an exposition, and a very good one, of Catholic philosophy and theology. I waited in the hope that it would reach some great climax, and I felt myself put off again and again by what seemed to me, artistically, one decline after another. This being my own response to the book, I can quite understand the response of publishers, who have a commercial interest in accepting and declining works of imagination.[3]

After years of adversarial correspondences with publishers, MacColla reached a fuller awareness of the matter, which he expresses in *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*, where he admits: 'I was very naïve of course if I ever expected that novel [*Move Up, John*] to be published as a novel. The days are long gone by when the public will tolerate being edified by a novelist, or indeed being edified at all by any kind of writer. Writers no longer lead public opinion'.[4] But such a show of resignation does not reflect MacColla's actual position in relation to the incorporation of didactic elements into his fiction, which is revealed a few years later by MacColla who, in his essay "Mein Bumpf", elaborates on his narrative strategies while, with specific references to *Move Up, John*, offering a repudiation of Muir's (and others') muted accusations of Catholic propaganda: 'I was preoccupied with how to write a novel which would have the effect of *showing* the reader what *really* happened at the Reformation knowing only too well that to *argue* the thing out would be merely to arouse a furious opposition of conditional emotions with rationalisations galore to justify them'.[5] Here, then, despite the criticism levelled against him, MacColla refuses to accept the charge of didacticism. The point is explicitly reiterated in what follows: 'In this day and age, readers do not need a thesis or work of heavy

didacticism [as] there is nothing more disconcerting in reading a novel than suddenly to begin to suspect that one is being instructed'.[6]

However, according to John Herdman, who has worked extensively on MacColla's entire output, there is a discrepancy between what the writer professes in his theoretical writings and what he actually produces as fiction:

> It was... the conflict between the "creative" and "speculative" elements of his talent which constituted MacColla's central dilemma... The compulsion which he felt to communicate the insights at which he had arrived, his restless sense of their overmastering urgency, exerted a pressure upon the novel form through which he sought to make them concrete, which broke down the restraints of traditional narrative structure.[7]

The result of such an operation, according to Herdman, has been detrimental to the qualitative status of MacColla's fiction:

> MacColla's very fine achievement as a novelist was limited by a devaluation of his own necessary creative subjectivity, indeed of subjectivity itself, so that he felt obliged to dress it up as objectivity. That it was which again and again prompted him to insert long passages of abstract argument into the body of his narratives, instead of relying on his magnificent novelistic talents for the *enactment* of his meanings. This flaw maims, though far from fatally... the artistic coherence of that in many respects splendid novel *The Ministers*; while the author was able to salvage his last novel *Facing the Muzhik* only by excising most of his philosophical content and converting it into a high-class adventure story.[8]

In an attempt to resolve the incongruities which underlie the relationship between theory and fiction, Herdman uses biographical details to account for MacColla's intentions to preserve 'objectivity' in the fictional space of his novels. The critic believes that after his conversion to Roman Catholicism, MacColla felt it necessary to produce historical and psychological novels which were completely bereft of any form of sectarianism. However, Herdman continues: 'All this resulted... in a considerable over-compensation, an eschewal of the subjective which came into

conflict with his natural novelistic endowments'(Herdman, p. 12). In the same article, Herdman attempts to illustrate the other side of the argument, that is, MacColla's dilemma in being unable to maintain a separation between fiction and theory:

> The question remains as to why MacColla, deeply convinced as he was of the vital importance of communicating his insights on the theme which so exercised his mind and talents, chose to do so through the medium of fiction. The first reason is perhaps simply that he started off as a novelist and continued to think of himself primarily as such, even when his mental landscape came to be increasingly dominated by ideas. Another is that in the forties and fifties when his later novels were being written it was still generally believed that fiction was more popular with the public than fact (the reverse is the case today), and that ideas were likely to prove more palatable and hence more persuasive when projected dramatically in fictional form. (Herdman, p. 13)[9]

Herdman's terminology appears vague and impressionistic. It is not clear, for instance, why, to put it in simple terms, MacColla's ideas should not be represented in 'fictional form'. Following Herdman's argument, MacColla's mission is thwarted at root because of his 'personality': his intentions are overpowered by his opinions which, in themselves, are delimited by his intentions towards 'objectivity'. In view of all this, Herdman affirms, it is impossible to negate the impact of theoretical speculations on the narrative structure of such fiction, and, in particular, on the delineation of the characters this fiction depicts. Not only do speculative elements prevail through the insertion of argumentative paragraphs or, as in *Move Up, John*, in the unfolding of dramatic dialogues, but they also affect the realisation of fulfilled and autonomous characters:

> MacColla was fully aware of the danger of the method he adopted in *Move Up, John...* Even supposing that the *personae*, once established, assumed a total autonomy and proceeded to act in complete independence of the author, which of course cannot be the case, the fact remains that from the start they are inescapably his creations. (Herdman, p. 13)

Therefore, it is with scepticism that Herdman acknowledges MacColla's words on the non-conscious control over his characters during the act of writing, evidencing the characters' independence from the author, as mentioned in *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*:

> The method I adopted was that of a novel of the dramatic type, in which the characters, representing the various elements involved in the reformation in Scotland, acted and reacted upon each other and so wove a pattern of events which ought to have described the course of the movement and, one hoped, displayed its nature. The danger of such a method is obvious; it is that the author will without realising it involve himself in the action, that he will conduct his characters through the action of the play instead of leaving them to work it out themselves... No such thing was the case with me, for while before I began I may have had some idea of the general direction in which the movement was likely to drift, *I had as it turned out no idea at all... at what I was to arrive.* (*CF*, p. 57)

Herdman disputes MacColla's alleged method by attacking it on two different fronts. Firstly, by advocating the critical stance that 'characters are not autonomous objects in the outer world... they are, on the contrary, necessarily products of their creator's subjectivity' (Herdman, p. 12); and, secondly, by challenging, once again, MacColla's proposition on the autonomy of his characters, with specific references to the dramatic dialogue "Ane Tryall of Heretics": 'The formal interactions of a trial scene, the formalised rhetoric of a sermon, obviate the need for the novelist to provide a wider context within which developed characters interact in accordance with the inner logic of their personalities' (Herdman, p. 11). And he concludes, unambiguously, by suggesting that 'in MacColla's case [the characters] remain to an unusual degree subject to his fully conscious control' (Herdman, p. 12).

In what follows, however, I intend to offer an alternative reading of MacColla's authorial presence and, more generally, of the relationship between his

fiction and the theoretical speculations represented through it. This kind of analysis, of course, would not be possible without Herdman's valuable and incisive criticism. There are, however, some contradictions in Herdman's arguments, one of the effects of which is to show that to merely identify the characters with their author's idea, or the philosophical speculations in MacColla's fiction with their author's position, does not affect the autonomy of the characters, nor of *their* ideas. According to Herdman, biographical circumstances would seem to be responsible for both MacColla's attempts at objectivity and his failure to sustain it. To this extent, Herdman would appear to have the biographical status of the author supporting one thing (the over-compensating tendency towards excessive objectivity) and then the other (the author's inability to sustain his objectivity because his creations are inevitably his). Herdman, it seems, has failed to fully recognise or, at the very least, to explain the paradox which he himself has identified as 'the conflict between "creative" and "speculative" elements of his talent'. Furthermore, Herdman is beginning from a position that refuses to entertain the possibility of the text as the host of multiple voices, preferring not to separate the author as person from his or her fictional creations. Later, we shall see how Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas put such assumptions firmly into doubt. Herdman, indeed, begins from a position where he is reluctant to entertain the prospect of the author as being capable of multiple modes of expression, as if to suggest that MacColla was so inflexible with his ideas that he was unable to change, revise, develop or reconsider them alongside those which they oppose. Again, there is a contradiction here, given that Herdman has drawn attention to at least one conflict of interests in MacColla, and a highly problematic one – namely, the creative versus the speculative. The suggestion is, then, that Herdman's

contradictions in themselves point towards the possibility of a dialogic – as we receive it through Bakhtin - rather than didactic, strain in the author himself which is translated through his fictions as part of *their* dialogic vitality. This dialogic vitality becomes the basis for MacColla's plots which explore the tensions which inform them. The objective / subjective or creative / speculative aporia does not diminish his fiction *as* fiction: it is what his fiction is made of. It is fiction, on one level, that explores the tensions underlying the historical ruptures that shape or unshape a nation, and fiction, on another, that explores the tensions regarding how to resolve and represent them.

The accusations of didacticism against MacColla presuppose the negative effect on fiction of any content other than the plot, so that any discursive or theoretical material, treated at length, is bound to distort the virtues of the novel as a medium for telling stories. Certainly, there is a danger that the inclusion of such material should be detrimental to the status of the novel as a means of entertainment or stimulation. But this is also as if to say that the inclusion of any theoretical subject matter is somehow at odds with the narrative aspect of the novel, whereas, conversely, I intend to suggest, it is the 'inclusion' or incorporation of such material that becomes, for MacColla, the basis from which his narrative takes form. We might say, then, that it is a mistake to think that these extremes (the creative and the speculative) cannot co-exist as aspects of the dialogic apparatus of narrative. The novelist's theoretical approach becomes itself an aspect of the dialogic vitality permeating the text. And, if MacColla's (the author's) voice does appear in the text, it becomes only one among the multitude of voices with which the text is invested.

This section, then, defines the concept of author, what is intended by identifying his/her position within a text and, finally, the implications of such an identification from a narrative point of view. With reference to MacColla, this alternative reading is an attempt to shift the focus of analysis from the critics' assumptions about MacColla's authorial bias to the perception of his authorial voice participating in the narrative discourse as only one among an ensemble of different voices. This analysis introduces the study of *Move Up, John*, *Facing the Muzhik* and *The Albannach* which we undertake in the next chapters. Underlying each novel are the profoundly dialogic dichotomies yea-saying/nay-saying, will/intellect, Catholicism/Protestantism, England/Scotland, which engender MacColla's philosophical output, as illustrated in the first section of this thesis. Far from being perceived simply as ontological contrasts, such dichotomies often inhabit one single consciousness, generating multi-faceted characters such as John Tod, in *Move Up, John*, Nikolay Parfenovitch, in *Facing the Muzhik*, Murdo Anderson, in *The Albannach*. What I intend to argue in the next chapters is that, following MacColla's approach to the study of history, it is precisely through the exploration of such individual contrasts, in relation to the other voices in the novel, that the represented historical event becomes fully discernible. It is important never to lose sight of the main principle which informs MacColla's fiction: the attempt to reconstruct history through imagination, even when this implies inserting theoretical material into the fictional discourse. MacColla's aim is to show through fiction the actuality of what occurred by allowing the formation of narrative to occur, objectively, through a process of 'post-factual empathy' which, in the context, purely, of fictional representation, we might refer to as an objective revelation technique, both in the

sense that it attempts to *reveal* the motivations underlying history and to *transcend* the material conditions that prevent their assimilation.

In *Move Up, John*, we focus on the theological and psychological confrontation between a reformed and a Catholic priest as the premise of the novel's dialogic quality. As I argue in the next chapter, the Catholic priest's voice, while prone to an identification with the author's voice, especially through the non-dialogic format of his sermons or expositions of Catholic doctrines, never falls into any form of monologism, but gives rise, throughout the novel, to a variety of responses from his closest being not-'I', the reformed priest: in this lies the dialogic quality of the novel which we set out to analyse.

In *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*, MacColla compares the causes and the effects of the Reformation in Scotland with those of Communism in Russia. Both perceived as profoundly disrupting events, in theological, social and also linguistic terms, at least as far as the Reformation is concerned, Communism and Protestantism share, in MacColla's view, a 'lie in the mind', a movement of negation of the being not-'I'. Behind the harsh critique of Communism, arising dialogically from a former revolutionary, *Facing the Muzhik*, MacColla's unpublished Scottish-Russian novel, focuses on the dynamics underlying the relationship between the individual and the community. Our intent is to show how the story of a Russian Catholic priest escaping to Scotland during Soviet Russia communicates not so much the author's belief in the truth of Catholicism, but rather the emphasis on the identification of the individual with the community he chooses to be part of as a *sine qua non* condition for the affirmation of nationalism. The thread which leads us to this particular reading of the novel ought to be identified with Dostoevsky's indirect presence in the

text. It is the subdued voice of the author which, through few sparse hints at the Russian writer's political and religious life, allows us to interpret the impact of religion in the novel not *per se*, but as a conduit leading towards, or away from, the shaping of a national identity.

The Albannach, MacColla's first novel, does not seem to present didactic elements; the narrative discourse is held together by a unitary point of view, the hero's consciousness. But before looking at the novel in detail, we should ask whether the solitary state of the hero's consciousness can in fact silence any potential dialogic approach by allowing the authorial voice to merge with the main character's without being confronted by other voices. In actual fact, that the hero's voice is a reflection of the author's - as MacColla declares in the Foreword to the 1971 edition of *The Albannach*: 'Murdo Anderson in the book [is] the protagonist of my own attitude in the complex context of human life'[10] - is not necessarily an indication of monologism. This becomes clear once we analyse Murdo's controversial relationship with the members of his community and we begin to perceive that his piercing satire is a desperate attempt to break through a monologic barrier built by the community itself against the linguistic or religious not-'I' which Murdo incarnates. To put it in simple terms, his is the struggle of the individual to establish dialogic contacts with a substantially nay-saying community and it is in this light that the revivalist ending should be interpreted.

To return to the present account of the theories underlying authorial boundaries in MacColla's fiction, we may claim, as briefly mentioned, that this analysis is strongly influenced by two of the most relevant aspects of Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of literary discourse: those concerning the presence of the author

in the text and the definition of 'other'. Such theories, however, are inextricably related to an understanding of the value of 'chronotope', as illustrated by Bakhtin in his essay 'Forms of Time and Chronotope in the novel'. The chronotope constitutes, as it were, the frame within which the author and his/her *other* takes shape. It is, as Bakhtin defines it, the intersection of time and space which allows the representation of the event in *narrative* or, more specifically:

> ...the chronotope makes narrative events concrete... An event can be communicated, it becomes information, one can give precise data on the place and time of its occurrence. But the event does not become a figure [*obraz*]. It is precisely the chronotope that provides the ground essential for the showing-forth, the representability of events. And this is so thanks precisely to the special increase in density and concreteness of time markers – the time of human life, of historical time – that occurs within well-delineated spatial areas'.[11]

For a more concrete example of the chronotope, we might turn to one of its most immediate applications – namely, the chronotope of the *road* and of the *encounter*:

> The road is a particularly good place for random encounters. On the road... the spatial and temporal paths of the most varied people – representatives of all social classes, estates, religions, nationalities, ages – intersect at one spatial and temporal point... On the road the spatial and the temporal series defining human fates and lives combine with one another in distinctive ways... The chronotope of the road is both a point of departures and a place for events to find their denouement. Time, as it were, fuses together with space and flows in it (forming the road). (Bakhtin, pp. 243-244)

Bakhtin's definition of the various chronotopes, such as the chronotope of the *court* and the *market-square*, and the chronotope of the *castle*, is essential in order to understand the authorial position in relation to the characters and the speculative elements in the novel. Chronotopes, therefore, have a substantial spatial nature inasmuch as 'they are the organizing centers for the fundamental narrative events of the novel' (Bakhtin, p. 250).

Before proceeding to position the author in a text, Bakhtin advances an immediate, yet fundamental, distinction between what occurs within the chronotope established in the narrative and the elements which lie outside it, warning us not to confuse 'the *represented* world with the world outside the text (naïve realism); nor… the author-creator of a work with the author as a human being (naïve biographism)' (Bakhtin, p. 253). The author as human being, Bakhtin claims, lives *'outside'* the work, whereas the author-creator is 'tangential' to the chronotopes he has created and so:

> …represents the world either from the point of view of the hero participating in the represented event, or from the point of view of a narrator, or from that of an assumed author or – finally – without utilizing any intermediary at all he can deliver the story directly from himself as the author pure and simple (in direct authorial discourse). But even in the last instance he had seen and observed them himself, *as if* he were an omnipresent witness to them… The represented world, however realistic and truthful, can never be chronotopically identical with the real world it represents, where the author and creator of the literary world is to be found. (Bakhtin, p. 256)

In view of this, the matter is no longer whether the characters in a novel mirror their creator's subjectivity and to what extent, but rather what their fate is after being created within the spatio-temporal configuration of the novel and what happens to them given that their signification cannot be saturated by the context of the novel, nor depend on any specific reading of it. By the same token, with specific reference to Herdman's criticism, it seems ineffective to retrace the biographical elements that led MacColla, as a human being, to creating a particular chronotope so as to have a recognisable role in the text, or, vice versa, to disappear behind the objectivity of philosophical speculations. Our objective, instead, is to present a critical study of MacColla's works which eliminates MacColla's biographical life, particularly his

conversion to Catholicism, as the sole interpretative key to the understanding of his fiction. Following Bakhtin's approach, then, it becomes possible (indeed, imperative) to discard any generative or causal analysis of MacColla's works with respect to his biography. This said, it should be pointed out that the study of the characters and of the internal narrative dynamics which emerge from any given chronotope in MacColla's novels will not prevent us from undertaking further observations on and establishing connections with MacColla's historical, political and metaphysical conceptions, which are, of course, part of the dialogism feeding into his narratives.[12]

The analysis of the characters' dynamics and the relationship between author and characters in MacColla's fiction also requires, within the scope of Bakhtin's theories, coming to terms with the Russian's postulations underlying the concept of *otherness* in the artistic creation. More specifically, as Tzvetan Todorov explains in his analysis of Bakhtin's philosophical anthropology, in order to establish the position of the author in relation to his character - the aesthetic *other* -

> Bakhtin asserts the necessity of distinguishing between two stages in *every* creative act: first, the stage of empathy or identification (the novelist puts himself in the place of his character), then a reverse movement whereby the novelist returns to his own position.[13]

What Bakhtin suggests is the development of a unique relationship between, to put it in MacCollian terms, the being 'I' of the author and the being not-'I' of the character that he/she has created. The most relevant aspect of such a relationship is that, after being shaped, the character's consciousness stands in a dialogic frame with the author:

> The author is profoundly *active*, but his action takes on a specific *dialogic* character... Dostoevsky frequently interrupts the other's voice but he does not cover it up, he never finishes it from the "self," that is from an alien consciousness (his own).[14]

Bakhtin widely investigates the potentialities of the *other* in Dostoevsky's novels for it is with the Russian writer that, in the critic's view, the position of the *other* emerges as an independent consciousness, but more importantly, it is through the heterogeneity which Dostoevsky establishes in his novels that the voice of the author becomes, at last, just *one* voice amongst many. According to Bakhtin, with Dostoevsky we have, for the first time in literature, 'a *plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights, each with its own world*, combining the unity of an event but nonetheless without fusing...'[15] Bakhtin's references to the *other* in Dostoevsky's novels are widely employed in the chapter on *Facing the Muzhik*, given the substantial presence in MacColla's novel of Dostoevsky's historical and religious interpretation of pre-revolutionary Russia, as expressed, mainly, in *The Possessed*. Our analysis of Dostoevsky's and MacColla's novels will revolve around the dialogic principle established by the Russian author with his characters, showing how such a principle lies at the core of MacColla's understanding of the *other* and, more widely, of his perception of nation as a 'plurality of consciousnesses'.

