

# Notes on T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land' and Hugh MacDiarmid's 'A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle'

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## I

This paper sets out by making two assumptions. Firstly, that what most Anglophone literary commentators have called modernism represents only a reduced version of modernist aesthetics. The Anglo-American time-frame of about 1914-1928 is inadequate to tell the story of many of the world's other modernisms, which often had much more directly political aims, particularly those modernisms from colonies and ex-colonies. Secondly, since English Literature arose in part from a marginal eighteenth century adjustment to the standards of the British union, Scotland, more so than England, has acted as the field's lever, lending support during the Enlightenment and withdrawing it in the early twentieth century. These two assumptions are related: in the 1920s, the relationship between unionism and empire was given an a new urgency by Home Rule movements' leading to partial independence in 1921-22 in Ireland, since 1800 part of the union but administered more or less as a colony, and a hinge between ideas of 'empire' and ideas of 'home'. The two texts under discussion here, Eliot's 'The Waste Land' (1922) and MacDiarmid's 'A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle' (1926), were both published within five years of the Irish semi-independence. They take opposing, yet both modernist, positions on the loss of authority signalled by the beginning of the fall of Britain's colonies.

It is often noted these days how strongly colonial aspirations had been tied to the growing strength of the British union (perhaps most famously in Linda Colley's account, which nevertheless seriously under-represents socialist and insurgent activity (Colley 1996)). What is less often noted — though a number of scholars are headed in this direction — is that crises in the global reach of Anglophone culture were often linked to internal British 'Celtic' nationalism as it arose in the period roughly between 1870 and 1920. Ireland's decolonization, fudged and partial though it was, had been a long time coming, and had frequently clogged up the British parliamentary agenda during this period. And although Scotland had in some senses been especially complicit in the project of Anglophone imperial culture, the Irish Home Rule question also crystallized Home Rule ques-

tions in Scotland and Wales, particularly after the First World War provided a terrible denouement to empire. The years 1916–19 saw a rapid growth in class consciousness in Scotland *contra* the British war effort, particularly in Glasgow, a city which had previously been integral to imperialism (Devine 1999: 315). The resultant culture of Britain ‘against itself’, in both socialist and nationalist senses, still describes the political landscapes of Scotland and Wales today, as reflected in voting in the devolved parliamentary elections in 1999.

It was against this background of constitutional disturbance that the Anglophone version of modernism peaked in the early 1920s. Yet modernism understood in this way is curiously un-modern, working through chaos to find a buried ‘civility’, to borrow a Scottish Enlightenment term, or ‘tradition’, to borrow T.S. Eliot’s. The ways in which tradition-in-chaos represent Eliot’s core aesthetic have been well documented since ‘The Waste Land’s publication. More problematic is the key moment of Scottish modernism, MacDiarmid’s *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*’, published four years later and partly intended as a reply to Eliot. ‘A Drunk Man’ is paradoxical, both opposing Eliot’s strongly British will to order, and yet tending to replace it with alternative forms of order, shifting location and dialect but remaining standardized. MacDiarmid’s tendency to become entrapped by the very boundaries of English which he sought to escape, makes more sense if we look at how national language was equated with imperial culture during the period which preceded the events of the 1920s.

The late-nineteenth century period, when the Irish question finally clambered on to the agenda, had also been one of a relative disinterest in colonial activity, in part occasioned by a pared-down reading of Adam Smith’s free trade economics (originally a Scottish bid for American riches to be released from London monopolies (Smith 2000)). Since British readings of Smith, especially from the mid-nineteenth century, tended to downplay his insistence on welfare in favour of questions of profitability, colonies’ financial worthiness came into question increasingly from the 1850s and ‘60s, a time which saw little colonial expansion (Young 2001: 82–87). This rethinking of the role of empire ushered in an era in which arguments for British imperialism were based less on the possession of colonial territory than on the franchising of ‘English’ culture in each locality. Britain’s largest and most important colony, India, had already had its cultural infrastructure indexed to a highly canonical version of English Literature by the Indian Education Act of 1835 (see Viswanathan 1989) — intended to produce an ‘indigenous elite’ of Indian colonial bureaucrats, but increasingly presented as a ‘mission’ or ‘duty’ beyond profit — as in Kipling’s infamous 1897 formulation of leading ‘lesser breeds without the law’ (see Ashcroft and Griffiths 2000: 202–03). A replicable *cultural* standard, placeless and morally universal — and iro-