We conclude this introduction with a provocation raised by Foucault in his essay "What is an Author?" concerning precisely the paternity of the authorial voice within a given discourse. Interestingly, Michel Foucault's narrative theories on discourse seem to suggest interesting similarities with a Bakhtinian reading regarding the position and the function of the author within a text. Foucault intimates an absorption of the subject within the mobile coordinates of the narrative discourse, where a plurality of forces interact in the creation of fiction:

> I realize that in undertaking the internal and architectonic analysis of a
> work (be it a literary text, philosophical system, or scientific work), in

setting aside biographical and psychological references, one has already called back into question the absolute character and founding role of the subject. Still, perhaps one must return to this question, not in order to re-establish the theme of an originating subject, but to grasp the subject's points of insertion, modes of functioning, and system of dependencies [...] these questions will be raised: "How, under what conditions and in what forms can something like a subject appear in the order of discourse? What place can it occupy in each type of discourse, what functions can it assume, and by obeying what rules?" In short, it is a matter of depriving the subject (or its substitute) of its role of originator, and of analyzing the subject as a variable and complex function of discourse.[16]

Indeed, the difference between Bakhtin's and Foucault's analyses lies in the question of authorial identity: Bakhtin views the author as still, and necessarily, the basis of the unity of writing; on the other hand, Foucault advocates a dispersion of the author, and, mostly, of its originating stance within the textual discourse. What, instead, brings the two critics together is the insistence on a heterogeneity of voices within a text. Foucault takes the concept of multitude of voices to the extreme by relieving each voice of its paternity. His provocation reveals his hopes in an imminent disappearance of the author and a new interpretation of discourse:

All discourses, whatever their status, form, value, and whatever treatment to which they will be subjected, would then develop in the anonymity of a murmur. We would no longer hear the questions that have been rehearsed for so long: "Who really spoke? Is it really he and not someone else? With what authenticity or originality? And what part of his deepest self did he express in his discourse?" Instead, there would be other questions, like these: "What are the modes of existence of this discourse? Where has it been used, how can it circulate, and who can appropriate it for himself? What are the places in it where there is room for possible subjects? Who can assume these various subject-functions?" And behind all these questions, we would hear hardly anything but the stirring indifference: "What difference does it make who is speaking?"[17]

Indeed, any literal application of Foucault's provocation to MacColla's fictional discourse would appear nothing but a contrived critical attempt at eliminating a well-defined and resounding voice. After all, MacColla's fiction still responds to most of

the canonical criteria established by modern literary criticism, whereby

> the author provides the basis for explaining not only the presence of certain events in a work, but also their transformations, distortions, and diverse modifications (through his biography, the determination of his individual perspective, the analysis of his social position, and the revelation of his basic design). The author is also the principle of a certain unity of writing.[18]

However, we could also assume, that if we were to fully embrace, rather anachronistically, Foucault's suggestion, MacColla, probably, would not have to go a great length to justify apparent Catholic tendencies in his fiction and would be relieved in not having to disclaim his cumbersome intrusions in the life of 'his' characters. More realistically, even if not acknowledging the author's full disappearance, our task is to establish whether it is possible, at least, to recognise his voice simply as one amongst others within a dialogical fictional format.

To conclude, in this introduction we have analysed how Herdman proposes a creative process where the author is the source of everything he or she creates: this way the text belongs entirely to the author and inevitably represents his states of mind merely as a consequence of his choosing to write. For Bakhtin something of the opposite is true, where the author as person becomes immediately distanced from the author as writer: the process of writing is one where the text is inevitably invested with a multitude of voices passing through the author, of which the author's voice is only one among many. In the following chapters on MacColla's novels, we will illustrate, following Bakhtin's argument, that the 'plots' are bound to be unorthodox, not motivated or controlled by a series of 'traditional narrative' conventions – using Herdman's terminology. They are, rather, the amalgamations of incompatible theoretical fields, dramatised within the context of character and scene, consisting of

creative and speculative associations that do not impair but determine his narratives.

Putting it another way, they are classic examples of the formation within the novel of

a chronotopical order which, according to Bakhtin, characterises its function.

Notes

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[1] As far as the publishing aspect is concerned, we should point out that *The Albannach* does not share the same fate as MacColla's later novels given that its publication follows soon after its completion, due to Hugh MacDiarmid's help. For further details, see chapter 7.

[2] Letter in the National Library of Scotland, Deposit 239, Box 2.

[3] Edwin Muir, NLS, 239/1a.

[4] MacColla, *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*, p. 58. Further references in the text.

[5] MacColla, 'Mein Bumpf', *Essays on Fionn MacColla* (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1973), p. 28.

[6] MacColla, NLS, 239/8.

[7] John Herdman, 'Introduction' to *Move Up, John* by Fionn MacColla (Edinburgh: Canongate Press; 1994), p. 11.

[8] John Herdman, 'Fionn MacColla: Art and Ideas', *Cencrastus*, no. 13, Summer 1983, p. 13. Further references in the text.

[9] As far as influential literary trends are concerned, we have an immediate referent in the "literary manifesto" of Aldous Huxley, whose writings undoubtedly exerted a significant influence upon MacColla (see, for example, *Too Long in this Condition*, p. 18). Huxley's aim as a novelist was 'to arrive, technically, at a perfect fusion of the novel and the essay', 'arguing', as David Bradshaw points out in his introduction to *Brave New World*, 'that the novel should be like a holdall, bursting with opinion and arresting ideas' (Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, London: Flamingo, 1994). In this respect, it is plausible that MacColla, when he first set out to write *Move Up, John*, in 1941, was essentially motivated by a commitment to the instructive potentialities of fiction and by a will to actualise such potentialities 'within' the context of fiction, both from a technical and a thematic point of view.

[10] MacColla, *The Albannach* (London: Souvenir Press, 1971), p. IV.

[11] Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel' in *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1986), p. 250. Further references in the text.

[12] In referring to Bakhtin's chronotope and dialogic stance we should acknowledge the essay 'Scottish Narrative since 1979: Monologism and the Contradictions of a Stateless Nation' by Donald Wesling in *Scotlands* 4 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997). Wesling carries out an analysis of Scottish fiction since 1979 challenging Bakhtin's own perception of the dialogue-monologue dyad: 'I [...] inquire whether Mikhail Bakhtin definition of the novel [...] as the supreme *dialogic* speech genre might need to be revised, on the showing of these Scottish examples of a positive, artistic monologism in fiction' (p. 22). Wesling's argument includes a compelling analysis of Alasdair Gray's *1982 Janine* and Irvine Welsh's *Marabou Stork Nightmares* as epitomes of the monologic novel narrated in the first person. A narration which reveals 'a capacious and contradictory single narrator, usually unreliable, whose moments of crisis, or nightmare is the tale', and an image of Scotland as a post failed Devolution stateless country which is 'the most negative possible'. Personally and nationally, then, monologism is 'the mark of an incompleteness [...] a feint toward a higher dialogism'. Wesling introduces also the phrase, coined by Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, 'Congealed Event' to refer to Bakhtin's chronotope and applies it to post-1979 Scotland: the 'Scottish Chronotope of Failed Devolution'. His essay is an attempt to establish an interdependence between Scotland's chronotope as it appears after 1979 and the monologic form of most contemporary Scottish fiction, without neglecting that 'particular *clash* of inner and outer speech [that] organises the novels and even organises its Scottishness'. Our analysis, however, is only tangentially related to Wesling's considerations, in as much as it deals with Bakhtin's chronotope and the problems related narrative points of view. But the Scottish chronotope MacColla refers to is a pre-1979 one and has therefore

different spatio-temporal coordinates; by the same token, his fiction discloses a speculative potential of which, say, Gray's and Welsh's fiction is necessarily devoid.

[13] Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: the dialogic principle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 99.

[14] Ibid., p. 106.

[15] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, quoted in Todorov, p. 104.

[16] Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in *Textual Strategies – Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, ed. by Josué V. Harari (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1980), p. 158.

[17] Ibid., p. 160.

[18] Ibid., p. 151.

Chapter five

Narrative Confrontations: *Move Up, John*

I

In 1941 MacColla began writing a novel, set in the 16th century, explaining the impact of the newly introduced reform doctrines in Scotland. The novel revolves around the conversion of a Catholic priest to Protestantism and underlines the psychological dynamics that such a personal transformation involves. *Move Up, John* was finished by 1946 but was published in its entirety only in 1994, almost twenty years after the death of its author. As shown below, the novel's troubled history and partial publications tested MacColla's capacity to re-elaborate his own material, whilst revealing its dialogic potential, its theoretical weight or simply its compulsive narrative effectiveness. I am referring, specifically, to the insertion of parts of *Move Up, John* in the long essay *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* which occurred mainly as a consequence of MacColla's disputes with publishers. The novel consists of six chapters: 'Two Priests', 'Scottish Noël', 'Ane Tryall of Heretiks', 'At the Gallows', 'The Douncome' and 'At the Sign of the Clenched Fist'. Of these chapters only 'Ane Tryall of Heretiks' was included in whole in the essay *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*, while 'The Douncome' and 'At the Sign of the Clenched Fist' appeared in a reduced form; 'Two Priests', 'At the Gallows' and 'Scottish Noël' were not included in *Clenched Fist*, although the latter had been published separately in 1958.[1]

As a consequence of the problems related to its publication, *Move Up, John* developed within itself independent units interacting flexibly with one another, so that the final and unabridged version, as we have it now, results in only one of the

possible combinations among its parts. Although the thread that keeps them together is the well-delineated conversion of John Tod, the philosophical and theological significance of the different sections renders them self-sustainable.[2] Inversely, it is precisely the philosophical content, which transcends its otherwise fractured plot, that brings John Herdman to acknowledge that 'while the novel may not achieve a fully realised dramatic unity... nonetheless its largeness of conception, the power and mastery of the language, its psychological penetration and its intellectual authority and coherence give it a kind of fractured greatness which is worth a hundred small successes' (Introduction to *MUJ*, p. 11).

In approaching the present analysis of *Move Up, John* we attempt to answer a few questions related to the Bakhtinian premise expounded in the introductory section. In particular, what are the effects of the temporal convulsions described in relation to the overriding aspects, that is John Tod's conversion and his relationship with his closest being not-'I', Uisdean MacUalraig? As far as the temporal element is concerned, is it possible to establish a correspondence between Tod's biographical adventure and the historical time in the novel by interconnecting the themes at stake: will/intellect, reason/desire, Catholicism/Protestantism, England/Scotland, themes which embrace both the personal and the historical sphere? Finally, to what extent do MacUalraig's monologues hamper the dialogic nature of the novel, and can they be identified with the so-called authorial interventions in the text?

Our investigation of *Move Up, John*, in its fragmented status, will begin with its most substantial and significant part, 'Ane Tryall of Heretics', appearing both in the novel and in *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*. With reference to the latter, we will focus, more specifically, on how the dialogue (and other chapters) transforms the

essay into a polysemantic discourse and subverts, to a certain extent, its dynamics and perspective as a non-fictional work. MacColla can be seen to alternate his roles as a historian, essayist, playwright and novelist, raising questions of his function as author and originator, and on the extremely variable spatial and temporal elements which regulate his work.

It should be added that *Move Up, John* and *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* are inextricably related not only because the essay hosts portions of the novel, but also because the essay includes valuable theorisations of the issues of narrative, structure and fictional representation which lead towards a fuller understanding of the novel itself. In parts one and two of *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*, for instance, MacColla illustrates his understanding of history, as discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, with specific references to Scotland and the Reformation. His perception of the latter, we recall, is founded on a psychological approach which isolates the historical event, as it were, outside of time, in order to retrace what are its most recondite originating causes. As explained elsewhere in this thesis, MacColla's concept of post-factual empathy - a mode of consciousness which reaches beyond historical factual knowledge and is expressed through the fictional format - emerges as his most effective approach to the understanding and the representation of history. Hence his dissatisfaction with certain so-called 'historical approaches' and his determination to face the subject using a novel

> as a method of enquiry, not... a novel written to a thesis, that is designed of set purpose to illustrate and lead up to conclusions consciously present in the author's mind before he began to write the book... If I am right in my conclusions where I found myself was not particularly in the sixteenth century at all, or in any particular century, or any particular country, but right in the homeland of basic human motivation in all times, among

basic human motivations of any time or any place *right where they reside*. (*CF*, pp. 57-58)

In chapter IV and in the Foreword included in chapter V, before the actual dialogue begins, MacColla provides the reader with a precious insight into the strategies employed in the creation of the drama - a sort of 'behind the scenes' account of the creative and speculative processes at work in the production of 'Ane Tryall'. Additionally, the Foreword can be read as a reply to almost two decades of criticism raised against MacColla for his supposedly overwhelming presence in the text; or, more malignantly, as an exploitation of its non-fictional space in order to justify, through a historical reconstruction and paraphrastic devices, his bias towards Catholicism or his excessive intrusiveness on the lives of his characters. In fact, it is these moments of exposure, where MacColla reveals his narrative approach and retraces the historical event which inspired the novel, which allow us insight into his historiographic techniques.

In his attempt to grasp the causes which led to the establishment of the Reformation in Scotland, MacColla acknowledged the relevance of the protestant doctrines and, consequently, the necessity of having them explicitly stated in the text, so much so that 'a footnote, or even an appendix, would not have sufficed – for the simple reason that no-one as a rule bothers to read them' (*CF*, p. 72). The problem he had to face and overcome, then, revolved around the format and mode of inserting these doctrines within the body of a fictional text:

> What was obviously necessary, therefore, was to devise a means of stating the doctrines *as a part of the action of the book*, so that a reader would be unable to avoid acquiring a clear grasp of them while at the same time the action would not only not be held up, but even, if it could be contrived, advanced. Accordingly in the end I adopted the device of presenting a contemporary trial for heresy, which would allow the formal

statement of the new doctrines, which could be given in the actual words of Luther and Calvin, set over against the Catholic doctrines that stood in refutation of them. (*CF*, p. 72)

Under MacColla's method, the confrontation between Protestant and Catholic positions in a dramatised context, with particular attention to the issues of predestination and justification, transforms the actual doctrines into interpretative acts and the fixity of the 'Word' into a textual dispute. The combination of religious doctrines and dialogue intensifies the latter's dramatic impact, while it dilutes the doctrines' dogmatic potential. Most importantly, the dramatic format mitigates the potentially hampering effects of the doctrinal material on the assertion and preservation of the chronotope during the trial.

The conflict between the new doctrines, expounded by the heretics Alexander Cock and Robert Coltart, and the Catholic doctrines, of which the Bishop and the anti-Reforming priest Ninian Kennedy[3] are the representatives, gives rise to a dispute principally revolving around the question of hermeneutics whereby the Catholic hermeneutical tradition, enriched by the scriptural interpretations of the Fathers and the Scholastics, is challenged by an emergent form of protestant exegesis.[4]

Therefore, the role of Uisdean MacUalraig, as the deputed theologian, is to affirm the Word, not so much through the reading of the Scriptures (by now dangerously prone to contrasting interpretations), but through the innumerable and canonically established works of the Fathers. When challenged by Alexander Cock on the controversial issue of predestination – a challenge which culminates in the sentence 'Therefore he hath mercy on WHOM he WILL, and WHOM he WILL he HARDENETH!' (*CF*, p. 82) - MacUalraig admits that

some passages of the Scriptures would seem to imply that God withdraws His grace from them that are obdurate, nay, that He himself hardeneth their heart in punishment of sin... But it would be wrang to assume that this denotes ane positive action on the part of God... The faut in ilk' instance lies with the sinner, wha obstinately resists the call of grace. The Fathers speak of God's way of dealing with obdurate sinners in a manner whilk clearly shows their belief that He never entirely withdraws his mercy. (*CF*, pp. 82-83)

And it is precisely the Fathers and the hermeneutical weight of their writings within the established Church that the heretics fiercely oppose, as cogently exemplified in the following:

...And abune aa I will hear nae mair of your Fathers, nay, nor your mothers, nor yet your sons and dochters! I will not admit even the angels of God that they suld judge my doctrine! But I will hae the Scriptures, and I will hae the Word of God, and *That* I will hae, and by that alane will I be judged!
The friar cried again ... '*Consentio!*' (*CF*, p. 87)

Among the instructions provided by MacColla in the chapters immediately preceding and following 'Ane Tryall of Heretiks', as it appears in *Clenched Fist*, the writer focuses on the Bishop's reaction to the insistence with which the heretics defend their doctrines:

As to the puzzlement of the clerics of the time at the persistence of their doctrines after their untenability had been shown, it will, I hope, be noted how, towards the end, the Bishop begins to have an inkling of what I consider the true or basic fact - that the heretical doctrines proclaimed were an epiphenomenon or rationalisation in terms of theological formulations masking... an unconscious personality-situation of a definable type in the persons concerned. (*CF*, pp. 74-75)

The dialogue shapes around a psychologically driven reading of the Reformation and this is rendered through a piercing exchange between Cock and the Bishop, evidencing, respectively, a radical personalisation of the Scripture, as understood by the heretics, against an affirmation of the authority of the Kirk, as promulgator of established and irrefutable norms.

In the conclusive part of the text, when dealing with the crucial issue of interpretation, the baker poses the following question to those who are accusing him of heresy: 'And I will ask you, where gat *ye* the spirit of interpretation that ye suld declare unto *me* the interpretation of Haly Writ?' (*CF*, p. 91). In the Bishop's immediate reply and further remarks we perceive the emergence in the drama of the essential distinction between the nature and use of the will and the intellect which stands at the core of MacColla's entire non-fictional thought:

> *We* interpret Scripture by nane inward and private, and therefore uncertain illumination; but openly, by the light of Reason, and conform to the harmony of doctrine in its divers parts, and under the authority of the Kirk. (And, mark you, Cock, the Kirk has the richt to interpret Scripture, for it is the Kirk that guarantees the authority of Scripture, which indeed was first written in proof and witness of the doctrines of the Kirk.) But ye, Cock, in despite of Reason, wad mak the Scriptures witness till their ain authority – Nothing, nor no man, Cock, can witness till his ain authority; but all authority, save only God, is witness till from without and from above. (*CF*, pp. 91-92)

The Bishop's explanation, however, generates Cock's fiery, and yet apparently inexplicable, rejection of Reason: 'Speak ye to me of Reason! What, i' faith, is Reason?... "Reason is a whure! Reason is the Devil's greatest whure" (Luther) Does the Reason gie licht? Aye, verily, like the licht dung would gie forth were it putten in a lanthorn!' (*CF*, p. 92). Cock's (and Luther's) categorical renunciation of the use of reason, as colourfully illustrated in the dialogue, meets MacColla's fictional purpose to gradually shift the argument from a theological, or exegetic level, to a subjective one. This finds a textual reference in the Bishop's last remarks before his condemnation of the heretics:

> I perceive it is not pure doctrine that ye crave, and for the sake of pure doctrine – ye hae deceived us there, and wad deceive others, making a profession – but what you seek is something other, something that you hope to gain *by means of fause doctrine*. If sae, we but waste wind upon

ye, for your heresy lies not within the mind, but abides in some distemper
of your will, in your desires and your affections. (*CF*, p. 94)

What is hinted by the Bishop above is clarified by MacColla in chapter VI with reference to the secular nature of the causes underlying the heretics' doctrines. According to MacColla, the discourse upon which 'Ane Tryall' is based is a theological one merely because the 16th century 'was a theologically preoccupied century' (*CF*, p. 99). It follows that the motives which have brought the heretics to expose themselves as the enemies of Christendom have to be sought away from religion, in the non-mystical desire of the being – 'I'. Likewise, the Scripture is nothing more than a textual refuge where the heretics can project, and imbue with religiosity, their otherwise non-religious rejection of the being not-'I': 'the Reformation doctrines were not found in the Scripture at all', claims MacColla, 'except insofar as they were put there by those who "found" them. […] The *real* cause of the Reformers' heresy was not to be looked for in errors of judgment on doctrine or in the intellect at all, but in a deviation of the *will*' (*CF*, p. 99).

Having said this, it is, stylistically speaking, undeniable that it is the feisty and flaming rhetoric of the heretics which sustains the pace of the dispute and prevents the weight of the Catholic doctrines from crushing the dialogic aspect of the chronotope. It can be claimed, therefore, that the time of the trial is regulated according to the refutations launched by the heretics against their accusers. The trial, in other words, becomes a dispute over the definition of the temporal dimension. One the one hand, the heretics, animated by the novelty of their doctrines and the desire to enforce them, accelerate the tempo of the confrontation through brief, but piercing interventions. On the other, the Catholics seem to be preoccupied with the

preservation of their established doctrinal tradition and their static and, up until then, irremovable power. Thus the chronotope, containing the dialogic impulse, is enlivened by this polysemic conflict of interests, rather than nullified by the author's excessive presence.

'Ane Tryall of Heretiks' bears only a feeble connection, contained in the description of the Bishop, with the previous chapter, Scottish Noël: '...the Bishop's large face in the centre, still pallid from the wounds received in a recent English invasion, appeared even more sickly because of the tinge thrown over it by his purple cassock and birettum' (*MUJ*, p. 97). The choice of the indefinite article 'a', rather than the definite 'the', to describe the battle evidences the narrator's intention to maintain the drama as independent from, and yet connected to, the rest of the narration as possible. This is reiterated with the introduction of Uisdean MacUalraig in the drama. His presence in the dialogue is functional to the fulfilment of the dispute, while the focus on his being - 'I' in relation to Tod's, which is central to the plot of the novel, is here abandoned in favour of his more formal and abstract role as a theologian presiding over the trial. However, while the drama establishes a sub-narrative, only loosely inscribable in the wider plot, it nevertheless insinuates an alternation of pauses and temporal advancements consonant with the rest of the novel. The trial, in this respect, is consistent with the whole of *Move Up, John*, where moments of dilated meditation or long sermons, often coinciding with the exposition of Catholic doctrines, are systematically broken into by the impetuosity of protestant 'incursions'.

It is interesting how MacColla's 'didactic' or theoretical themes appear to become bound up with and separated into the spatial and temporal aspects of the

chronotope respectively. Therefore Protestantism becomes synonymous with time, and sudden advances in the plot; while Catholicism symbolizes the space of transcendental meditations. In the previous chapter, I underlined the importance of Bakhtin's theory in relation to MacColla inasmuch as both were trying to formulate structures that combined history with narrative forms. Following Bakhtin, then, the numerous intersections of Protestantism with Catholicism, as illustrated below, come to represent the chronotope of the novel itself. It can hardly be said that, in relation strictly to Bakhtin's theories, these associations were implemented deliberately by MacColla. But if it was done unconsciously then this unconscious correspondence with the logic of the chronotope is evidence or an indication of the multifarious expressions which are independent of the author as a human being (consciously erupting with one-dimensional biases and opinions) and must be seen to pertain to the author-creator who acts as a conduit for many voices, passing through him in ways, as MacColla suggests in *Clenched Fist*, which go beyond his conscious control: '*I had as it turned out no idea at all… at what I was to arrive*' (*CF*, p. 57).

When we look at the other chapters of the novel, we discover that the Protestant attacks against the Catholic world occur in the text by means of sudden exclamatory sentences indicating a dramatic change of tempo and disruptive fluctuations in the course of the narrative.

In chapter one, it is the news of the killing of Cardinal Beaton[5] that marks the precipitous decay of the Catholics in Scotland, as it is prophetically expressed in Tod's frightful reply: '*The douncome!*' (*MUJ*, p. 21) and in the words of Uisdean MacUalraig:

'The Cardinal!' he whispered... *'The Cardinal!'*... 'It's the traitors, John! Lippen on it, it's Henry's tools! It's the heretics! They ha' finished the Cardinal. I wonder... what mair than the Cardinal hae they finished?... An the traitors have their will now... I trow it will be *finis Scotiae*!' (*MUJ*, p. 21)

The introduction of sudden temporal progressions (perhaps of progressive historical advancement, like that of England) would appear also to evince the decay of Scotland, implicitly establishing a correspondence between the Catholics' and the country's decay. As Tod himself acknowledges, 'The Cardinal was the prop of all. One moveless point in a shifting world, of legendary fixity' (*MUJ*, p. 23). Indeed, both MacUalraig's and Tod's exclamations give way to a profoundly upsetting moral and social uncertainty which in a near future would be identifiable, in MacColla's view, with the protestant erosion of Catholicism as the basis for Scotland's collapse as a nation.

Colin Kidd's thesis, expressed in *British Identities before Nationalism*, seems to reinforce, although more cautiously, MacColla's position:

> [...] the Reformation directed Scots towards a British rather than an ethnocentric identity. The fact that the English Reformation had taken place some thirty years before Scotland's break with Rome encouraged Scottish Reformers to address the idea of Britain. The influence of the English Bible in Scotland reinforced this tendency, as did the Union of the Crowns (1603) which stimulated a Scoto-British strain of apocalyptic discourse.[6]

Rather consistently, in 'Scottish Noël', the moment which defines the imminent battle between the English and the Scots, the only epic scene in the whole of MacColla's fiction, is rendered through a sudden change of sounds, which MacUalraig first perceives through his senses, and then translates into language through a desperate cry towards John Tod. The invasive intrusion of the English,

then, ought to be understood as the military expression of the dramatic temporal thrust of Protestantism:

> The tall priest hung a moment longer looking where there was a curious effect to westwards – the world snow-white clad, appearing insubstantial, floating, while all solidity had passed into the heavy, leaden sky... While he was admiring this rarity he began to think he detected, whether in his ears or as if down by his feet, a tiny, drumming sound... At once it was unmistakable, and was growing more distinct. Rising, it seemed to swim about him – a continuous drumming sound, regular, though seeming to contain irregularities... 'Up, up, John! No time for prayers!... *The English are ower the border!*' (*MUJ*, pp. 37-40)

The cause underlying Tod's reticence in taking part in the battle, in spite of MacUalraig's exhortations, is here retraced by evoking Tod's first accidental encounter with a man-at-arms and, through him, his first ever perception of the interdependence between being 'I' and being not-'I'. To put it in Bakhtinian terms, we can suggest that Tod's acknowledgement of the being not-'I' represents the beginning of a process of awareness of the *other*, as intended in Todorov's reading of Bakhtin. Alongside such an awareness, Tod opposes a barrier at the level of the will, acting as a rejection of the being not-'I'. The contrast between acceptance and refusal of the not- 'I' gives rise to the primary source of dialogism in the novel, that which takes place within Tod's consciousness and which will exhaust itself only after the final confrontation between him and MacUalraig:

> The shock of his first encounter with the not-'he' had penetrated to the quick of his being, awakening him, in an instant blindingly bright, devastating as a thunderbolt, to a new waste state within, a new 'he' that was always to be 'he', that he was always to know thereafter as himself, and whose sour, astringent taste he felt at such a moment as the present was the only flavour ever yielded to him by his self-awareness. (*MUJ*, p. 46)

Such introspective instances, which emerge from the narrative and which reveal fragments of Tod's will, define Tod's biographical time on a different scale to the

time of the novel and envelop it in an aura of simultaneity, the same described in relation to MacRury's flashes of vision in the first chapter of this thesis. This occurs again in 'At the Gallows', the chapter following the trial, where the entire narrative is filtered through the eyes of John Tod.

'At the Gallows' opens with the priest running towards the market-place to attend the hanging of Cock and Coltart. Here, it is not the Catholic element which is broken into, but Tod's most recondite thoughts about the imminent event. The climax of his turbulent walk is at the market-place, where, in an instant of interiorising the being–not 'I', Tod undergoes a process of complete identification with external reality:

> The buildings around were suddenly shaken in the beatings of his heart. His soul had come to his eyes and looked upon the market-place – *and the market-place looked into his soul…* All at once it was another than Cock that was climbing the ladder to the scaffold … more striking-looking than Cock, with flaming hair, and of greater unction. Without surprise he saw it was himself. (*MUJ*, p. 135)

Tod's life-long torpor is awakened by voices in the crowd announcing Lord Pitfourie's arrival and the subsequent liberation of the heretics: 'Screams and frantic shouting from the merchant's windows, and from here and there throughout the crowd, of thc drcadcd name – 'Pitfourie!' – set off the panic surging away and scattering' (*MUJ*, p. 136). Arguably, this turbulent instant marks a significant turning point in the novel. As MacColla, the essay-writer, recounts in *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*:

> He [Tod] came away shaken by an appalling inward tumult – *because knowing somehow deep-inwardly that he had seen himself.* Obviously there remained for him but to encounter the doctrines which justified such a movement of the spirit as theirs and his, and whose 'truth' he would in consequence immediately perceive, so that he also might

become a stander above the mighty and the multitude and his voice too –
and even more than Cock's – might fill the land. (*CF*, p. 101)

In what appears only as an incidental chapter to the plot, it is possible to grasp the

two fundamental elements which define Tod's awakening and the resurgence of his

being 'I'; these elements are the crowd (to which the chronotope of the market-place

is inextricably related) and the temporal modality within which the epiphany occurs.

Retracing some of the most influential aspects of Dostoevsky's poetics on

MacColla's fiction, as mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis – that is, the

psychological insight in the being 'I' in the attempt to understand the subject both

'historically' and in its relationship with the *other* - it appears relevant to introduce

Bakhtin's observations on the Russian writer's most common forms of chronotope

and then compare them with the ones appearing in 'At the Gallows':

> In Dostoevsky... the chronotopes of the street and the square... are the
> main places of action in his works, places where crisis events occur, the
> falls, resurrections, renewals, epiphanies, decisions that determine the
> whole life of a man. In this chronotope, time is essentially instantaneous;
> it is as if it has no duration and falls out of the normal course of
> biographical time.[7]

It can be suggested that nowhere else in *Move Up, John* is the concept of the

chronotope, as intended by Bakhtin, more transparent and efficaciously portrayed

than in this brief, but significant chapter. It is the conjuncture of space (the square)

and time (expressed in its most essential manifestation through the adverb 'all at

once') that generates the crisis and then the resurrection underlying Tod's conversion

from Catholicism to Protestantism. Just as suggested by Bakhtin, the simultaneity

with which such a transformation occurs isolates the temporal element from

historical or even biological time; time, therefore, ceases, and it is only when Tod's

'heart began to throb again' (*MUJ*, p. 136), that the temporal coordinates of the plot

reappear with the friar and the baker seen mounting horses and disappearing into the crowd.

In 'The Douncome', Pitfourie appears again: this time his incursion cannot but be read as a literal storming into and subversion of the Catholic world, in that his attack occurs in a Catholic church during Uisdean MacUalraig's mass. From a narratorial point of view, the Protestant incursion appears essential for the reinstatement of the temporal element which had been annihilated by the monologism and the abstractness of MacUalraig's sermon while he is celebrating mass. But if we read Pitfourie's incursion historically we recognise the author-creator's conscious employment of the time-space correlation of themes to portray the threat of 'progressive' history, embodied in the uncontrollable impetus of the Protestant charge, against the timeless exuberance of the Catholic epiphanic time.

Pitfourie's attack, this time, is even more significant as it is accompanied by the appearance of John Tod, who has now *consciously* embraced the reformed doctrines. Once again, this is rendered through an instant of temporal suspension, during which MacUalraig's and Tod's exchanged glances and MacUalraig's rhetorical plea are crystallised in a poignant image:

> 'John!' he [MacUalraig] cried, striving to take in what had already penetrated to the deep region of his mind – though like a lightning-flash that at first confused and blinded him – the paleness of John Tod's face he realised was not from fright but *anger*... anger against *him* – 'John!... Tell me soothfastlie! – have you joined yoursel to the heretics?'
> For answer John Tod brandished his fist. (*M UJ*, p. 162)

Tod's clenched fist is the first image symbolising the acquired awareness of his conversion, a translation to the intellect of the impulses that, up until that moment, had inhabited only the realm of the will.

In *Move Up, John*'s last chapter, 'At the Sign of the Clenched Fist', the establishment of a new world order - a Reformed one - is epitomised by an image of Protestant 'self-apotheosis'. Pitfourie has declared himself Lord Provost of the town, and John Tod is now free to profess his doctrines. It is precisely this freshly acquired sense of security and righteousness, in which Tod is enveloped, that is upset by an unexpected visit. Here, it is the Catholic side which breaks, fatally, into the newly established Protestant 'realm', when Uisdean MacUalraig, by now a 'disreputable and outcast figure' (*MUJ*, p. 213), appears unexpectedly at Tod's new house, formerly the Bishop's.

Throughout the main body of the chapter, we are presented with MacUalraig's alarming predictions on the impact, on the social and national sphere, of the new doctrines in the shape of another long sermon. John Herdman, writing about MacUalraig's last intervention in the text – the priest is bizarrely killed by a bull after being set free by his captor, a former Catholic man-at-arms now at the service of Pitfourie – underlines how the absence of a trial scene, like that in 'Ane Tryall of Heretiks', 'makes the final confrontation on balance less impressive'.[8] Herdman is referring to the almost entirely monologic nature of MacUalraig's long interventions, which are interrupted only occasionally by Tod's rare and broken replies. However, it can be suggested that, although the dialectical nature of the confrontation is partially impeded, the strength and ineluctability of Tod's conversion, expressed through his reticence, but also through his newly acquired sense of liberation, are decisive in controlling the dynamics of the encounter.

MacColla, in other words, establishes a correspondence between the priests' relationship and their narratorial position in the chapter. While MacUalraig

dominates the narrative of 'At the Sign of the Clenched Fist', occupying most of its space on the page, it is Tod that allows the chronotopic aspect of the tale to be sustained and taken to a conclusive stage. The strength of his conversion, then, becomes mostly manifest in his resistance to the obliteration of the temporal and spatial aspects pertaining to MacUalraig's transcendental speculations, and, more generally, to the Catholic 'legendary fixity' that the Cardinal's death had finally interrupted. This occurs through a balanced alternation of silences and interventions, the latter principally aimed at continuing the conversation for a specific narratorial purpose, as the narrator reveals in what follows:

> It all seemed brittle and of no consequence, to John Tod, and from a man of no account – logic out of a heap of rags. He had by now quite recaptured the assurance that of the two it was he that was at home.
>   Moreover, he knew something, had remembered something... His object now was to keep him there talking. (*MUJ*, p.186)

Undoubtedly, it is not Tod's intention to become engaged in any arguments requiring a redefinition of his newly established theological stance, as he consciously acknowledges after MacUalraig's death: 'No disputation could there be henceforward but that he could lead in, no argument but on ground that was his own' (*MUJ*, pp. 217-219); but, it should be noted that Tod also refuses to follow the delineation and the approach of MacUalraig's arguments on the grounds that it would necessarily entail a momentary abandonment of the temporal and spatial coordinates of the narrative scene. On the contrary, his most urgent preoccupation is to prolong their conversation until the arrival of the man who would guard MacUalraig. It is the soldier's entrance that suddenly and definitively interrupts MacUalraig's sermon, exposing the devious intentions underlying Tod's silences:

But John Tod thought he heard at last what he had been listening for, and abruptly withdrew his attention. Behind the door on the opposite side of the hearth from that by which the visitant had entered, there had been a sound. Now a sound of movement came again, with a dry clatter. He leapt out of his chair and rushed to the door, throwing it wide... There was a sound of someone approaching. John Tod, suddenly red to the eyes, pointed a violent finger, shaking in emphasis, at the figure sitting in the room... 'Guard him with your life!' (*MUJ*, pp. 206-207)

As anticipated earlier, the entrance of the soldier marks the end of the last encounter between Tod and MacUalraig and, consequently, Tod's fully achieved awareness of his conversion to Protestantism.

Through his conversion Tod appears to have gained not only a fuller understanding and freedom of affirmation of his spiritual being 'I', but also a new awareness of the supremacy of his physical presence over MacUalraig's. This latter aspect is emphasised in the juxtaposition between Tod's almost palpable and mobile posture on the Bishop's former arm-chair and the spectral 'apparition' standing before him:

> Keeping his eye on him John Tod put his hand down on the arm of the chair and lowered himself into it. Sitting, he looked over the extraordinary apparition sitting opposite, with a kind of incredulity, up and down. At the countryman's worn and ill-patched clothes caked with mud here and there as high as the shoulders, at the feet, bluish and wet-looking where they protruded through the burst footgear. Some yellow mud even seemed to be among the fair, dishevelled beard, which scarcely hid the hollowness of the cheeks. A figure altogether disreputable. (*MUJ*, p. 174)

At first, MacUalraig's ghostly appearance upsets Tod as he sits 'tensed and half-recoiled in his chair' (*MUJ*, p. 179), but then a gradual relaxation of his figure takes place - 'John Tod crossed his legs and settled his head against the back of his chair (*MUJ*, p. 183) - as he comes to terms with his corporeal presence and the aura of supremacy which he is able to project through his new faith. None of the words

uttered by the priest on the subjective and deviating aspects of Protestantism can affect him now, given that he is now allowed to apply 'freely' a new set of norms and meanings to such concepts as truth, freedom, justice, loyalty and the nation, which, beforehand, were interpreted solely through the Catholic canon: 'I hae tauld ye already', Tod reiterates, 'it is the Truth that maks us free. *We* are free. Our Faith is Freedom' (*MUJ*, p. 183). Tod's brief intervention generates the second part of MacUalraig's long monologue in which the priest prophetically opposes the threats of the Protestants' new epistemological categories as subjective and unsubstantiated, and mainly aimed at eradicating Scotland's Catholicism and its independent status as a nation:

> Scotland, too, that was till now a community of men and women of common blood and inheritance working in common under God and by His Will for the informing of life on earth with the especial quality of the 'mind' embodied in their tradition, ye would turn henceforward to mean naething mair than sae mony persons holding the Protestant religion… If now they come under your tutelage to indentifee freedom simply with the Protestant religion they will be ready to follow the Protestant religion to the death… or waur, to the loss of all true freedom. (*MUJ*, pp. 184-185)

It is apparent, then, that MacUalraig gradually turns into what he prophesises, and with his disappearance from Tod's house and his death, he finally evaporates into nothing, as if he merely represented a psychological projection of historical states.

One of the most relevant characteristics of MacColla's fiction is the interpretation of Scotland's historical crises through the conscience of individuals – a trait which undoubtedly was influenced by MacColla's reading of Dostoevsky. The psychological character and epiphanic quality of Tod's transformation are evidenced through moments of temporal isolation and a substantial absence of spatial peregrination; yet, it would be incorrect to suggest that his experience is isolated or

abstract as it occurs in a well-defined historical time. As pointed out in the first chapter of this thesis, in relation to the metaphysical dimension of *And the Cock Crew* and Maighstir Sachairi's perception of time, it can be claimed that a fundamental trait of MacColla's fiction lies precisely in the combination of the diachronic occurrence of history with the synchronic, a-temporal and interiorised perception of the historical event on behalf of his characters. In *And the Cock Crew*, the Clearances define the historical parameters within which the story is set, but remain constantly in the background as a dramatic reminder. Most importantly, their tragic impact on the Highland communities is not once made explicit, say, through a historical description of the evictions; instead, it is poignantly rendered through the tormented conscience of the local minister. Likewise, in *Move Up, John*, Tod's transformation as an individual reflects historically outside of his biographical adventure, which is positioned in a specific historical time. But Scotland's tumultuous process of conversion from Catholicism to Protestantism merely represents a spatial and temporal frame filled by Tod's personal apprehensions of the historical events and the consequent process of self-awareness he undergoes.