Notes on T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land' and Hugh MacDiarmid's 'A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle' nically pioneered by Smith's linguistic adaptation to union in *Lectures on Rhetoric* (1748–51 in Edinburgh, 1751–63 in Glasgow) — reduced the need for costly colonial possessions, and made maintenance of empire seem reasonable even to anti-colonials within the Liberal Party, such as those following William Gladstone. Thus by the 1920s, claims for Home Rule for Anglophone nations presented to the British parliament were almost automatically for 'Home Rule within empire' (as reflected in the compromise solution of 'British Commonwealth', to which much of the former empire remains allied today). Empire came to be understood in an increasingly culturalist sense, as a shared bond transcending local autonomies. In practice, this shared bond was an assumption of common behaviour transmitted by language itself.

Thus in 1868 when Charles Dilke (later Liberal MP) published *Greater Britain*, a record of having 'followed England round the world', he argued that English language represented a metaphor via which the empire could remain unified: although 'climate, soil, manners of life, mixture with other peoples, had modified the blood', nevertheless 'in essentials the race was always one' (Dilke 1894: vii). Dilke spells out the sameness-indifference of the English speaking world, redefining this body as a 'Greater Britain', superseding local place: 'If two small islands are by courtesy styled "Great", America, Australia, India, must form a "Greater Britain"' (Dilke 1894: viii). Dilke's influential redefinition of people as language helps us understand why 1920s Scottish nationalists like MacDiarmid so often allowed claims for a separate language to collapse into the already thoroughly discredited category of 'race', even when trying to describe a post-British alternative. By 1920, language had become *the* term of cultural nationalism. Or in the terms of Benedict Anderson's influential claim in *Imagined Communities* that European nations were built on integrative print cultures (Anderson 1983), for most of the people of Greater Britain, whose speech did not correspond to its written standards, establishing a written 'language' became indistinguishable from establishing a nation.

Also noting the significance of Anderson in this context, Robert Young has described Dilke's connection to John Seeley's 1883 series of lectures *The Expansion of England*. Not mentioned by Young, however, is the way in which Seeley also seems to view 'Highland' Britain, an area which 'gave us trouble in the northern part of our own island' (Seeley 1892: 47), as part of an imperial federation sharing an Anglophone culture, and sliding under the umbrella term 'English'. In one of the most telling passages of the book, Seeley indicates that the cultural federation of member regions works the same way both inside and outside the union: 'If Greater Britain in the full sense of the phrase really existed, Canada and Australia would be to us as Kent and Cornwall' (63). Seeley's equation of the margins of Britain to the margins of empire gathered speed between the 1870s and the 1910s be-

cause of the Irish question, and conversely, especially under the encouragement of the lukewarm pro-Home Rule Prime Minister Gladstone, nationalist sentiment in general grew rapidly. In the 1885 election in Scotland only 27 unionist MPs were returned from all parties (Hutchinson 1985 : 154 ; Smout 1997 : 253). When the Liberal party rallied against the more pro-Home Rule Labour movement in the late 1900s, it was nevertheless with a sense that it could no longer persuade the working-class and the young back to full unionism — a sense prescient of today's identities, these groups tending to feel least British (Hutchinson 1985 : 223 ; cf. Paterson et al 2001 : 89–90). After the 1918 Reform Act virtually tripled the electorate and the Scottish Labour Party (SLP) became a serious force, the question of Home Rule proved as divisive for the Labour movement as it had for the Liberal Party. The SLP became a strongly pro-Home Rule voice in the movement, at times taking Irish republicanism as a model, and mobilising an Irish immigrant vote. In January 1919 the trade unionists known as the 'Red Clydesiders' shocked Westminster by attempting to declare a socialist republic in George Square, Glasgow's main square (e. g. Smout 1997 : 259). Thereafter there ensued a centrist purging of the British Labour movement on the one hand, and on the other, a break-off of discontented Home Rulers leading to the set-up in 1925 of Plaid Cymru (Welsh Nationalists), and in 1927 of the National Party of Scotland, which became from 1934 today's Scottish National Party (SNP).