The accidental combination of Tod's affirmed will and his conversion to Protestantism is emphasised by MacColla, the essay writer, in his commentary on the novel - where he insists on defining the Reformation as the Mask, the circumstantial manifestation, of a condition in the 'metaphysics of the will' of the individuals which in the sixteenth century expressed itself in religious terms simply as a reflection of the spirit of the age[9] - and, indeed, finds substantiation in many pages of *Move Up, John*. In this respect, it can be claimed that John Tod, together with Maighstir Sachairi, is one of the fictional figures that better embodies MacColla's theorisations

on the psychological nature of history. However, to identify Tod's fictional presence solely with his deviated will would be not only reductive and misleading, but it would also deprive him of his widely perceptible bodily presence which, as pointed out above, finally overpowers MacUalraig's in the attainment of Tod's spiritual victory and, overall, of his compelling dramatic impact on the plot. What Tod's perceives as the 'enfranchisement' of his being 'I' from MacUalraig's being not-'I', then, is ahistorical inasmuch as it occurs at a level of the will: it is a movement of liberation from MacUalraig's irrefutable will; but when analysed historically and biographically, such a movement epitomises the emancipation of the Protestants from the righteousness of the Catholic doctrines - 'He [MacUalraig] was gone, and had taken with him... the last weight of personal recollection and association binding him to the influence of that hateful Act, that annihilating, unhuman Mass' (*MUJ*, p. 218) - and Tod's possibility, henceforward, to live free of the moral guidelines that had impinged so influentially over his life: 'never had he felt so completely *right* and so much at home in a personal encounter', he acknowledges during their last meeting, 'and it struck him that this was the first time of all that he had felt anything of the kind in *this* person's presence – how completely he was liberated!' (*MUJ*, p. 179)

The didactic nature of MacUalraig's monologues, especially in the last chapter, is rather explicit and it helps define the unambiguous and faultless position of the Catholic minister in the narrative: he fully embodies well-delineated moral, religious and political doctrines, or, if we leave the Mask aside, the epitome of a being- 'I' fully projected towards the acknowledgement of the *other*. His preoccupation on the effects of Predestination on the individual and on the destiny of Scotland, prone to be enslaved to the English nation as a consequence of the current

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political and religious transformation of the country, echoes that of MacColla as stated in *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* and in other non-fictional contributions. In this respect, we can claim that, in spite of MacColla's intentions to create 'real persons – not puppets or mere 'characters'' (*CF*, p. 58), MacUalraig apparently resembles, more than anything else, what Herdman simply described as 'the author's ideas'.[10] Yet, his ethereal presence, uttering gloomy predictions about the country and reminding the heretics of the universal validity of the Catholic word, is indispensable throughout the course of the narrative as it represents the term of comparison, the *other* conscience, which Tod has to confront until the priest's death. Whether this is manifest through a rejection of MacUalraig's doctrines or, as it occurs in the final dialogue between the two, through Tod's scornful attitude as a means of fulfilling his plan and keeping the Catholic priest at the Bishop's house as long as possible, MacUalraig's monologic interventions act as a dialogical element by the very fact that they generate, throughout the novel, a reaction, in dramatic terms, over John Tod. In other words, MacUalraig's ideas, precisely because of their unilateralism, become strictly functional to the process underlying Tod's conversion.

What needs to be emphasised is that acknowledging MacUalraig's words as the author's ideas does not necessitate their dismissal as authorial interventions. The point is that as long as they are dialogical, that is, as long as they generate a narrative interaction they, by right, belong to the character. In spite of MacColla's disillusion and problems with publishers, we can claim that he never gives in to any pure form of monologism, insofar as the monologic instances do not appear as the author's primary voice, exploiting the novel format due to external adversities; but rather the

voice of MacUalraig's, Tod's being not-'I' *par excellence*, which indirectly, and paradoxically, annihilates itself in favour of Tod's final fulfilment.

Notes

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[1] An accurate account of the composition and various publications of *Move Up, John* is to be found in John Herdman's Introduction to the final and complete version of the novel, where Herdman himself underlines the fragmented appearance of *Move Up, John* throughout the years: 'In 1958 the second chapter of *Move Up, John* [...] was issued by Castle Wynd Printers, Edinburgh, as a small separate edition under the title *Scottish Noël*. This vividly and passionately rendered account of a sixteenth-century battle was saluted by such critics as Edwin Muir, Naomi Mitchison and Sydney Goodsir Smith as marking the re-emergence of a major talent silent for too long. In 1962 the dramatic qualities of the third chapter were strikingly attested to when it was presented *Ane Tryall of Heretiks* by the Curetes in the Paperback bookshop during the Edinburgh Festival – a performance whose success inspired Jim Haynes with the idea that resulted in the Traverse Theatre; it was issued as a pamphlet the same year by Michael Slains of Collieston. In 1967 *Ane Tryall*, together with its Foreword, was reproduced in whole in *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*, while significant portions of the remaining two of the four major chapters were further incorporated by MacColla as part of the structure of that work's philosophical argument', in *Move Up, John* (Edinburgh: Canongate Press, 1994), pp. 11-12.

[2] This aspect is reinforced by the various nominal transformations of the two priests: the one that becomes a Reformer and the other that makes a stance against the Reformation, as indicated by John Herdman: 'In *Scottish Noël*, finding the cowardice or nervousness of his protagonist John Tod (the name substituted in early revision for the original John Rough) - the priest who becomes a Reformer – a distracting irrelevance within the new context of a self-contained episode, MacColla 'discarded him for the occasion and replaced him with another priest of identical outward appearance but very different in military instincts'. This priest was called John Erskine. In *Scottish Noël* and the other separate published sections, the anti-Reforming priest Huisjean MacUalraig becomes Ninian Kennedy, 'Huisjean' being a phonetic approximation of the Gaelic Uisdean (Hugh), while the Gaelic name MacUalraig is usually rendered in English by Kennedy'. Introduction to *Move Up, John*, pp. 12-13.

[3] See note 2.

[4] In this context, the terms 'hermeneutics' and 'exegesis' refer to their original meanings in connection with the interpretation of the Bible. Following M. H. Abrams' definition, 'The term hermeneutics originally designated the formulation of principles of interpretation that apply specifically to the Bible; these incorporated both the rules governing a valid reading of the biblical text, and exegesis, or commentary on the application of the meanings expressed in the text', *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998), p. 91.

[5] In March 1546, Cardinal Beaton condemned the protestant preacher George Wishart to death by burning in St Andrews. Soon came the Protestant retaliation with the killing of the Cardinal in May of the same year.

[6] Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism – Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 128.

[7] Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel', p. 248.

[8] John Herdman, 'Fionn MacColla: Art and Ideas', *Cencrastus*, no. 13, Summer 1983, p. 11.

[9] See *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*, p. 149 et al.

[10] Herdman, 'Fionn MacColla: Art and Ideas', p. 12.

Chapter six

Voices of Authority in *Facing the Muzhik*

In the early 1950s, MacColla started working on a novel set in the Scottish Highlands, but mysteriously enveloped in a Russian aura. With the unpublished *Facing the Muzhik*, MacColla introduces, for the first and only time in his fiction, a cold-war scenario which crosses the Scottish boundary (but not the geographical one) and enters the complex situation of contemporary Russia. In an unpublished fragment, the writer describes the novel as being

> about a Russian who had had innumerable adventures during and after the revolution, before escaping to the West in the twenties. Before that he had been in the Imperial Army in which he held commissioned rank although in fact in the earlier part of his life, as a student, he had, like practically all his contemporaries, been some sort of a revolutionary and fallen foul of authority.[1]

While introducing the reader to the novel, MacColla's description oversimplifies its narrative potential and historical dimension.

The novel is structured into three main parts which are here illustrated respectively in three sections followed by a conclusion. The first section introduces the mysterious events at Achrithie on the unexpected arrival of Colonel Sholto Douglas; the second examines the disclosure of the mystery which coincides with the introduction of spy story elements; and the third considers the thematic influence on the novel of the Orthodox Church in Russia.

The composition of *Facing the Muzhik* was slightly preceded by that of *Tsar's White Hell*, a long and painstaking study of the Siberian prison system of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries inspired by George Kennan's and James

Young Simpson's accounts of their Siberian journeys.[2] The following extract from 'Mein Bumpf' includes MacColla's most relevant account of the genesis both of *Tsar's White Hell* and *Facing the Muzhik*; it also reconstructs the interaction between the intellectual and the historical forces which led MacColla to the creation of the two Russian texts:

> For some reason the first shots of the Russian Revolution of 1917 echoed in my consciousness and awoke an intensity of interest in Russia and everything Russian which has been one of the two or three overwhelming influences in my life. This interest led of course to an immersion in the astonishing phenomenon of Russian literature of the 19th century and a familiar acquaintance with all its principal figures, even to the way of walking of many of them and the sound of their voices. This interest, by a curious but understandable enough association, led to an exhaustive study of the Siberian prison and exile system; and this in turn led to a book, or a part of a book - called if I remember rightly, with more drama than accuracy, *Tsar's White Hell* - giving an account of 'Siberia' under the Tsars. I can only say that the notion we all have in the West that under the Tsars things in Russia were so awful, indeed intolerable, that Communism was in some way justified, if not inevitable, is in fact the reverse of the truth. Having failed however to convince any publisher that the truth of this matter was of public importance, but remaining myself convinced that it is, I approached it in another way and wrote a large novel, called *Facing the Muzhik*, in the first part of which the salient facts about the prison system were incorporated as part of the action and dialogue. In the latter part - the Russian Sphinx having as I believed yielded so much to the importunity of my devotion and patient endeavour to understand as in the end to whisper back its secret - I gave what I believe is the true explanation of what happened in Russia and how it was possible for the Communist Revolution - totally contrary to its own analysis of the historical process - to triumph there. Though essentially about Russia the novel was set in the Scottish Highlands, and contained a whole group of characters so vividly real to me that they are constantly floating in and out of my mind as if they were actual persons whom I had once intimately known. And I find it difficult to accept that they have no objective reality but exist only in my own mind, and furthermore will never exist in anyone else's. For I have no illusions about the writing business in our time.[3]

In the present chapter, I wish to engage primarily in a study of *Facing the Muzhik*, omitting, therefore, a closer analysis of *Tsar's White Hell*. This is mainly due to the fact that, as MacColla himself explains above, a significant part of the material

contained in the former reappears in a more challenging and stimulating format in the latter as a result of a process of transformation of discourse from the essay form of *Tsar's White Hell* to the novelistic quality of *Facing the Muzhik*.

MacColla's above-mentioned insights into the genesis of *Facing the Muzhik* seem to contradict his explanations of the method of enquiry adopted in the writing of *Move Up, John* insofar as they acknowledge a pre-determined thesis as a basis for the creation of fiction which is formed around two related points: first, that the Russian revolution is neither inescapable nor justifiable within the historical coordinates of the time, not even through the recollection of pre-revolutionary Siberia; and, second, that, as illustrated in one of MacColla's most controversial unpublished fragments, 'Catholicism would <u>also</u> have saved Russia from developing that messianic consciousness which formed a large part of the soil-preparation in the Russian psyche for the seed of revolutionary Communism'[4]. It is a thesis that ultimately originates from MacColla's conviction that, in spite of the historical diatribe of opposition between the Orthodox Slavophiles and the early revolutionary movements in 19th century Russia, Communism and Orthodoxy share a metaphysical negation of the being not-'I' which has been revealed respectively through the promulgation of mystically idealistic doctrines electing the Russian people as the 'God-bearing' people and, as far as Communism is concerned, through the creation of a chosen class collectively known as the proletariat. MacColla's postulation also derives from his understanding of history given in *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*, as illustrated in the first section of this thesis, which, with specific references to the Russian Revolution, claims that such a movement ought to be interpreted not only as a historical, but also as psychological event.

However, it is the aim of this chapter to show that, in spite of the fact that the novel revolves around an assertion of preconceived ideas, it is nevertheless animated by a dialogic fictional discourse. In what follows, moreover, I wish to show how action and abstract speculations merge successfully through the creation of various chronotopes (including Old Russia and Siberia, the Castle and the Church) which are here analysed in each section. This chapter will also explore the implications of the ideas around which the narrative is constructed. Such chronotopes constitute the fictional framework within which MacColla's argument on the effect of a nay-saying attitude on history is developed.

Once he had fallen into a state of 'uncritical infatuation'[5] towards anything Russian and had become enveloped in comprehensive and uninterrupted studies in Russian literature, MacColla elects Dostoevsky's account of his Siberian years, narrated in *Memoirs from a House of the Dead*, and the anti-nihilistic novel *The Devils* as the principal sources of inspiration for his Russian novel. The *Memoirs* are notes collected and recounted by a stranger, a prisoner, the false author-narrator Aleksandr Petrovich Gorjancikov. Dostoevsky's narration is deliberately casual and fragmentary: this device allows him to portray episodes of his experience in Siberia without any 'personal' manipulation or the kind of introspection which otherwise characterises his novels. While the *Memoirs* provide a sort of authentic source for and reliable comparison to Nikolay's personal experience in Siberia, *The Devils* has a much deeper impact on the original idea underlying the whole of *Facing the Muzhik*. References, for example, to Catholicism and atheism in Russia, or to the individual in relation to the idea of nation, are re-elaborated by MacColla in his novel evidencing the widespread ideological influence that the Russian writer had on him.

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Arguably, Dostoevsky's influence is not only 'ideological' – in point of fact, we will illustrate how MacColla actually rejects Dostoevsky's religious and political beliefs regarding the Russian 'God-bearing' people as the 'chosen' people, an idea that MacColla sees as paradoxically too close to the idea of the elect class in Communist terms. Dostoevsky's influence over MacColla, then, is reflected mostly in relation to the Bakhtinian concept of dialogism, or, more accurately, to the tie between historical past and present which animates the multifarious voices of, say, some of the characters in *The Devils*. Likewise, in MacColla's characters, the historical voices from the past are not faded or dissolved, but continue to influence the present in a dialogic, self-conscious and self-reflexive way. What begins as an attempt by MacColla to extend his authority over the text becomes, then, a plurality of voices (of Dostoevsky, of the narrating 'I', of Nikolay Parfenovitch) each of which extends its logic of authority over the narrative scope of the novel.

I

The story opens with Colonel Sholto Douglas deciding to pay an unexpected visit to his cousin, James Grant-Rintoul, who lives in the estate of Achrithie in the Scottish Highlands. Sholto's idyllic memories of the place, though, seem to be spoiled by what he perceives to be an unusual, almost hostile, welcome from the dwellers of the castle - James Grant-Rintoul and Archie Grant, the gamekeeper - a circumspection which appears to extend to the villagers the Colonel encounters on his way to Achrithie. Such is the case with Roddy Chisholm and his apparently harmless questions about the colonel's stay:

'Will you be making a long stay this time, Colonel?'

[…] Something suddenly made it occur to me to wonder whether his questions has really been entirely formal, whether in fact he had not some particular interest, this time, in the answers, which he was trying to convey to me, but over-subtly. It seemed improbable.[6]

Such an unjustifiable conspiratorial mood, as it is perceived by Sholto, is rendered through moderate, yet sharp and effective, references to gestures, phrases, and looks which occur in clear dissonance with his expectations:

> Archie giggled as at a familiar joke. A chair creaked. 'Well... your health, Achrithie! And yours, Colonel!'
> And there it was again... an intonation that instantly revived my earlier impression, of my inexplicable exclusion from something: just a suspicion of hesitation before my 'health' was coupled with James's, the - I thought - notable omission of such usual expressions as, Glad to see you back, or Hope you'll make a long stay. I felt distinctly strange.
> Also throughout the following conversation Archie Grant's voice sounded consistently a shade too 'loud', as if it was being 'forced', in order to cover something more in the conversation than there was ostensibly. (*FM*, pp. 16-17)

Sholto's disturbing feelings reach a vorticose intensity with the introduction of Nikolay Parfenovitch: the presence, at Achrithie, of an old Russian soldier and revolutionary in exile appears to estrange Sholto almost entirely from what is becoming to him a totally indecipherable *reality*. Sholto's lost sense of balance and trust following the meeting with James and Nikolay at Achrithie is synonymous with the multifarious 'I's that both men embody at this stage of the novel, before the mystery is revealed. The mystery of Achrithie is also enriched by factual elements which support Sholto's suspicions. When Sholto wakes up, one night, and goes into the main lounge looking for some tobacco, he discovers a secret telephone inside a box-like cupboard and, picking it up, he hears the voice of a young Russian, a voice that is not Nikolay's. Given Sholto's knowledge of the Russian language, and a passion for Russian literature, he understands the cryptic message uttered by the voice – 'He didn't have a word to say; the bear sat on him heavily' (*FM*, p. 62) – as a

'catch favoured by one of Dostoevsky's drunkards' (*FM*, p. 62). The next puzzling

episode takes place the following night. Sholto is awake in his room, when suddenly

he hears a cry:

> It was a terrible cry... of pain, but not of body. Of a soul condemned to
> uttermost deprivation, unbelievable loss. [...] A ghostly figure was
> Nikolay Parfenovitch, in white pyjamas, standing outside his opened
> bedroom door. He was facing directly towards me, seeming indeed to
> look at me. At once he came with a swift purposeful step across and
> straight up to me. [...] He stared not at me but through me, and his
> strained features were like clay or chalk.
>
> 'They have got him!' he said in Russian, in a voice of tragedy. And
> again, as if it were something past belief appalling, 'They have got him!'
> [...]
> Now [Grant-Rintoul] was beside us. He was staring at Nikolay
> Parfenovitch and his expression ... utterly discomfited me. [...] He knew
> what Nikolay was referring to... It may have been the force of Grant-
> Rintoul's regard that penetrated to Nikolay. With a shudder he came to
> himself... and murmured, 'Pardon! Please pardon me!' and added almost
> inaudibly, 'A dream, I think...a bad dream...' (*FM*, p. 95)

In spite of Sholto's efforts to explain the episode in rational terms – 'Our talking

about Siberia had brought exciting and disturbing matters back to Nikolay's mind'

(*FM*, p. 95) – this upsetting circumstance reinforces Sholto's perception of Nikolay's

and James's unaccountable detachment from him. The extreme point of alienation,

however, is reached the next morning, when Sholto hands Nikolay the text of a

telegram addressed to him. The telegram - 'Leakage at head confirmed, stop,

MacWhirter immobilised injured, stop, believe petrol followed on train. Signed Fish'

(*FM*, p. 102) - contains information completely indecipherable to Sholto, but

perfectly clear to Nikolay, James and even Archie Grant:

> I found the situation painful and embarrassing. The three of them were
> shaken to the core. But as they were standing directly in the doorway I
> had no choice but to witness their emotion; I could not have escaped
> short of exerting force to push them aside... as with the same impulse, or
> simultaneously moved by the same idea, they all three turned and looked
> at *me*... Not a word did they speak, but looked at me steadily. The
> nightmarish thing was that they seemed to consider me as if I were not

there – not, that is, as 'I'. It was some question that they were silently asking themselves. I felt depersonalised, as if naked and pushed back to an enormous distance, where I was spread out and pinned like a specimen to a board. (*FM*, p. 103)

Sholto's inability to reduce James' and Nikolay's voices to a single and univocal voice not only emphasises the dialogism of the chronotope which describes the situation at Achrithie on Sholto's arrival, but it also serves as counterpoint to Nikolay's long and monologic account of his Siberian exile preceding and following such episodes.

As MacColla himself explains in 'Mein Bumpf', he chooses to incorporate the crucial facts about the Russian prison system in the first part of the text, and does so through the voice of Nikolay and his long tales about pre-Revolutionary Russia. Dostoevsky's *Memoirs* recur in the anecdotal configuration of Nikolay's reminiscence of his seventeen years in Siberia, as a political prisoner, unfolding through a vivid description of the prisoners' journey to Siberia, the quality of life and food in the prisons, and the relationship between the prisoners, the officials and the villagers. The narration is characterised by extensive monologues, only briefly interrupted by Sholto's and James's eager questions. When compared to MacUalraig's sermons in *Move Up, John*, however, Nikolay demonstrates a narratorial awareness of which the minister is completely devoid. For example, Nikolay seems to regulate his narrative through a mechanism of self-conscious parody which indicates the author's dialogic position in relation to the fictional discourse which he is supervising. Such a mechanism is revealed by means of simple but effective lines, such as 'But again I become speculative' (*FM*, p. 38), after some philosophical considerations on the Russian soul; or, alternatively, through his interruption of his account of the long journey, which the fettered convicts made on

foot towards the prisons, with the song they used to sing.[7] Nikolay's empathic feelings towards the convicts - 'It was like the voice of the whole of suffering humanity!' (*FM*, p. 44)[8] - evokes MacColla's metaphysical approach to history, defined in the first chapter of this thesis as post-factual empathy. As pointed out elsewhere, post-factual empathy is the process which allows MacColla to construct an accurate representation of the past in the context of the present. In this respect, Nikolay, through his narration, becomes an illustration of such a dialogic process. With specific references to Russia's history, in *Tsar's White Hell*, MacColla reveals the profound misconception of the West about Siberia, both in its geo-physical and socio-political aspects. The author postulates that this misconception is founded on a perpetuating myth, that of considering Russia as the antagonistic 'other' or, in propagandist terms, the 'enemy': 'The West needed "Siberia" to be perceived as it came to be in order to consider Communism as a necessary and inevitable historical event'[9]. However, as opposed to Dostoevsky's intentions in the *Memoirs*, MacColla's aim here is to launch, through Nikolay's narration, a specific message which goes beyond the contingencies of mere description. His is a clear design to revaluate the 'word' Siberia so as to undermine its pre-established implications:

> I have not met anybody outside Russia who did understand what Siberia, prison Siberia, was in the old Russia. People everywhere seem to have the very strong impression that it was something quite exceptional, something that only happened in Russia, and was the product of a unique barbarity inherent in the pre-Revolutionary system of government. I have often [...] heard the word 'Siberia' tossed down into a conversation as if it was the final proof that a revolution was both inevitable and justified [...] But in fact, people in Russia were not all the time thinking about Siberia [and] heard the word with different feelings altogether [...] for Russians Siberia did not immediately or necessarily connote prisons, and even when it did mean prisons there was no more suggestion of horror than there would have been about prisons anywhere else. (*FM*, pp.32-33)

Nikolay is adamant that Siberia was a system of criminal and exile transportation, and that capital punishment was abolished in Russia in the eighteenth century. Such a statement opens up a general and compelling consideration on the crime of murder in pre-Revolutionary times, and on the widespread leniency of Russian courts towards the criminals.[10] According to Nikolay, such an indulgent penal code was partly responsible for the incredible number of murders occurring in Russia; but 'partly', continues Nikolay, 'it was something else' (*FM*, p. 38). The first echoes of *The Devils'* central argument resound throughout Nikolay's further observations. Despite the socio-political analysis of pre-Revolutionary Russia carried out in *The Devils*, including the undeniable influence of materialism on the emerging bourgeoisie, the fundamental aspect depicted in Dostoevsky's novel is the demonic quality of the human being, that which deprives man of freedom, negates God and manifests itself first and foremost as a form psychopathology. The influence of Dostoevsky's psychology of being over MacColla is evident through Nikolay's emphasis on the metaphysical inclination of the Russian people towards some sort of glorification, be it satanic or divine.

> What is beyond question is that in Russian human nature there exists, there lurks, and appears from time to time, a frenzied strain of cruelty so senseless and so inhumanly callous that it merits to be strictly called diabolical... they can become like men possessed... Perhaps the Russian soul is made to be possessed, must be possessed, so that if it be not possessed by God it will be possessed by the Devil. Perhaps it was its failure to be possessed by the secular, materialist gods of the nineteenth century, because they are of their nature inadequate to possess and fill the soul, that caused that invincible, devastating boredom and life-weariness that afflicted so large a section of the educated classes and came to be regarded as typically Russian. (*FM*, p. 38)

Through Nikolay's personal experience and anecdotal references to Siberia, it is possible to identify and reconstruct MacColla's reading of history, as expounded in

At the Sign of the Clenched Fist. As regards the Russian Revolution and the advance of Communism, we recall his interpretation of such events as the violent imposition of a doctrine, perceived as true, 'which at one stroke sets [the revolutionary] free of all obligation to every overshadowing reality or 'other' whether of the present or of the past' (*CF*, p. 154). In relation to this, another parallelism can be drawn between *Facing the Muzhik* and *The Devils*, particularly between Nikolay's self-analysis of his younger years as a revolutionary:

> We were borne up in the consciousness of being right, when all the world was wrong... of being in advance of our age, when the whole of humanity lagged behind... an intoxicating joy, believe me, when one is young and knows no better... Then, we had no cares, for we had no responsibilities; we had repudiated the entire existing order of things, with every family and social obligation. (*FM*, p. 56)

And the confession of Lyamshin, one of the characters in Dostoevsky's novel devoted to the revolutionary cause:

> Asked why so many murders, scandals, and villanies had been perpetrated, he replied with feverish haste that it was all done 'for the systematic destruction of society and the principles on which it was based, with the object of throwing everybody into a state of hopeless despair and of bringing about a state of general confusion: so that when society – sick, depressed, cynical, and godless, though with an intense yearning for some guiding idea and for self-preservation – had been brought to a point of collapse, they could suddenly seize power.[11]

MacColla insists on the search and definition of the revolutionaries' common traits, as he perceives them, singling out another two of the innumerable types illustrated in Dostoevsky's novels. James's election of Myshkin, from *The Idiot*, embodying 'Ivan the Fool, the humble, self-renouncing, other-worldly idealist' and Rogozhin, from the same novel, as 'a type of man who is all prude – even to the extent of Satanic pride ... and overweening presumption and spiritual revolt' (*FM*, p. 84), signals what MacColla reckons to be the only attainable approach to historical matters, the

psychologically-inclined approach, and, in this respect, Dostoevsky cannot but represent an irreplaceable example. The strong emphasis placed on the opposing metaphysical forces animating the spirit of the Russian people – 'I distrust, as a rule, general and positive statements about a whole nation... but I think it could be maintained that there were always two... distinct, even opposed elements which mingled or contended in Russian human nature' (*FM*, p. 84) - is comparable to the fundamentally dialogic relationship, often evoked by Bakhtin, between the positive and negative poles inhabiting Dostoevsky's characters. In *Facing the Muzhik*, however, such dialogism is only evoked, but it does not seem to 'torment' any of the characters. Nikolay, and Sholto, are not characterised by a lack of dialogism; only their turmoil (especially when compared to some amongst Dostoevsky's characters like, say, Nikolay Stavrogin's or Kirillov's life-long struggle between good and evil),[12] does not correspond to their biographical adventure in the novel. Although it is not until the end of the story that we become aware of Nikolay's actual identity, we can only imagine and reconstruct the turmoil of his younger years. Nikolay perceives the inner instability of human nature, but he is not personally living through it in the plot; his position is detached. In other words, the time of Nikolay's personal tragedy does not coincide with the time of the novel, and this, inevitably, dilutes its dialogic potential. Dostoevsky, indeed, never allows such a time-lag to occur, so that his form of dialogism represents exclusively the unpredictability of the unravelling present. On the other hand, the present, in *Facing the Muzhik*, needs to be reconstructed through the metaphysical movement of post-factual empathy in order to be dialogic. This is what Sholto does in his reconstruction of Nikolay's dialogic consciousness:

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Nikolay Parfenovitch... belonging still in the basic structure of his consciousness and colour of memory to a world otherwise vanished from existence, a world of men differently motivated, apprehending the world of reality through the filter of a differently constructed consciousness, with different ways, different postures both of mind and body, different customs of speech – a type of man that once was living and multitudinous in a large area of the earth, the 'Old Russia', and was gone and would never exist again. And Nikolay Parfenovitch in turn linked with Grant-Rintoul and me and the others overtly, who were Scots of the Catholic tradition, by all the lines in the consciousness of all of us that came most unbroken and most directly out of all the past, and attached it to all the future through the shifting moment of the present. (*FM*, pp. 138-139)

In Sholto's view, Nikolay's dialogism emerges from the ontological structure of his consciousness which, shaped in the historical, cultural and linguistic milieu of a no longer existing community, identified with pre-revolutionary Russia, now finds its full representation in Catholic Scotland. Located at the core of Sholto's observations is MacColla's idea of an intrinsic relationship between the individual and the community, exemplified in the dictum 'The unique individual cannot appear in a vacuum. The unique human community is what incarnates the absolute'. According to Sholto, the temporariness of Old Russia, swept away by a revolutionary wave, in which Nikolay himself participated, is replaced, in the Russian's life, by the historical continuum represented by Catholicism in Scotland (here we anticipate an important element underlying Nikolay's presence in Scotland). In MacColla's view, the idea of community, we recall, is not a fixed notion, but is constantly re-shaped by the quality of the individualities which inform it; only then can it become a transcendental entity. Therefore, Nikolay's unique dialogic consciousness and the Scottish Catholic community, envisaged by Sholto as overcoming temporal boundaries, are inextricably tied and coherently exemplify MacColla's interpretation

of metaphysics, as initially conceived by Duns Scotus, whereby, the transcendental absolute is achievable through the perception of individual forms.

The dialogism which we have acknowledged as being a crucial part of Nikolay's reconstruction of the bonds between past and present, is, as it were, materialised in the chronotope of the castle of Achrithie, the old part of the estate, which contains within its walls the mystery of the novel, as illustrated in the following section.

II

The revelation of the mystery of Achrithie (of a secret organisation which provides a reliable support from the West to Catholic Russians seeking to escape from their country), is for Sholto also a disclosure in physical and metaphysical terms of the actual meaning of the Castle:

> The days since... my introduction to the Castle and what is going on there have meant a change in the flavour of experience and even the quality of living. (*FM*, p. 196)

With this inspired consideration Sholto begins his last account of his tale which revolves around the Castle of Achrithie. The importance of the castle as 'a... territory for novelistic events'[13] is certainly not unknown to MacColla, as is shown by this informal fragment: 'I had to make Grant-Rintoul of the detested *laird* class so as to get a Castle for my seminary'.[14] It is not until the final pages that Sholto – and the reader – become fully aware of the actual significance of the Castle. However, a gradual introduction to the mysterious but pivotal role that such a construction plays in the plot, both physically and metaphorically, occurs at the very beginning of the story when James, questioned by Sholto on the restoration of the building, ambiguously replies: 'Oh well... you might call it a matter of prudent conservation...

you never know... the old castle might be the salvation of us all' (*FM*, p. 13). But the castle, as Bakhtin explains in relation to the function of chronotopes in fiction,[15] denotes the fortunes of families and entire dynasties, strengthening the bond between human relationships and history:

> And I had [breakfast], amid feelings principally of weariness, while absently staring at the portrait of the ancestor – his name chose such a time to come back to my mind: James Alphonsus Grant, thirteenth of Achrithie. And an unlucky thirteenth, since it was in his time that the Castle was abandoned as a residence of an impoverished family. (*FM*, p. 99)

What Sholto discovers when he is first led, by Nikolay, into the old part of the Castle is not only the physical visual disclosure of the new, improbable and unexpected use that had been made of those historically charged walls, but also a metaphysical unveiling of his consciousness:

> everything appears now or is experienced in a radiance of a new light of meaning and consequence. Because simply by being in the same world as the enterprise of the spirit that is 'the Castle', it is involved in the confrontation of the issues of life. For 'the Castle' is essentially and above everything a point in time where the issues of life are being confronted at their deepest level. [...] Those rooms which I first saw empty of people and strange, leaping up apparitional, I am now familiar with briskly full of virile, purposeful men. That is the keynote of the intense life going on there. And lightheartedness... laughter... that is also forever a part of the full meaning of 'the Castle'. (*FM*, p. 197)

What Sholto is referring to is the restoration of the long-uninhabited castle and its transformation into a seminary, as mentioned by MacColla in the afore-mentioned unpublished fragment, of which Nikolay is the head, where a dozen or so young Russians took refuge after their escape. With Sholto's discovery, the Castle in *Facing the Muzhik* acquires a new meaning in relation to Bakhtin's chronotopic delineation. We could go as far to claim that the Castle, here, is comparable, for its conjunction of chronotopic and psychological elements, to the square in 'At the

Gallows'.[16] Its impact on Sholto generates an immediate regeneration of his being-I in an instant of temporal suspension, following his prolonged mood of alienation. His regeneration coincides with, to put it in MacCollian terms, a metaphysical affirmation of his will and of the being not-'I'. In this respect, the Castle of Achrithie becomes a physical representation of MacColla's interpretation of history. The historicity of the castle is not predominantly dictated by the life and death, the fortunes and the misfortunes of its inhabitants – Sholto's reference to the thirteenth of Achrithie is fragmented and devoid of any narrative or historical implication. Rather, the time of the Castle becomes historical precisely when its continuous notion is suspended, which is why in the castle Sholto finds, not the absence of history, but its most comprehensive representation through the regeneration of the being- 'I'.

The presence in the Castle of the young Russians and the revelation of Nikolay's leading role among such an unusual community gives rise to the conclusive part of the novel concerning a long speculation on the reasons which caused, according to the main protagonists in the story, the decay in Russia's spiritual life. This discussion, like the one on Siberia, is mostly conducted by Nikolay and, due to its predominantly monologic form, it generates micro-narratives which run parallel to the chronotope of the plot. Before proceeding with an analysis of Nikolay's speculations, it is worth remarking on the impact of these speculations on the main body of narration and on their relationship with the author-creator, especially in light of Bakhtin's and Foucault's theories given in the introductory chapter on MacColla's fiction.

The question presents itself regarding the extent to which Nikolay's narrating-I, in 'his' sub-narratives, detaches itself from Sholto's official first person narration. Following Bakhtin, Sholto is an 'autonomous subject', unidentifiable with his author-creator because appropriately inserted into the spatial and temporal coordinates of the novel. We have already explored the contingent moments of circumspection, stupor, crisis and regeneration which have characterised his experience at Achrithie. Borrowing Foucault's expression, we could say that the distance between Sholto and MacColla is a varying distance in which the, so-called, author-function operates, but which is never reduced to a single point of coincidence with the 'I' of the story:

> Everyone knows that, in a novel narrated in the first person, neither the first person pronoun, nor the present indicative refer exactly either to the writer or to the moment in which he writes, but rather to an alter ego whose distance from the author varies, often changing in the course of the work. It would be just as wrong to equate the author with the real writer as to equate him with the fictitious speaker; the author-function is carried out and operates in the scission itself, in this division and this distance.[17]

Nikolay, on the other hand, emerges as a narrator when the value of the novelistic chronotope is close to null, when MacColla's authorial presence is further exposed and the author-function's voice is overwhelmed by the real writer's and the fictitious speaker's.

However, while acknowledging the identification between author and character, it is our intention to recall and follow Foucault's liberating suggestion, 'What difference does it make who is speaking?',[18] given at the end of his essay 'What Is an Author?', and to proceed with the analysis of Nikolay's/MacColla's

speculations on the responsibility of the Russian Orthodox church over Russia's current state of affairs without dwelling any further on the 'real' paternity of these ideas. If the author's voice exists in the text it necessarily becomes part of the dialogic network of voices. It therefore becomes irrelevant in terms of being 'the author's' voice, as it is only one among many.

III

Between 1935 and 1938, MacColla wrote twelve lectures under the title 'Makers of the Modern Thought' for the New University Society in Edinburgh. During the writing of the paper on 'Marx, History and Revolution', he encountered the works of contemporary Russian philosopher N. A. Berdyaev. Berdyaev's essays on the metaphysical problem of freedom, Russian religious thought, Dostoevsky, Solovyov, and others, exerted a great influence on MacColla, which he visibly instilled in Nikolay Parfenovitch's argument.

'What was the real cause of Russia's going rotten, Nikolay?' (*FM*, p. 170) – James asks at the beginning of the long discursive chapter on the causes of the Revolution and the veto against the profession of any religion in Soviet Russia. Nikolay's answer, which constitutes the core issue of this discursive chapter, is clear, dogmatic and unchallenged. His thesis is built around a syllogistic-like structure. The two premises which he advances are the following: firstly, that the Orthodox Church in Russia has been devoid of any theological, philosophical and moral teaching since it was first established in the eleventh century; and, secondly, that, in the West, the Christian Church has based its doctrines, throughout the centuries, on the philosophical works of the Scholastics. According to Nikolay, the Orthodox Church is responsible for creating a groundless society in Russia which is deprived of an

organic 'cultural' tradition as a consequence of its lack of theological, philosophical and moral teaching. Of course, Berdyaev's concept of 'groundlessness',[19] is implied but not stated in the premises, but its identification with the lack of a rationally-based religion in Russia is always implicit in Nikolay's words and its associations with a deviating idea of freedom as 'the seed of revolutionary Communism'[20] are, in MacColla's view, inextricable. It can be suggested, then, that Nikolay's argument represents a faithful and articulate development of MacColla's postulation. According to Nikolay's reading of Russia's history, the identification of the Church with tsardom since the introduction of Christianity in Russia by St Vladimir, Prince of Kiev, and the consequent schism from the western church, had a twofold effect on the Russian people. Firstly, the Orthodox church appealed solely to the sense of beauty inspired by Byzantine splendours, but did not take part in the development of the philosophical and theological thought which was taking place in the West (*FM*, p. 179). Faith, as such, devoid of any theological or moral teaching, became the only bond between the people and the Church itself. This caused a non-rational and non-conscious attachment of the people to the Church: 'the attachment was there, and it was sincere... but it came not by way of intellectual assent to doctrines or moral assimilation to a way of life' (*FM*, p. 178). Secondly, Nikolay claims:

> During the chaos that intervened between the fall of Kiev and the rise of Moscow, when the Russian lands were torn asunder by the internecine feuds of native princes at the same time as they were overrun by ferocious invaders, the Church alone remained as a symbol of national unity and identity, the sole guarantee of survival; the fusion took place of the ideas of 'Church' and 'nation'.(*FM*, p. 179)

Nikolay's account of historical events leads to a more congenial introspective analysis of the effect that such a fusion (between Church and nation) had on the Russian psyche. As mentioned earlier, in relation to the transposition of signifiers

from the reality of the Castle to Sholto's being 'I', Nikolay here suggests a connection between the schism separating the Russian Church from the Western Church and an interior separation, extending indelibly throughout the centuries, within the Russian consciousness:

> The Church had become the symbol and rallying-ground of Russian nationality, and a mark of *difference* between the Russians and all others [...] Such a consciousness could never have been created in the Russians but for Russia's divergence in the earliest stages of her history into a form of racial-national sectarianism. (*FM*, pp. 194-195)[21]

Indeed, the idea of schism and separation reminds us of the fundamental dyad upon which *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* is constructed: namely, the division between will and intellect which, clearly, MacColla here recalls in relation to the non-conscious separation which occurred in the Russian consciousness and which, in his view, led to the creation of a 'Chosen' category: Communism.

The idea of the unity of a people emerging from the exclusiveness of its religion, and even of its own God, is exemplified in the words of the Christian character, Shatov, in *The Devils*:

> The people is the body of God. Every people is a people only so long as it has its own particular god and excludes all other gods in the world without any attempt at reconciliation; so long as it believes that by its own god it will conquer and banish all the other gods from the world [...] A truly great people can never reconcile itself to playing second fiddle in the affairs of humanity, not even to playing an important part, but always and exclusively the chief part. If it loses that faith, it is no longer a nation. But there is only one truth, and therefore there is only one nation among all the nations that can have the true God [...] and the only 'god-bearing' people is the Russian people.[22]

But in the nineteenth century, while Shatov is affirming the uniqueness of his God, Russia witnesses the rising of the atheist intelligentsia, exemplarily embodied in the nihilistic Stavroghin:

> 'Are you an atheist? Are you an atheist now?'