The Irish/ colonial question had thus, as John Kendle says, 'raised key concerns about the relationship between the Celtic fringe and the centre of power in London and how that linkage could be ameliorated and preserved' (Kendle 1997 : 78). This 'amelioration', the adaptations of 'English' culture — understood in a nebulous linguistic sense — to its waning grip over Greater Britain, formed the background to Eliot's 1922 poem 'The Waste Land'. Eliot's dry, barren, infertile London has lost not a local community, not even an English community in the sense of England as nation, but its centrality to the Dilke-Seeley version of Anglophone Greater British culture. When Eliot forlornly listens for a traditional order of English, he finds it in echoes of canons which each individual poet must work to discern under the barren dust, but which have grown increasingly faint. In this sense, if 'The Waste Land' represents a key text of modernism, then it is probably better to think of modernism as the end of an era, rather than as the beginning of one.

## II

Even today, many Anglo-American critics, despite the very real and lasting political aims of many of the world's modernists (for example in Latin America, the Soviet Union and the Caribbean), commit themselves to the Anglo-American model of the 'men of 1914' — Eliot, Pound, Joyce, and Lewis. This four's aesthetics are reputed to have, like a disciplinarian schoolmaster, delivered a sharp rethinking, primarily aesthetic and quickly

Notes on T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land' and Hugh MacDiarmid's 'A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle' over: by about 1930 English critics were rushing to proclaim the end of the modernist movement and recoup its gains, reducing it to a canon of a few key figures. As early as 1928, Robert Graves and Laura Riding's anthology *Survey of Modernist Poetry* was intended as a retrospective (cf. Longenbach 1999: 101); in 1932 F.R. Leavis's *New Bearings in English Poetry* — the seminal New Critical account — hastily historicised Eliot's discernment of cultural 'loss' as a canonical fact on the level of Shakespeare, Milton, and Shelley (Leavis 1960).

Post-war accounts, most notably that of Frank Kermode, began to correctly locate Eliot-Pound modernism within an older Romantic ideal of poetic dissociation of sensibility, or detachment of feeling from the social (Kermode 1957; Davie 1962). Insofar as they rewrote literary history, though, accounts of this period nevertheless usually stopped at either pitting the influence of one figure against another, or adding more English or American figures as alternatives (such as previously ignored women and black writers: there has since been a slow recognition that Harlem Renaissance poets were often formally much more challenging than most canonical modernists (see Gates 1989; Hutchinson 1995)). The Anglo-American squeeze on modernist poetry stresses Eliot's reaction to mass culture in a 'reduced aesthetic', which protects poetry from a hostile society by reducing it to small and perfect images — in its extreme form, imagism. Ironically though — given Eliot's typically 'men of 1914' concern in 'The Waste Land' to place himself as American in a European heritage of painterly modernism — many later American poets and critics have ignored Eliot and, increasingly, Pound. Many indeed have turned back to William Carlos Williams, a figure who, *contra* Eliot, tied his aesthetics to places far from 'unreal', particularly his strikingly un-glamorous home town of Paterson, New Jersey (Williams 1983; see Silliman 1986). Strongly aware of his poetry's materiality and placedness, Williams later became admired for his accentuation of the tension between rhythm (aural) and lineation (spatial), and thus of physical arrangement, contrary to the Greater British reliance on a tradition transcending place, or a universal 'music of poetry'.

Similarly, although 'The Waste Land' is usually seen as inaugurating an aesthetics of interruption and disturbance, a look at the criticism of the 1920s shows how Eliot in practice triggered an intellectual move towards 'understanding', of reconstructing an order within which to render the poem readable. An early schematization is that of December 1922 in *Dial*, the magazine which awarded Eliot a prize of \$2000 and reprinted 'The Waste Land' after its first appearance in the first *Criterion*; here Edmund Wilson painstakingly explicates the 'universal' rituals of fertility which for Eliot, via Jessie Weston, lead to the Holy Grail legend. Especially in its last two sections, 'The Waste Land' associates cultural death with dryness, drought, and infertility:

Here is no water but only rock  
Rock and no water and the sandy road  
The road winding above among the mountains  
Which are mountains of rock without water  
If there were water we should stop and drink  
Amongst the rock one cannot stop or think  
Sweat is dry and feet are in the sand  
If there were only water amongst the rock  
Dead mountain mouth of carious teeth that cannot spit  
Here one can neither stand nor lie nor sit  
There is not even silence in the mountains  
But dry sterile thunder without rain  
There is not even solitude in the mountains  
But red sullen faces sneer and snarl  
From doors of mudcracked houses (Eliot 1950 331–345; references to the poem  
are to *line numbers*).