'Yes'.

'[...] do you remember your expression that "An atheist can't be a Russian," that "An atheist at once ceases to be a Russian"? [...] You can't have forgotten it! Let me remind you of something else you said at the same time: "A man who does not belong to the Greek Orthodox faith cannot be a Russian" [...] But you went even further: you believed that Roman Catholicism is not Christianity; you maintained that Rome proclaimed a Christ who yielded to the third temptation of the devil, and that, having proclaimed to the whole world that Christ could not hold out on earth without an earthly kingdom, Catholicism had thereby proclaimed the antichrist and ruined the whole Western world'.[23]

As if referring to the inherently hinted dialogue between Shatov and Stavroghin, Nikolay intimates that Dostoevsky belongs to a 'school of thought or tendency in Russian writers [who] would have had it that the hatred of the uneducated masses in Russia for the intelligentsia was due to their profound sense of religion, outraged at the intellectuals' infidelity' (*FM*, p. 188). In actual fact, according to MacColla, Dostoevsky's criticism of immanent socialist ideas, of the destructive and rebellious attitude of the emergent liberal classes and of the revolutionaries is bereft of a valid historical and political proposition. Dostoevsky's exploration of the complexities underlying the antithesis between good and evil undoubtedly influenced MacColla's philosophical and creative discourse, but, in MacColla's view, it also displays the basic absence, shared by those who embrace the Russian Orthodox doctrines, of something 'intermediate between the too-high, austere ideal of the monk and the ordinary world condemned to live 'in sin', no intermediate 'ordinary' life which could yet be spiritually good and of value' (*FM*, p. 181). What Nikolay is intimating is a paradoxical equivalence of modes of conceiving 'the reality of the present' between the revolutionaries and the reactionaries. More specifically, Nikolay is referring to the messianic aspect which affects both parties alike, thus contributing to shape the 'ineluctable Dialectic of history' (*FM*, p. 194), as explained in the first

chapter of this thesis with references to *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*. Therefore, underlying the 'Dostoevskian and Slavophils myths of the "pure" and "holy" "God-bearing Russian people"' (*FM*, p. 188), MacColla perceives the same messianism which animates the actants in the Revolution, and which he condemns, most evidently in *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*, as a historicist stance contrasting with the randomness of history. Nikolay establishes such an equivalence by employing the same adjectives, 'holy' and 'pure', to describe the revolutionaries, and by consciously creating a continuum of intentions between those in favour and against the revolution:

> The Russians were still the 'chosen' guardians of a 'holy' doctrine, the 'pure' doctrine of Communism which it is their Destiny to impose in the whole world. The Russians therefore were prepared for Communism in advance by their deep, messianic feelings down the centuries. (*FM*, p. 194)[24]

Nikolay's syllogism appears to find substantiation in his own, and Berdyaev's, explanations. The Orthodox Church's dependency upon the State; the identification of Faith with Nation; the messianic consciousness underlying Orthodoxy - all this has created a vacuum in Russian society, which the Christians thinkers, among which Dostoevsky, have been able to detect, but unable to fill, and which, instead, has been replaced by Communist doctrines. The paradox of Russia's history, then, lies, according to MacColla, precisely in the fact that the Orthodox Faith and Communism share the same messianic origin:

> The destiny of Russia was to be fulfilled when the Imperial Eagle flew across the world and the whole world was brought by force to the true, that is, the Russian Faith – a 'national' heresy and racial sectarianism profoundly at variance with the spirit of Christianity and radically destructive of the idea of the Church. This was that 'messianic consciousness' of the Russians which henceforth possessed the Russian soul like a demon – and still possesses it as much as ever; which was constantly betraying its informing presence in Russian thinking of all

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sorts and parties, revolutionary every bit as much as 'reactionary', which even radically afflicted such a soul as Dostoievsky, whose writing when he turned to national questions is of a chauvinistic crudity to make his admirers blush. (*FM*, p. 194)

IV

Dostoevsky's indirect presence in *Facing the Muzhik* represents a 'voice' which participates as part of the text's dialogic mechanism and which has led to two particular observations, one concerned with narrative and one with the reverberating influences that his religious and political stance has had on MacColla. This chapter has shown how the Dostoevskian dialogism between author and characters, highlighted by Bakhtin, emerges in *Facing the Muzhik* with a temporal difference. In Dostoevsky's novel, the present is enacted in the narrative and becomes concrete and dialogic precisely through the interaction of voices which animate it; but in *Facing the Muzhik*, the present needs to be reconstructed in order to become readable to Sholto, meaning that only through its reconstruction can it become dialogic. The situation at Achrithie becomes dialogic and the interactions between the characters increase through the disclosure of Nikolay's identity and his reasons for being at James' estate. As illustrated in the exposition of Sholto's or Nikolay's past, historical, religious and philosophical elements are filtered through his individual experience, inundating the narrative with their dialogic potential, which is also fed by successful narrative ploys aimed at protracting the final revelation and the solution to the mystery.

Nikolay's syllogism on the fate of pre-revolutionary Russia finds a concrete reference in Dostoevsky. But, more than that, in *Facing the Muzhik* Dostoevsky comes to represent the supreme example of a 'deviated' Christianity and of a

detrimental nationalistic thrust, both of which are marred by messianism. As MacColla claims in one of his unpublished fragments, 'the imperialist strain that mined Russia' together with 'the justifying messianic aspirations... also mined the politics and the historical thinking of Dostoevsky'.[25] Indeed, MacColla's detachment from Dostoevsky on the issues of nationalism and religion is most immediately imputable to the messianic element. It is, however, on an ontological level that MacColla departs from Dostoevsky's predicaments, in particular with regards to the relationship between the individual and the community, which represents one of the pivotal aspects of MacColla's fiction. In his novels MacColla is constantly striving towards a resolution of the estrangement and alienation of the 'single' from the 'whole', which is how he conceives the idea of community in metaphysical terms. Such is the case with Sholto, when he first arrives at Achrithie; with Maighstir Sachairi, in *And the Cock Crew* (although, as illustrated in the first chapter of this thesis, the minister's attempt of reconciliation with his community dramatically fails to succeed); and with Murdo Anderson, in *The Albannach*, who chooses to return and settle in his community in the attempt to revive the 'original' bond that he feels ties him there.

Interestingly, Hugh MacDiarmid, as Peter McCarey argues in the essay 'Dostoevsky and MacDiarmid', perceives the same limit as MacColla in his application of Dostoevsky's philosophy to his own poetical programme. In particular, MacDiarmid's detachment from Dostoevsky's understanding of the relationship between man and community begins in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* and culminates in *To Circumjack Cencrastus*. In *A Drunk Man*, McCarey claims, MacDiarmid strives to establish a connection between the individual and the

nation in the belief that 'Dostoevsky's art... undermined the barrier between psychology and history, going down through the roots of individual psychology to a place whence the individual was seen to have a purpose and the nation – a destiny'.[26] The familiar image of Dostoevsky's God-bearing people (*narodbogonosets*), according to McCarey, helps the drunk man to shape the destiny of the Scottish people in the same way as the *narodbogonosets* have shaped Russia's destiny. So, in *A Drunk Man*, Dostoevsky is the *narodbogonosets*' 'new messiah' and, by the same token, the drunk man will be 'the architect of Scotland's destiny':[27]

> At the beginning of the Dostoevsky section, which is marked by the word '*narodbogonosets*', MacDiarmid sets out the alternatives for Scotland: to be a God-bearing people like Dostoevsky's Russians, or to be a wasteland.[28]

The idea of God-bearing people is linked, as the critic D. S. Mirsky's points out,[29] to the metaphysical concept of Pan-Humanity (vse-chelovek), a trait which Dostoevsky recognises in the Russian people, given their ability to synchronically embody contrasting emotions and face conflicting situations. And it is with the intention to retrace the same trait in the Scottish people - namely, the concept of antisyzygy – and to unite his soul to that of his country that MacDiarmid invokes Dostoevsky:

> *Narodbogonosets* are my folk tae...
> ... even as the stane the builders rejec'
> Becomes the corner-stane, the time may be
> When Scotland sall find oot its destiny,
> And yield the *vse-chelovek*[30]

However, in spite of the identification of the drunk man with the thistle, and of the thistle with the Dostoevskian philosophy of the antithesis, the drunk man's efforts to bind himself to his country remain unfulfilled. McCarey retraces the causes of such a failed attempt in the lack of universality in Dostoevsky's philosophical perspective, which MacColla would claim as originating in Orthodoxy:

MacDiarmid had hoped that Dostoevksy's ruthless scrutiny of motivation afforded an insight into the purpose of the individual and the destiny of the nation; but... Dostoevsky was the best guide through splintered psychology, but he could not carry through to a vision of universal purpose; his own hopes for Russia derived from the conservative utopia of the Slavophiles, which became increasingly reactionary in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.[31]

McCarey concludes by showing MacDiarmid's drastic change of attitude four years later in *To Circumjack Cencrastus*, where Dostoevsky, the messiah, is replaced by what MacColla would describe as another messianic figure who has failed to bond the individual to his country, except for a 'chosen' class: 'MacDiarmid could draw from Dostoevsky neither faith in himself nor faith in Scotland, so he changed tack... Dostoevsky was out, and Lenin was in' (McCarey, p. 34).

From this brief exposition of McCarey's reading of Dostoevsky's influence on MacDiarmid, we can infer that MacDiarmid and MacColla share a perception towards the Russian writer's failure to formulate an idea of nation with which neither the drunk man nor the Catholic Russians at the castle can identify.[32] In spite of future divergences between MacColla and MacDiarmid on the political front, both deeply recognise the hopelessness of the human condition of the individual outside the cultural, and metaphysical, contours of a nation.

Notes

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[1] MacColla, NLS, 265/31.

[2] See G. Kennan, 'Siberia and the Exile System', in *The Century, a popular quarterly* (New York: the Century Company, May 1888 – Oct. 1891) and J. Y. Simpson, *Side-Lights on Siberia. Some Account of the Great Siberian Railroad, the Prisons and Exile System* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1898).

[3] MacColla, 'Mein Bumpf' in *Essays on Fionn MacColla* (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1973), pp. 29-30, (italics mine). In relation to MacColla's apparent amnesia on the title *Tsar's White Hell*, it is worth remembering John Herdman's own considerations on the matter. After quoting a fragment by MacColla on the peculiar structure of *Move Up, John*, Herdman writes: 'These doubts [...] are undoubtedly coloured by MacColla's experience of rejection; in later years he tended to be defensively casual in his references to his unpublished work, affecting to be vague about the title of *Move Up, John* and even claiming to have forgotten the existence of the novel published

posthumously as *The Ministers* (1979)'. John Herdman, Introduction to Fionn MacColla, *Move Up, John* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1994), pp. 10-11.

[4] MacColla, NLS, 239/18.

[5] MacColla, NLS, 265/32.

[6] MacColla, *Facing the Muzhik*, NLS, 265/2-7, p. 3. Further references in the text.

[7] The 'Miloserdnaya' or exiles' begging song:

Have pity on us, O our fathers!
Don't forget the unwilling travellers,
Don't forget the long-imprisoned, [...]
Behind walls of stone and gratings,
Behind the oaken doors and locks or iron, [...]
We from all our kin have parted,
We are prisoners:
Pity us, O our fathers!

translated and first published by G. Kennan in 'Siberia and the Exile System. Life on the Great Siberian Road', Vol. 37, Issue 2, Dec. 1888, p. 184.

[8] Nikolay's words recall George Kennan's account: 'It seemed to be the half-articulate expression of all the grief, the misery, and the despair that had been felt by generations of human beings in the étapes, the forwarding prisons, and the mines', p. 185.

[9] MacColla, NLS, 239/9.

[10] Nikolay describes the criminals with specific references to the so-called 'vagrant without identity': 'You may remember an excellent description of a group of those people in Dostoevsky's *House of the Dead*', he says addressing to Sholto. 'They were, in fact, those tramps, the very cream of the cream of the criminal profession. They were ... men who had ... escaped from prison or exile in Siberia and returned to Russia to live by stealing and murder and all sorts of rascality – Dostoevsky describes them perfectly' (*FM*, p. 40). See F. Dostoevsky, *House of the Dead* (London – New York – Toronto: Oxford University Press), pp.12-16.

[11] Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Devils* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), pp. 661-662.

[12] In *The Devils*, Stavroghin and Kirillov both collapse, committing suicide, before their inability, as human beings, to follows the religious laws which prevent man from establishing himself as the sole arbiter of the world's morale.

[13] Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel' in *The Dialogic Imagination* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1986), p. 245.

[14] MacColla, NLS, 265/31.

[15] 'The historicity of the castle time has permitted it to play a rather important role in the development of the ahistorical novel. The castle had its origins in the distant past; its orientation is toward the past. Admittedly the traces of time in the castle do bear a somewhat antiquated, museum-like character. Walter Scott succeeded in overcoming the ranger of excessive antiquarianism by relying heavily on the legend of the castle, on the link between the castle and its historically conceived, comprehensible setting. The organic cohesion of spatial and temporal aspects and categories in the castle (and its environs), the historical intensity of this chronotope, is what had determined its productivity as a source for images at different stages in the development of the historical novel'. M. Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel', p. 246.

[16] See the analysis of *Move Up, John* in chapter 5.

[17] Michel Foucault, 'What Is an Author?', Josué V. Harari (eds.) *Textual Strategies – Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1980), p. 152. Foucault begins his analysis as follows: 'It is not enough... to repeat the empty affirmation that the author has disappeared... Instead, we must locate the space left empty by the author's disappearance, follow the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch for the openings that this disappearance uncovers' (p. 145).

[18] Ibid., p. 160.

[19] As Nikolay Berdyaev suggests in 'Concerning the character of the Russian Religious thought of the XIX Century': 'Before the XIX century... thoughts religious, theological and philosophical, we had not, for Rus' was not yet roused for thought. The Orthodox world for long centuries lived asleep in thought. Orthodoxy lived only through the Patristic age, but it had not its own age of Scholasticism, it did not live through the Renaissance of thought, which in the West happened from out of the depths of the Medieval period. Orthodox thought in pre-Petrine Rus' was connected exclusively with the religious mission of the Russian realm, with the fundamental basis of the idea of an Orthodox

tsardom... The paradox of Russian spiritual culture of the XIX Century consists in this, that the groundlessness of Russian thought, its aethereal quality, its unconnectedness to a durable tradition, was not only its weakness and defect, but also its strength and virtue. The groundlessness of Russian thought in the XIX Century and of Russian religious thought in particular was a source for its extraordinary freedom, unknown to the nations of the West with their close connection to their histories... Ungrounded thought and the schismatic always become more free, than thought grounded in and connected with organic traditions...', 'Kharaktere Russkoi Religioznoi Mysli XIX-go Beka' in *Journal Sovremennye Zapiski*, (1930), No. 42, pp. 309-343 ('Concerning the character of the Russian Religious thought of the XIX Century', English translation from www.berdayev.com).

[20] MacColla, NLS, 265/32.

[21] Berdyaev, 'Concerning the character of the Russian Religious thought of the XIX Century'. According to Berdyaev: 'The Schism was a product not only of ignorance and ritualism of theme, but also from the struggle posited in the depth of the national consciousness for a messianic idea of an Orthodox tsardom, invoked to preserve in the world the true faith'.

[22] Dostoevsky, *The Devils*, pp. 257-258.

[23] Ibid., pp. 254-255. The extraordinary philosophical insight contained in the dialogue between Shatov and the nihilistic Stavroghin is paired with its high dialogism. Shatov's ideas derive, as he reminds Stavroghin, from Stavroghin himself, and had been formulated years earlier in America. Stavroghin's 'forgetfulness' and perpetual ironic smile denote the multiplicity and clashes of voices animating Dostoevsky's characters' consciousness.

[24] Berdyaev, 'Concerning the character of the Russian Religious thought of the XIX Century'. Again, behind Nikolay's words we can grasp MacColla's reading of Berdyaev describing nihilism as a 'religious phenomenon' deriving from Orthodoxy's detachment from the 'world': 'The Russian populist movement was full of subconscious religious motifs. Russian nihilism, which became the basis for the world-concept of Russian socialism, was a religious phenomenon. It became possible on the soil of Orthodoxy, it was the result of a lack of disclosure within Orthodoxy of a positive attitude towards culture, of an Orthodox eschatologism... In the nihilism was a peculiar living-through of an ascetic world-denial, a non-acceptance of the world, as of something based on falsehood and injustice... A boundless social visionary dream took hold in the soul of the Russian Intelligentsia of the second half of the XIX Century, and this was regarded the sole permissible and allowable visionary-dream. Every other visionary-dream was declared sinful. Into this social visionary-dream was invested all the energy of a pent-up and constrained religious feeling. This was religion without a religious object, with an object, unworthy of religious worship, and this religion had fateful consequences.. and we have reaped its fruit in Russian Communism.'

[25] MacColla, NLS, 265/32. In this respect, we should recall that in the distinction that MacColla operates between self-affirming and self-asserting nationalism (NLS, 239/12), he elects Russia as the most immediate example of self-asserting nationalism, whereas Russia's 'satellite' republics such as Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia as proposing a form of self-affirming nationalism.

[26] Peter McCarey, *Hugh MacDiarmid and the Russians* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987), p. 18.

[27] McCarey, p. 28.

[28] Ibid., p. 29.

[29] See McCarey, p. 29.

[30] Hugh MacDiarmid, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1977), p. 122.

[31] McCarey, pp. 30-31.

[32] Undoubtedly, MacColla's perception was influenced by MacDiarmid's as the following fragment reveals: 'Grieve introduced me to Dostoevsky. It is necessary to have experienced Dostoevsky, but it is also necessary to transcend him' (NLS, 239/18).

Chapter seven

The Albannach: Identity and Nationhood

I

As suggested in the first part of this thesis, to analyse MacColla's works implies re-defining the balance between two contrasting approaches: on the one hand, an assiduous critique of the socio-political, cultural and linguistic status of Scotland which MacColla sees as being in a subordinate position to England; and, on the other, a desire to locate, both on a metaphysical and a political level, through nationalism, the haecceity of Scotland. *The Albannach*, MacColla's first novel, epitomises these two aspects of MacColla's thought. As the author himself suggests in the essay 'Mein Bumpf', *The Albannach* is 'an extended parable or allegory of Scottish life, of the Scottish situation, and an indication of the way out',[1] manifesting, therefore, a sense of the 'inadequacy' which MacColla attributes to Scotland as a political and cultural entity and whose only solution appears to lie in nationalism.

In spite of a certain multiplicity of viewpoints, such as those previously analysed between Muir, Gibbon and MacColla on the question of nationalism, the issues on which the Scottish writers of the time expressed common views mostly concern the Anglicisation of the country, both from a linguistic and an educational perspective, the controversial effects of Calvinism and the need to re-assert Scotland as, in Compton MacKenzie's words, 'a self-evident proposition'.[2] In many ways, *The Albannach* can be seen as an attempt to deliver the means through which the Scottish

nation can realign its apparent disparities so as to form the political and cultural totality that MacKenzie proposes. The success, both from a publishing and critical point of view, that it achieved when it first appeared in 1932 was mainly due to the role played by Hugh MacDiarmid who not only made possible the novel's publication - he was the director of John Heritage (the publishers of *The Albannach*) in London in the early thirties - but also perceived its importance in the development of the Scottish Renaissance Movement:

> I was privileged to be in close contact with Fionn MacColla the author of *The Albannach* [...] while he was writing it, and privy to the first abortive negotiations with publishers. That I was finally able to secure its publication, I regard as one of my most unquestionable services to the Scottish Movement.[3]

The fact that MacDiarmid saw the publication of *The Albannach* as one of *his* most outstanding contributions to the Scottish Movement would seem to suggest that it also stands out as one of MacColla's most outstanding contributions to the Scottish Movement. The question presents itself, then, as to why it stands out from among MacColla's other works as a novel that so effectively conveys his theoretical strategy to the point that it is so emphatically endorsed by Scotland's foremost literary figure at the time as a work of crucial and enduring importance.