This loss over control of water in ‘The Waste Land’s scheme of civilizations strongly recalls the loss of a seabound empire, a kingdom of ‘Oceana’, as another classic ‘Greater Britain’ account had it (Froude 1886). The withering of Greater Britain’s Anglophone standards is also the withering of Britannia’s ability to ‘rule the waves’, as it was put in the second line of the 1740 imperial anthem (ironically written by the Scot James Thomson). In ‘The Waste Land’, as in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902), all culture flows, or fails to flow, from the Thames. Wilson takes up the water metaphor to suggest that Eliot had not only rippled the surface but stained the ‘sea’ of modern poetry, which would, in its Anglophone form, become obsessed with protection against cultural loss (Wilson 1982: 139).

Wilson’s ‘explanatory’ move, as that of later 1920s critics (at least those critics who did not simply claim not to understand the poem) had already been provided with a model in the poem itself, which took the dubious step of footnoting its own allusions, thus simultaneously occupying poetic and critical ground. The primary structuring principles claimed by Eliot himself originate in Weston’s *From Ritual To Romance* and from J.G. Frazer’s comparative-anthropological study *The Golden Bough*. These trans-historical models of the universal progress of all societies allow Eliot to see the London ‘crowd’ around him as unrooted and only comprehensible when returned to a longer narrative of rising and falling civilization. Indeed the background of a ‘crowd’ onto which civilization is overlaid, and into which civilization is in danger of collapsing, reflects an Anglo-British and Hobbe-

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sian idea of an originary 'state of anarchy' prevented by sovereignty (cf. Hobbes 1985). Moreover in Eliot's Spenglerian scheme, the phase of decay which great European cities have reached — 'Falling towers/Jerusalem Athens Alexandria/Vienna London/Unreal' (374–77) — actually corresponds to 'civilization', a phase which follows directly after full maturity. Of course what is decaying is not society as such (on the contrary, ideas of 'society' accompany modernization), nor even Europe, but European empires — Greater Britain's English rather than England's English. Thus we should be careful not to confuse this schematization with 'racism': Greater British ethnocentrism is more fundamental than any given 'racial' prejudice, since its tradition is passed down within *de facto* groups which are impervious to all social change other than that described as universal. The Anglophone Greater Britain of the later imperial phase had become precisely such a model of this cultural universality, spread across many localities.

For Eliot, since maintenance of this tradition had become the duty of chosen individuals, the position of the poet remained intact and discrete. Three years earlier (1919), his 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' had overtly moved poetry away from the personal, yet done so in an individualistic terminology of the responsibilities of 'the poet' to an 'inner voice' issuing from 'Europe — the mind of his own country' (Eliot 1975: 39). The artist's responsibility was thus to maintain and help this critical tradition 'adjust' to threatening circumstances, rather than entering into an open-ended dialogue with society: 'The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole *existing* order must be, if ever so slightly, altered' (38). Language had become divorced from social communication; or rather, language was an order always preceding social communication. The pure form of 'music', in particular, represents an absolute standard of language free from the risks of writing, to be taken up by the poet — 'Sweet Thames, run softly, till I end my song' (Eliot 1950: 176). Occupying something like the position that logic would occupy for Wittgenstein, music was for Eliot a metaphysical category which ordered content, but itself remained free of any dangerously social hint of content. So when voices can be heard in the cultural desert, they are unlinguistic and dry, 'singing out of empty cisterns and exhausted wells' (385).

### III

While the critical fuss over 'The Waste Land' was still fairly warm, Hugh MacDiarmid attempted to answer its standardizing tendencies with an explicitly dialectical method, necessarily open-ended and avoiding conclusions. 'Progress', in this marxist description — not of Eliot's unified Anglo-Britain, but of MacDiarmid's Scotland, a country of 'contrair qualities' — is redefined as a productive disjunction of ideas and things, language and content. The poem's speaker does not 'adjust' tradition, but forces a clash of tradition and ex-

perience in order to:

begin

Wi what's still deemed Scots and the folk expect,  
And spire up syne by visible degrees [then rise up]  
To heichts whereo the fules hae never recked.