The success of *The Albannach*, as this chapter will reveal, is dependent on a number of factors, above all, perhaps, on its effective use of satire as a means of exploring the modern day condition, or conditions, of Scotland. The cutting edge that the novel acquires through its deployment of one of fiction's most powerful weapons would have appealed, no doubt, to an *agent provocateur* like MacDiarmid. MacDiarmid aside, however, it is a novel that obviously strikes the right note in confronting the potentially bitter consequences of contemporary Scotland's failure to

consolidate a status of nationhood. The prospect of nationhood, as the novel clearly shows, is one which is fundamentally and hopelessly impaired by incongruous social and cultural positions. But if *The Albannach* explores, and ruthlessly deplores, the disparities of the modern Scottish condition, it also exploits them by involving them in a dialectic mobility, rather than stasis, which becomes the basis, not for Scotland's demise, but for its revitalisation. It is a novel that, through satire, seeks to reduce the measure of difference or *otherness* between opposing cultural forces and to present them as the terms under which Scotland can be conceived as 'a self-evident proposition'.

The hard-hitting satire of *The Albannach* is addressed, first and foremost, against the 'great edifice of beliefs and attitudes, of taboos and silences'[4] proliferated by the practice of Calvinism, whose detrimental effects, in MacColla's view, ought to be extended to a socio-political level as causes both of the disappearance of Gaelic as one of Scotland's languages and the position of 'servitude' in which the country finds itself in relation to England. Employed by MacColla in *The Albannach* to hit unilaterally a society that has annihilated its own most basic potentialities of expression – namely, language and music – the use of satire is part of a strategy corresponding to, and perhaps emerging from, the article he wrote in 1933 for the nationalist magazine *The Free Man*, where MacColla issues one of his strongest and most self-deprecating statements against, what was for him, the insufferable status of the modern Scottish nation: 'Autonomous nations may blunder and go wrong certainly; but if you want a really vicious and anti-social nation, one equally ready to play the part of a parasite, a flunkey, or an Iscariot, take a nation gone astray from herself, without honour or self-respect, content with servitude. Take a nation that

throws dirt on its past. Take Scotland'.[5] Through satire, *The Albannach* expresses what MacColla acknowledges as 'Scotland's share of guilt' in relation to the current situation of Gaeldom. The Gael's tendency towards self-annihilation is an aspect of the novel which is underlined by Andrew Monnickendam in his essay 'Through the glass bleakly: Fionn MacColla's view of the Gaelic world in *The Albannach*':

> What *The Albannach* demonstrates is that what has sentenced the Gaelic to oblivion is the Gaels' own perception of themselves [...] what [it] indicates is that even though the destruction of indigenous culture began with a genocidal campaign, it has become a case of suicide, it is their own annihilation.[6]

The effectiveness of *The Albannach's* portrayal of the self-destructive negligence of the Gaels is singled out for particular praise by MacDiarmid who, in his appraisal of the novel, compares the satirical quality of MacColla's writing to that of the ancient Gaelic bards: 'His work abounds in exact analyses of the most devastating description, in satirical passages of a bitterness that has no equal save in some of the old Gaelic bards'.[7] But, in doing so, MacDiarmid does not fail to point out the relevance of MacColla's satire in relation to contemporary Scotland: 'His gift for nicknames… is not only an old ancient Gaelic attribute, but is in line with one of our most desperate needs today, the power of sheer personalities, of far more intense satire than has been seen for many a long day'.[8] The intense satire of *The Albannach* is most noticeably directed against the nay-saying Calvinist ideology which Murdo's community adheres to, and often materialises through its grotesque representations of leading community members: 'Take eight gibbering monkeys; remove their "glands" – eight silent Seceders!' (*Albannach*, p. 30)

Murdo's satire, however, is not limited to Calvinist doctrines alone. It is also employed as a means of attacking the precarious linguistic status of a community

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which is not always fully conscious of its active participation in the transition from Gaelic to English. To this extent, the community epitomises the incontrovertible, as much as ambiguous, linguistic shift taking place in the Highlands, where Gaelic is on the verge of disappearance – with the exception of Bible readings – and English is still far from illustrating the villagers' 'intentions'.[9] Murdo is quick to ridicule such instances of linguistic ambiguity while drawing attention to the damaging role of Protestantism in the Anglicisation of the Highlands:

> The ministers, the missionary, and the elder sat round an empty grate, the ministers with their Sabbath tails turned up at the back, and were for the most part silent. Now and then one or the other would make a remark about the service or the congregation, and grunts would come from others. It was pretty sure, however, that their thoughts were of the needs of their bellies. You could almost be sure of that by the fact that all the remarks were made in the Gaelic, that will always come readier to the tongue of a hungry man. (*The Albannach*, pp. 34-35)

Murdo's derisive eye focuses mainly on the fact that the villagers do not seem to be able to 'possess' either language – hence, they have no definite identity that grounds them in the present day and age. Such an undefined linguistic identity signals a divided self within the community; but it also gives rise, mainly through Murdo, to a movement aimed at challenging the dogmatism of Calvinist doctrines through the 're-appropriation' of Gaelic as the language of the self.

For Murdo, the recovery of Gaelic as his medium of expression means a resistance, linguistically and socially, to the diffusion among the community of a language he perceives as partial and restrictive because it prohibits the conception of a viable Scottish selfhood. It is a view reminiscent of MacColla himself who, in his autobiography, is often at pains to point out the inseparable link between language and identity, with a particular emphasis on the predicament pertaining to Scotland: 'Scotland as shown by its linguistic condition has become so devitalised as to be

virtually incapable of making any decipherable signal at all denoting identity'.[10] The immediate result of Murdo's commitment to Gaelic is to further isolate him from his community, to the extent that he is even placed at an ontological distance from his own family:

> [...] he could never get an angle on his parents that would let him see them as he felt he ought to, but always he would be seeing them as you might see two people from Mars, or it might be animals of another species, say two stirks looking over a fence. (*The Albannach*, p. 10)

The failure to make 'any decipherable signal', meanwhile, becomes materially inscribed in the context of writing, as, for example, when Murdo receives his mother's letter when living in Glasgow. It is a move by MacColla that not only draws attention to the status of English as the language of 'education' – a fact born out by its use, in Glasgow, as the language of knowledge, the language of institutions. It draws attention too to the fact that, as a language of learning, Gaelic is dead, a language consigned to linguistic oblivion. The paradox of an 'uneducated' woman insisting on using a foreign language to communicate with her own son, who has chosen explicitly to repudiate that very language, clearly documents a devitalised linguistic condition beyond recovery:

> well theres nothing new with ourselves at the time but last night Ruaray Alastars red cow was in the bog the back of Drumuane and your father was at her taking out. they had a bad job taking her out and the ground so wet with the rains weve been having and your father was not the better of it at all I am thinking [...] excuse the gramer for I was never very good at the English as yourself knows my parents did not have it at all. hoping this finds you well as it leaves ourselves. (*The Albannach*, pp. 104-105)

The representation, in the novel, of two different socio-linguistic perspectives poses a highly problematic conundrum. Ironically, Murdo is isolated from his native community as a result of resorting to his native tongue and, so, acquires a measure of

otherness in relation to the community of which he is a part, illustrating therefore the tensions with which the modern Scottish national identity is invested.

However, by looking at the causes underlying the dislocation of Gaelic as the national language, we can begin to see how Murdo's position of isolation does not exclude but, rather, opens up the possibility of a reconciliation between the incongruous positions which characterise the Scottish nation. In *British Identities Before Nationalism*, Colin Kidd introduces the chapter on 'The Gaelic dilemma in early modern Scottish political culture' by defining Gaeldom both as 'the historic essence of nationhood' and as 'an alien otherness'.[11] In developing the issue further, Kidd specifies how, on the one hand, Gaelic 'remained pigeon-holed with popery in the Kirk's taxonomy of the alien' while, on the other, it 'was recognised as a necessary missionary medium'.[12] Victor Durkacz, meanwhile, who Kidd refers to in his chapter, has advanced a crucial distinction between the roles of Gaelic and English in the late 17th century which appears equally relevant to Murdo's situation: 'English in education, serving the long-term aim of civilising and reforming the Highlands; Gaelic in preaching and religious instruction, serving the immediate end of saving souls and holding back the Counter-Reformation'.[13] The distinction is one that explains, not only from a fictional but also from a historical perspective, Murdo's perplexity at the incoherent use of Gaelic among his community:

> However, after he had wondered with the half of a wandering mind how
> it was that the Gaelic was kept for worship and the house of God, and it
> only used at other times by the crofters and the men in Mexico's back
> room - and by an elder from the town now and then when the bottle was
> far down – he started, under his black brows, to study the faces of his
> father and mother, and they with their noses in their Books. (*The
> Albannach*, p. 9)

What separates Murdo from his community, though, is not only his monolingualism -
'He himself if he had to speak to anyone at all he would always use the Gaelic' (*The Albannach*, p. 253) - against the community's precarious bilingualism. Gaelic for Murdo, certainly, constitutes a personal and privileged vehicle through which he is able to perceive and conceptualise his views on Gaeldom and the world at large. But the linguistic vacillation affecting the community also reflects what Murdo recognises as a widespread inability to embrace, consciously and unambiguously, a specific set of values. In this sense, *The Albannach* is a text that involves itself not only in dialogue but also, and predominantly, in dialectic, 'because the existence of two or more distinct linguistic contexts within the text presumes the existence of alternative value systems which those linguistic contexts express, and therefore of a dialectical process of debate and argument between those values'.[14] While satire is used to magnify the degree of separation between two value systems (which are allegorically conveyed via Murdo's separation from his community), it also magnifies the dialectical struggle occurring between them. This struggle, however, is not one of perpetual negation and counter-negation but, rather, one which is capable of engendering new linguistic or ontological frontiers appropriate, as Bakhtin might put it, to the subject's assimilation of a 'concrete heteroglot conception of the world'.[15] Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia, in fact, offers an account of overlapping, rather than opposing, social and cultural determinations which is readily applicable to the situation in Scotland:

> [...] it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth [...] these "languages" of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying "languages".[16]

Through the idea of 'heteroglossia', then, it becomes apparent that the opposition between Gaelic and English and their intrinsic value systems need not prolong the absence of identity but may begin to engage a process of 'forming new socially typifying "languages"'.

Indeed, if *The Albannach* demonstrates, as Monnickendam suggests, the process of self-annihilation occurring from within the Gaelic community, it also, as MacColla has claimed, offers 'an indication of the way out', particularly through its provocative use of satire. In the novel, satire acts as a wake up call. It is intended to act as a stimulus or a panacea designed to interrupt the inevitable regression of Gaeldom into the terminal malaise of its self-induced Anglicisation. However, satire cannot offer a way out in itself, given that its function is to obliterate or invalidate the object of its scorn and reprobation: in this case, the satire is referring to an object that cannot be obliterated – namely, the Anglicisation (mainly through language) of Scotland. Consequently, in *The Albannach*, the satirical and irreverent element is one that infiltrates, through Murdo, the community, though it does more than simply expose the failure of the community to sustain its Gaelic inheritance. Murdo's voice, in other words, introduces a dynamic and non-homogeneous voice *within* contemporary Gaeldom which, by entering into a dialogue with the nay-saying Calvinist doctrines that dominate the community, induces a dialogic possibility which, in turn, provides the means through which Scotland can recover its status as a 'self-evident proposition'.

In view of this, the question arises as to whether *The Albannach* can be perceived as dialogic in spite of the status of the story as a 'parable or allegory' and the exclusivity of its main voice. The main voice, certainly, is intended to be

exclusive, as MacColla points out in the Foreword of the 1971 edition of the novel: 'The point of view, whose function is to impose unity on the work, is from inside the hero's perception throughout: we are supposed to apprehend the state of his consciousness at any moment by seeing things as he was seeing them'.[17] It can be said that allegory, meanwhile, is principally monologic insofar as it carries, as it were, a significance *a priori*, by implying a political, moral, religious or ideological discourse which is not represented and enacted literally in the novel itself. Allegory, by definition, is didactic: its main aim is to *illustrate* an issue or an ethical point which exceeds the narratorial boundaries of the text. In what follows, however, I intend to demonstrate how, in *The Albannach*, the focus on the hero's perception, far from contributing to the isolation of his voice against the voice of the community, allegorises the dialectic qualities of contemporary Gaeldom, whereby its tendency towards self-annihilation, through the proliferation of Calvinism and the spread of the English language, becomes part of a dialogic interplay through which it becomes possible to redefine Scotland's identity as a nation.

Given that the whole scope of the novel is communicated through Murdo's consciousness, an absolute measure of narrative subjectivity appears to be expected, if not unavoidable. Certainly, Murdo's opinions dominate the ideological context of the novel. But while potentially monologic, his consciousness reveals itself, however tormented, as the expression of a dialogic interaction between the individual, Murdo, and the being – not 'I' of the Calvinist community. Allegorically speaking, Murdo becomes a personification of the dialogic qualities of Gaeldom who, emerging from his disaffection within Anglicised Scotland, offers a model for selfhood appropriate to the contemporary development of the Scottish nation. We can go as far as to say

that, within the allegorical framework of the novel, the community is not so much an *other* existing *outside* of Murdo, but an internalised object of *otherness* denoting a conflictual reconciliation between Murdo's being 'I' and the being not-'I' of the community. As Cairns Craig points out in his analysis of John MacMurray's notion of 'heterocentricity' in relation to modern Scottish writing:

> The 'person', like the culture, is not the unitary identity of the isolated ego but a continual dialectic with its own otherness; exploration of the 'divided self' is not simply exploration of the sickness of the culture, but exploration of the sickness of the notion of culture by which a culture that recognises its own involvement with the 'other' is assumed to be as sick as the self which has withdrawn from its relationship with the other into a self-enclosed and divisive self-identity [...] To explore and to celebrate the multiplicities of the self is to recognise the fact that the self is never self-contained – that the 'divided self' is not to be contrasted with the 'undivided self' but with the 'self-in-relation'.[18]

It is evident that MacMurray's exposition of the ontological interaction between the Self and the Other can be applied to Murdo's 'I' becoming a 'self-in-relation' precisely through its confrontation with the community. Underlying MacMurray's exegesis of the interdependence between the Self and the Other is the concept of a plural 'identity': 'identity is necessarily relational and the Self is necessarily constituted by its relations with what it regards as its Other'.[19] Following on from this, Craig establishes a correlation between MacMurray's ideas of 'divided self' and 'relational identity' and Scotland which, although never directly related to *The Albannach*, appears to illustrate, not only the thematic crux of MacColla's first novel, but his theories of nationhood more generally: 'The inner otherness of Scottish culture – Highland and Lowland, Calvinist and Catholic – thus becomes the very model of the complexity of the self rather than examples of its failure'.[20] Likewise, Murdo's 'self-in-relation' is represented allegorically through the socio-linguistic and geographical dichotomies highlighted by Craig. This becomes

apparent during his experience in Glasgow when a series of contrasts, including those between the Highlands and Lowlands, English and Gaelic, the Catholicism of Father O'Reilly and the Protestantism of the minister, Mr MacIver, are established in order to throw into relief the diversification upon which, to borrow a phrase from MacMurray, the 'normal self' of Scotland is based.[21] In *The Albannach*, then, MacColla resorts to the variable and pluri-discursive qualities of the individual-community relationship as a means of defining and acknowledging the subject's religious, cultural and political identity within the confines of the nation.

The idea of the nation in *The Albannach*, emerging from a dialectical and diversified portrait of Gaeldom, would not be exhaustive without a fuller understanding of the language issue involved. MacColla, like other Scottish Renaissance writers, ironically chooses[22] to narrate his story and to let his characters speak in the very language, English, which, in his view, is responsible for the annihilation of the community portrayed in the novel through its annihilation of the Gaelic language. It is a view, of course, not out of place in the critical matrices of modern Scottish historians and writers. As Craig, for example, points out in relation to Neil Gunn's *Butcher's Broom*:

> The novel is locked into a tragic conflict in which the novelist himself is the representative of the forces that will silence his characters, while at the same time trying to preserve a record of those characters' lives and culture, and to allow them to speak in and through the very medium of their destruction. Whether from the negative or the positive side of the debate about the value of the 'native' language, the Scottish novelist is caught in a guilty dialogue in which the characters can only speak for themselves at epiphanic moments that are but the prologue to their being rendered mute, capable of being represented only by translation into the very language which has oppressed and silenced them.[23]

MacColla, indeed, perceives and is himself subject to the 'tragic conflict' outlined by Craig. At the same time, we cannot fail to observe that 'being represented only by

translation' does not silence Murdo nor the other members of his community but, on the contrary, enriches them with a linguistic awareness which proves of enormous value to the revivalist mood which permeates the novel. English is not accepted or perceived uniformly by each member of the community, but invokes a variety of responses. It is analysed and dismissed by some, who insist on its ineffectiveness in establishing 'natural' correspondences between the signifier and signified which, in Gaelic, would appear inviolable:

> [...] there's no music in it at all that I could ever hear and the queerest thing in it is that the words seem to have no meaning to them. Now in Gaelic a man can't tell his name itself without every man will know his whole history and his people's before him. (*The Albannach*, p. 70)

Where the awareness is lacking, or where characters are intent on using a language which they master with difficulty and tend to use for no good reason, the use of English becomes an instrument, as well as object, of satire, whereby the 'tragic conflict' described by Craig is transformed, quite literally, into a comedy of errors. In the letter sent to her son in Glasgow, Murdo's mother writes: 'excuse the gramer for I was never very good at the English' (*The Albannach*, p. 105). It is a pun that reflects the tone of *The Albannach* as a text in which the use of English, to some extent, stimulates the dialogue between the members of the community rather than stifles or annihilates its vitality. By setting a novel in contemporary Scotland, MacColla is aware of the fact that he cannot advocate a complete return to an entirely Gaelic speaking community. Whether through criticism or admiration, English for the characters, as in the novel itself, is an element which should be accounted for, rather than obliterated, not least because 'there's a great number of people who will be speaking it' (*The Albannach*, p. 70). It is a fact that MacColla cannot ignore which becomes, instead, a part of his focus on the 'conflict' and

'dialogue' between languages which, in turn, prompts him to look beyond the unilateral effects on the community of the eradication of Gaelic. *The Albannach*, clearly, denotes the recovery of Gaelic as an ideal basis for Scotland's recovery; but it recognises too the inherent futility of such a position. The recovery of Gaelic as a national language is impossible, whereby MacColla becomes the purveyor of a workable solution *under the circumstances*. He undertakes a forced transcendence of 'the tragic conflict' in order to consolidate a Scottish identity through the now inevitable dialogism of Scottish nation - or self-hood. Revitalised by satire, the 'incompatible' discourses of Scotland present a new dynamic for the divided-self of Scotland, a means through which it can regain its status as 'a self-evident proposition' through its status, as it were, as a divided-self-evident proposition.

There is a definite sense, then, in which MacColla refuses to lament the linguistic torpor of Scotland: he regrets but does not dwell on the inevitable loss of Gaelic, which is normally seen, as in *Butcher's Broom*, as yet another nail in Scotland's coffin. When Colin says, 'Whas the use of talking like that, man? I can't even see *Scotland* steady or see it whole' (*The Albannach*, p. 331), it is not meant to be taken as a statement of submission, but as a statement *per se*: it is an acceptance, made under the circumstances, amounting to a declaration of faith in the multiplicity of Scottish self-hood as workable notion for the development of nationhood. The absence of steadiness or wholeness, reflected particularly in the fractured use of language, does not reflect a tragic conflict. The conflict of language itself becomes a measure of the diversification and multiplicity of Scottish self-hood and the dynamic of diversification that invests the modern Scottish nation: it signals not a tragic loss but an emerging vitality - an 'indication of a way out' from a process of negation –

the mark of *The Albannach*, as MacDiarmid had claimed, as a work of the *Renaissance*.

II

In MacColla's view, the concept of the nation, as discussed in the first and second chapters of this thesis, occurs both on a metaphysical and a physical level. One of the examples identified earlier in this thesis referred to MacColla's interpretation of Scotland in relation to Europe as that of 'a part to a whole', an interpretation which relies heavily on a metaphysical understanding of the idea of nation and nationhood. A vision of Scotland, however, is formed in MacColla's fiction first and foremost through the physical representation of the country in geographical terms. According to MacColla, the manifestation of Scottish nationhood occurs almost entirely in the 'peripheries' lying outside of the country's urban 'centres'. It is not in 'central' Edinburgh that Scotland acquires its status of nationhood, but in the 'peripheral' north, among the Gaelic toponyms of hills and islands. In *The Albannach*, as much is expressed at the very beginning of the novel:

> Eastward the great bens flamed and burned – Sgùrr Ard, Beinn Bhreac and Càrn Mór glowing dark red at the roots of them and rearing in air high tops a vivid scarlet against a sky grey-blue like cushat's wing [...] Westward the huge bulk of Guala Mhór heaved up black as night over still, black waters, right in the face of the sun that was shooting long tongues of copper fire into a sky bloody like a memory of heroic wars. The islands – Eilean Sona, Long I, Eilean Ron and Tanera – floated black on a Minch of polished brass that took fire when it met the sky far to the west, just where you could see the Outer Isles on a clear day if you were on the hill... The great stillness that lay over the world was not broken by so much as the beating of a wing... It was as if Alba was waiting once again for the birth of a man, and all the mighty bens stood listening for the first cry of the babe that was to be a poet [...] At the moment Murdo had crossed over into that other world which overlays this one, and which most men find so difficult to enter because there is no space or time in it,

and [...] you have almost to be an Albannach, or perhaps an Eireannach, to feel readily at home in it. (*The Albannach*, pp. 1, 2 and 3)

Given, as we have claimed, that MacColla views Gaeldom as a synecdoche for Scotland, it is not surprising to find in his writing a transposition of signifieds from the local to the national in a way that reflects Duns Scotus's insistence on the particular, also in geo-physical terms, as a means of locating the universal, as MacColla reminds us in *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*:[24]

> Duns Scotus insisted on '*the knowability of the individual object*'. It was not perhaps surprising in one of his country of origin. In any case the physical surface of Scotland is such as to throw up into relief even quite small natural objects – trees, houses, rocks - and of course, even more, summits, craigs, dramatic acclivities, so that to the aware ego, they can all be even startlingly real and dramatically a part of the appurtenance of perceptual and emotional life; and it was so with the Scots, the Albannaich, among whom every slope had its elegy and every burn its troubadour.[25]

It could be said that MacColla's metaphysical vision of the Scottish nation derives from an interiorisation of Scotland's physical landscape and an affirmation of what Neil Gunn has called the 'landscape inside'.[26] As suggested by Gunn, the Highland scene ought to be interpreted as an independent voice within the fictional discourses of Scotland which, clearly, exerts a dialogic influence over the formation of characters acting within the world(s) of Scottish fiction:

> A novelist cannot write about people in a vacuum. They must have a background and the background becomes part of them, conditioning to some extent almost everything they do. When this works at a fairly deep level, it can be quite unconscious. I can't remember [...] ever having described a Highland scene for the scene's sake. Always the scene had something to do with the mind of the character who found himself there [...] when the character, for example, is on top of the world, the world becomes a wonderful place. When he is feeling depressed or nihilistic then the world around him becomes detached and uncaring. When one hears a critic describing the background as the principal character in a novel, it means that the background is actively directing the character. This can often happen in the Highlands.[27]

In *The Albannach*, certainly, Murdo's interaction with his geographical environment plays a crucial role in shaping his national identity through its dialogic substantiation of his sense of selfhood, whether in its inspiring aspect, evoked at the beginning of the novel, or in its 'uncaring' quality, often a source of resentment for Murdo: 'It would be better to go away somewhere. And the place was not worth living in, anyway – nothing but moors and crofts and bare rocks... How could a fellow settle to anything here?' (*The Albannach*, p. 5). The imagery of the Highland scene acquires the status of Murdo's Bakhtinian *other* both through its Gaelic topography and its position as a percept of Murdo's power to consciously or unconsciously perceive: it acts as a chronotope, rather than a 'vacuum', within which he is able to assert himself as one of a number of converging spatial and temporal factors.

In *The Albannach*, however, the idea of a 'landscape inside', as the *other* internalised, develops much broader connotations than those pertaining solely to the Highland scene as we see it in the novels of Gunn. Arguably, the transformation from Murdo's personal consciousness to a national one, coinciding initially with his absorption of the Highland hills, would not have been complete had he elected to remain there. It is by leaving the sphere of influence of the Highlands, through his train journey to Glasgow, that Murdo begins to absorb a range of previously unaccounted for environmental factors which, among other things, begin to disrupt and rearrange his perception of Gaeldom, as perceived from within, and, beyond that, of Scotland as a whole. Moving south, the Highland scene is infiltrated or altogether substituted by other, necessarily dialectic environmental influences which enrich, if also destabilise, his sense of self in relation to nationhood. It is a journey that takes him through the ever expanding contours of Scotland as a culmination of

incompatible social and cultural determinations which, geographically as well as linguistically, appear to undermine the possibility of a fixed identity; and yet, as with language, they may also prove capable of forming ulterior sites of social and cultural cohesion appropriate to Scotland.

As Murdo approaches the city, his awareness of the effects of industrialisation increases, so that his enthusiastic identification with the national identity issuing from the Highlands –

> Over and over again he would exclaim to himself under his breath, Alba, Alba, my own country! That's it there for you, he was thinking, the land of the people of my blood, - my fathers of the thousands of years, over the face of the world my roots in the soil of Alba (*The Albannach*, p. 79)

- loses its abstract and colourful clarity and acquires the gloomy shades of an unexpected industrial present:

> He had neither seen nor imagined the like of *this* before. He had never really thought about industrialism, merely been dimly conscious of it in the south side of his head, and had usually given it a mild and qualified approval, regretting the lack about it of that solitude so dear and so necessary to a hillman, but thinking of it for all that as somehow beautiful in its own mechanical way, a thing of great polished shafts rising and falling and of huge wheels revolving, beautiful for its polish and accuracy and dexterity, and for the power and inevitability of it. (*The Albannach*, p. 81)

Murdo's utopian idealisation of the 'clean', efficient and interminably productive processes of industry is dissolved by the dismal spectacle of coal heaps covering 'a black, sad country' (*The Albannach*, p. 81) and the bleak anonymity of ugly towns. For the first time in his life, Murdo does not impose any distortions on exterior objects and characters, but is passively distorted by the desolation of an unimaginable landscape.

Interestingly, the purely geographical aspect of the journey, as with the issue of language, begins to take on historical associations, creating a wider field of

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dialogic interaction which involves, recalling Bakhtin's phrase, 'the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the past and present'. The powerful influence of the bleak scene over Murdo affects his understanding of Scotland's history by putting into question any relationship between the past and the present. This is especially evident when he passes through Bannockburn, where his patriotic instincts are suddenly, but deceivingly, aroused:

> He had been sitting dozing into the beginning of his melancholy when suddenly a board passed the window, a black board with white letters on it:
>
> BANNOCKBURN
>
> [...] he stuck his head out, conscious of that same little shiver and tingle of excitement he had felt in the morning when the train had been puffing along through a sun-bathed country of streams and woods and great mountains, and he had been looking out at it and saying, Alba! Alba! To himself.
>
> But this was the black, scarred land; blasted and torn it lay under grey skies. (*The Albannach*, p. 82)

The correspondence between the signifier, BANNOCKBURN, and the signified, the historically decisive battle for Scotland, has been dislocated by the 'desolate fields bearing their crop of twisted steel and ugly houses of men' (*The Albannach*, p. 82). The extent of Murdo's disappointment at his failure to grasp the imperceptible thread between the past and present, which had formerly led to confident pronouncements about the firmness of his 'roots in the soil of Alba', now provokes, in him, an unsettling reinterpretation of history: 'He looked out again at the scarred, cheerless land, and, "I'm thinking we've lost that battle," says he to himself' (*The Albannach*, p. 83).

The contentious pessimism of this remark marks the beginning of Murdo's realisation that Scotland's 'heroic' past does not appear to define the country's present, not even through its 'historically established' landmarks. At the same time, it

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reinforces the apparent division between the 'idyllic' Highlands and the 'progressive' Lowlands, which are now doubly displaced in being detached, socially, from one another and, historically, from their shared cultural inheritance (for which Bannockburn stood as the ultimate signifier). What MacColla seems to imply, overall, is that history, understood as linking the past to the present, is annihilated as a consequence of industrialisation. Those moments where Murdo's contemplation of the Highland landscape projected him beyond any temporal dimension and allowed him to form a pan-historical vision of Scotland – 'all was ten million years ago and himself had slid back along a corridor of time, a memory of the future.' (*The Albannach*, p. 55) – seem suddenly impossible in the context of 'the modern'. Progress, therefore, instead of projecting Scotland's history into the future, interrupts the country's connection with its past, while advancing a new social dynamic that appears incompatible with that which preceded it.

This, then, brings us to the common complaint among critics and historians of a historyless Scotland (or, as the title of Cairns Craig's book suggests, of a Scotland *'Out of History'*). Without a history, it is a nation bereft of the necessary foundation upon which to construct a modern national identity. But what emerges from Murdo's journey is not, as suggested by Craig in relation to other twentieth-century Scottish writers, a 'double pattern [describing] the Lowland desire for re-entry into history [and] the Highland desire for re-entry into mythic pre-history'[28] – not, in other words, a desire to escape the present through the solace of an imagined past, which can only denote the a failure of history. Nor, for that matter, should we confuse Murdo's pan-historical visions with a trans-historical tendency, like Dark Mairi's in *Butcher's Broom*, to 'dissolve history into a higher pattern of meaning in which its individual

events are lost'.[29] If we recall MacColla's study of history through the medium of fiction, as illustrated in the first chapter of this thesis, we understand how Murdo's communion with nature is the metaphysical expression of an attempt to grasp Scotland's history in its distinguished moments. His engagement with the new social dynamic of Scotland is an attempt, in the end, to do the same.

What *The Albannach* shows is that it would be inaccurate to talk about the unaccountability or the failure of history in Scotland. In the novel, the intrusion of history is concrete and perceptible, even within the small community, as is made clear, for example, through Ian Beag's experiences in the First World War to which Murdo refers:

> What would his father look like when he was dead? He wouldn't take long to go to pieces. He looked a bit "high" already sometimes, if he had been lifting something. Blue and swollen like the bodies Iain Beag had seen in France, with the bellies of them blown out like so many balloons, and they letting gassy groans out of them. (*The Albannach*, p. 12)

For Cairns Craig, the extensive coverage of the First World War in Scottish fiction, as we see it in *The Albannach* or in novels such as Gibbon's *Sunset Song*, represents a paradigmatic shift in the (hitherto absent) history of Scotland:

> The First World War is the focus of so many of Scottish narratives because it is the moment when the historical is reintroduced into the historyless Scottish environment, but the historical in a terrifying and alienating form. Re-entering history is not benign or salvatory: it is terrible and destructive.[30]

However alienating, Iain Beag's tales force Murdo into an effective confrontation with history which signals, in turn, the recovery of history as a conditioning influence on the modern Scottish identity. This is shown, not only through the shattering effects of the war, but through the ambiguous role of the Gaels in the creation of the British Empire which, in Murdo's case, leads towards a redefinition

and recognition of Gaeldom as a 'centre', as well as source, of the contrasting states within and around Scotland.

The matter surfaces, appropriately enough, during a debate in Glasgow between members of a Gaelic society formed by students intent on gathering, as the narrator ironically puts it, 'for practising the English' (*The Albannach*, p. 146). One of them, Donald MacAskill, presents a paper illustrating 'The Contribution of the Gael to the Making of Empire':

> The sough of the high winds of the Isle of Lewis was from his mouth; and for his complacency, for his hair that would have put shame on a carrot and for his insolent up-pointing nose, Murdo took great dislike. For three-quarters of an hour it was that a Lewis-man had explored a corner of Canada, a Skyeman had found a river in Australia, a Lochaber man had given his name to a hill in New Zealand, a Mullman had crushed a marauding tribe on the frontiers of India, a Caithness man had become King of a South sea Island and condemned his subjects to death in the Gaelic (huge laughter), a Cowalman had fought the Zulus in Africa, an Atholl man had irrigated a bit of Egypt, a Badenoch man had found a microbe in Nigeria. Donald MacAskill, M. A., B.Sc. (Glasgow), to his peroration: The '45 and the efictions were the Providence of God. But for them the Highlanders would neffer haff entered into their heritage, the map would not pee cuffered with Highland names. (*The Albannach*, pp. 146-147)

MacAskill's enthusiastic reading of the Clearances as the historical event which increased the Scots' fortunes within the imperial politics of Great Britain reflects a view of history, repudiated by MacColla, which includes, among its most distinguishing claims, the 'necessary' and successful transformation of the 'colonised' into the 'colonisers'. As we have seen through *Clenched Fist*, MacColla condemns any historicist reading of history which endorses Progress as necessary and inevitable in the development of the 'historical process'. But, while MacAskill relies on the concepts of continuity and necessity to describe the impact of the Clearances on the present, Murdo, instead, suggests a dialectical understanding of the

Highland evictions which raises questions, not only on the role of the British Government, but on the passive reaction of the Highlanders themselves:

> Murdo was in a cold fury of indignation. He said he wished to disagree. They were orgies of rape and theft, of destruction and bloody murder. Any Highlander who gloried in them was a slave. Their "heritage" was a farce and a delusion. It was to clean the pots for the English. Their language was to die in two generations. They deserved it. They were assisting in their own annihilation. Their name would rightly stink in the nostrils of every honourable man until the end of time. (*The Albannach*, p. 147-148)

Murdo's interaction with MacAskill on the Highland evictions fuels his attempt to bring to the fore the dialectical, and somewhat controversial, qualities of the contemporary Gaelic world. As such, he is able to accept that Scotland's involvement or acquiescence in the Empire and its participation in the First World War have become part of its history – its modern history – so that, while they may contrast with or contradict the socio-ideological formations of the past, they are nevertheless part of the simultaneous, rather than successive,[31] web of events that constitute Scottish history. In the same way, the schisms between the Highlands and Lowlands or Gaelic and English do not undermine but create further dialogic shifts in the Scottish identity. As far as MacColla's understanding of Scottish history is concerned, there is no *ontological* difference between the Lowlands and Highlands;[32] any distinction between the two can only be referred to in geo-political or economic terms. The difference between Gaelic and English, meanwhile, is purely linguistic, whereas, ontologically, they interact, fusing a new social idiom which incorporates two opposing value systems within a heteroglossiac field of operation.

Above all, however, the historical analysis of the Clearances which emerges from the meeting[33] enables Murdo to redefine, and re-align, his personal relationship with his community. As Tom Scott suggests in an essay on Fionn MacColla, what 'is

implicit in *The Albannach* is that death in the communal tomb is the possibility of resurrection'.[34] Murdo's speech at the Gaelic society marks, almost cathartically, the beginning of a resurrection, where the personal and the communal coincide: 'the individual talent finds its salvation in the salvation of his community, in re-identification with it, and revitalising it'.[35] We can go as far as to say that Murdo's experience, from now on, abandons subjectivity in order to acquire purely 'national' characteristics, a move that reflects MacColla himself in his selfless determination to re-write Scotland's history as a nation among nations.

Notes

[1] MacColla, 'Mein Bumpf', *Essays on Fionn MacColla* (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1973), p. 13.
[2] Compton MacKenzie, 'Education in Scotland', *The Free Man Pamphlets*, no. 3, April 1933.
[3] Hugh MacDiarmid, *The Free Man*, 25/6/32, NLS, 265/20.
[4] MacColla, *The Albannach* (London: Souvenir Press, 1971), p. 191.
[5] MacColla, 'Scotland's share of guilt', *The Free Man*, 17.6. (1933).
[6] Andrew Monnickendam, 'Through the glass bleakly: *The Albannach* - Fionn MacColla's view of the Gaelic world' in Schwend J. and Drescher H. W. (eds.), *Scottish Studies - Studies in Scottish Fiction: Twentieth Century* (Frankfurt am Main; Bern; New York; Paris: Peter Lang, 1990), p. 308.
[7] Hugh MacDiarmid, *The Free Man*, 25/6/32.
[8] Ibid.
[9] I use this term within the frame of Bakhtin's theorisations on language in 'Discourse in the Novel': '...language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other... It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intentions, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention', Bakhtin M. M., 'Discourse in the Novel', Rivkin J. & Ryan M. (eds.), *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), p. 35.
[10] MacColla, *Too Long in this Condition*, p. 52.
[11] Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism – Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 123.
[12] Ibid., pp. 130-131.

[13] Viktor Durkacz, *The decline of the Celtic languages* (Edinburgh, 1983), p. 10, in C. Kidd, *British Identities*, p, 130.

[14] Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) p. 98.

[15] Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', p. 35.

[16] Ibid., p. 34.

[17] *The Albannach*, p. VII.

[18] Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel*, p. 114. MacMurray's 'heterocentricity', explains Craig, is a twofold notion: 'it is the fundamental ontological condition of the Self in its construction through Otherness, and, at a moral level, it is the condition in which we recognise and act, on a social and personal level, in full acknowledgement of this fundamental nature of our existence as selves, and therefore in awareness of the demands made on us to maintain the fundamentally communal structure of human life'.

[19] Ibid., p. 112.

[20] Ibid., p.114.

[21] Ibid.

[22] That is to say that MacColla was easily capable of writing in Scots, as in *Move Up, John*, or of incorporating Gaelic into his writing, as he has done on several occasions. He chooses English, however, to expose its chronic misuse among the community and, so, to give additional weight to the novel's satirical impact.

[23] Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel*, p. 81.

[24] See the first chapter of this thesis for a definition of Scotus' metaphysics and his influence over MacColla.

[25] MacColla, *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*, pp. 189-190.

[26] See Neil Gunn, 'The Landscape Inside', in *Landscape and Light: Essays by Neil M. Gunn* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), pp. 74-77.

[27] Neil Gunn, 'Landscape Inside', *Landscape and Light*, p. 74.

[28] Cairns Craig, *Out of History* (Edinburgh: Polygon Press, 1996), p. 60.

[29] Craig, *Out of History* p. 56.

[30] Ibid., p. 48.

[31] The distinction made here between the 'simultaneous' and 'successive' rendering of historical events refers to Thomas Carlyle's description in 'Essay on History'. See n. 34 in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

[32] See chapter two of this thesis where this issue is discussed in greater detail.

[33] In the second chapter of the present thesis, I discussed the bond, intimated by MacColla both in his essays and in his fiction, between the Clearances and the Anglicisation of the country.

[34] Tom Scott, 'A Note on the Albannach', *Essays on Fionn MacColla* (Thurso: Caithness Books, 1973), p. 67.

[35] Ibid., p. 66.

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