But aince I get them there I'll whummlle them [once] [confound]  
And souse the craturs in the nether deeps [drown] [creatures]

(MacDiarmid 1985: 83; references are to *page numbers*).

The poetic voice here arises from the apparently incommensurate opposites of 'heichts' and 'deeps' (high culture and experience), and does not finally occupy either. Thus the growth of the poetic voice is 'A mongrel growth, jumble o disproportions,/ Whirlin in its incredible contortions' (116). Mindful of 'The Waste Land', 'A Drunk Man' shows a parodically excessive mix of narratives, tales and situations, and also rapidly moves between addressees, including the speaker's wife, Dostoevski, and Robert Burns (whom he sees as having disappeared into English Romanticism and been dragged into imperial service). Matching 'The Waste Land's unpredictable shifts of versification, MacDairmid sets out in the aggressively 'native' ABAB ballad form, and wanders into an AABB couplet form, irregularly versed and frequently containing triplets (and many strained rhymes). But where Eliot separates, within one structure, a fantasy of a sterile desert and the definite city of London, MacDiarmid throws together 'illusion' and 'conclusion' in a way in which the two can never finally be reconciled:

Hauf his soul a Scot maun use [must]  
Indulgin in illusions,  
And hauf in gettin rid o them  
And comin to conclusions  
Wi the demoralisin dearth  
O onything worth while on Earth (157).

The most sustained and sophisticated claims for this process of dialectic have come from Alan Riach (later editor of the definitive multi-volume edition, published by Carcanet), who convincingly shows a productive fluctuation in MacDiarmid's narrative 'I' (Riach 1991). The dialectical destruction of any pre-given 'I' would indeed later be revealed as an underground current of Scottish thought, one closely resembling continental philosophy, and a world away from the New Criticism and logical positivism of the last phase



Notes on T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land' and Hugh MacDiarmid's 'A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle' of Greater Britain (cf. Macmurray 1969, Davie 1981, Broadie 1990, Craig 1996).

Some of the burden of dialectic falls on the thistle itself, which is used somewhat as Yeats used the rose, as a floating symbol capable of taking on the properties of the thing it describes. For MacDiarmid the thistle is (following G. Gregory Smith), usefully 'rude' (Smith 1919: 2), while the problem of the rose, as the national flower of England (and more clearly taken up by Eliot in 'Four Quartets') is its tendency to become 'universal': 'A rose loup't oot and grew, until/It was ten times the size/O ony rose the thistle afore/Hed heistet [hoisted] to the skies' (120). Here MacDiarmid attempts to return the rose to its un-British impurity, the original 'English' of England, by entangling it with the thistle — 'Syne the rose shivelled suddenly/As a balloon is burst; /The thistle was a ghaishtly stick, /As gin it had been curst' (121). Thus contrary to Eliot's question of individual adjustment to pre-existing tradition, MacDiarmid's question is of whether the nation can be made to adapt to lived experience, whether it is 'big enough to be/A symbol o that force in me' (145). In contrast to the rose which has slipped over into Greater Britain as a whole, the thistle represents a 'dour provincial thocht [thought]' (122), resisting universals and providing fuel for Robert Crawford's powerful case that modernism, counter the Pound-Eliot tradition, arose from a context of provincialism, or place-specificity (Crawford 2000: 216-270).

Moreover against the infertile dryness of Eliot's London — 'The wasted scam that dries like starch/And pooders aff' (MacDiarmid 1985: 123) — MacDiarmid images his dialectical method as drunkenness (a neat poetic trick, since it allows him to deny responsibility for the speaker's excesses while controlling thematic flow). Drink indeed is a hyperbolic contrary to the 'drought' of 'The Waste Land' — 'fu" (full, or drunk) in opposition to empty or dry. 'Drouth' can mean both dryness in terms of desire for human contact, and, more colloquially, desire for alcohol. MacDiarmid establishes that the quenching of thirst, in both its meanings, is an everyday and legitimate activity of the people making up the crowds which were for Eliot simply faceless. Drunkenness moreover triggers a rambling discussion of sexuality and childbirth, which provides a thematic opposition to Eliot's visions of infertility.

However as well as this slightly frantic and sometimes Poundian impulse to throw together themes and traditions without any need for resolution, 'A Drunk Man' also engages directly with working-class politics of the time, referencing the very contemporary General Strike of 1926, and generally showing how the waning of Greater Britain was also a move back towards community. For MacDiarmid, Eliot had missed the social situation while seeming to provide a commentary on it; instead of going to the centre of Gre-

ater Britain, he should 'hae come/To Scotland here' (94). Within the context of 1920s nationalisms, this modernism's engagement with the social is indeed more 'modern' than that of Eliot, with its double context of the local and the post-British — the socialist and the nationalist. Indeed one co-founder of the National Party of Scotland with Hugh MacDiarmid in 1927, R.B. Cunninghame Graham, had also been a co-founder of the SLP in 1888, and a key British native informant for Joseph Conrad (cf. Crawford 2000 : 240). The author of *Heart of Darkness* thus had in his Scottish friend a telling indicator of the double crack growing within Greater Britain; indeed, a case could be made that much of the thematics of 'The Waste Land' is a toned-down version of ambivalence already present in *Heart of Darkness*, now often viewed as a founding anti-imperial text.

#### IV

However, we can raise two major related reasons why MacDiarmid's answer to 'The Waste Land' does not exceed Eliot's poem in the way that he hopes, both of which return us to the Greater British context of Anglophone culture as race. The first is that MacDiarmid's readerly 'I', although persuasively and influentially explicated by Alan Riach and G. E. Davie, is often not really a negotiation between self and society. The poem is not dramatic in the sense of being driven by motives specific to character, but is rather a kind of writerly manifesto with a fairly rigid basis for what can constitute national resistance. *Both* Eliot and MacDiarmid thus turn to the 'reduced aesthetic' of poetry as protection from the mongrelized crowds around them. In Eliot's case, this had rendered the crowds of Britain's biggest city a faceless mass; in MacDiarmid's case, Scotland's biggest city, Glasgow, was frequently put under suspicion as 'losing' an earlier and more legitimate Scottish tradition. Thus both Glasgow and Edinburgh are like like 'ploomen [ploughmen] in a pub, /They want to hear o naething/But their ain foul hubbub' (108). This attack on urban noise is ironic considering MacDiarmid's marxist politics, and the fact that Glasgow had come closer than any other British city to revolution in 1919.

Despite its dialectical intentions, 'A Drunk Man' offers no serious counter-voice to this Eliotic retreat from city to tradition: where Eliot imagines the un-dissociated sensibilities of Shakespeare and Kyd without ethnic interruption, so MacDiarmid's speaker is equally certain that 'Scots' is really found in Burns and is only abused abroad. This is quite different from the techniques of later dialect writers like James Kelman, who transgresses dialects and persons — first, second, and third — while showing an acute awareness of how these linguistic and subjective boundaries define British national/class politics. Of this there is as yet no sign in MacDiarmid, yet between MacDiarmid's rediscovery in the 1950s and the more serious criticisms of the 1980s, the chilling idea of a Scottish 'soul' which opens 'A Drunk Man' was allowed to go relatively unchallenged. Moreover MacDiarmid's

Eliotic idea of the poet (meaning himself) as guarantor of culture, became stronger rather than weaker even as the empire broke up. Like Eliot and Pound, MacDiarmid increasingly became 'the man behind the poetry', gathering disparate voices and arranging them into the standard form enabled by his artificial language, 'Scots'. Often strongly biographical and explanatory, critical appraisals constituted a mini-industry between the '50s and '80s, in books produced by, amongst others, Duncan Glen, George Bruce, Roderick Watson, and Nancy Gish; 'A Drunk Man' remained, for this period, canonically untouchable. MacDiarmid criticism until recently thus fitted the man into the a wider Scottish Renaissance as easily as English critics fitted Eliot into New Criticism, the two figures arranging knowledges according to an 'inner voice' arising from a linguistic standard.

The second problem, correspondingly, is linguistic: despite a grammar, and even a spelling, that is clearly dependent on Standard English, MacDiarmid's conversion to Scots in his early lyrics of 1921-22 (coincident with *The Waste Land*), also begins a slow stiffening of his ideas about what constitutes real 'Scots'. Like the 'English' of Greater Britain, the language called 'Scots' slides uneasily to and from the 'people' also called 'Scots'. Correspondingly, 'Scots' shadows English in its reliance on written standards which have little to do with spoken dialect. Very few Scots were using words like 'whummlle' and 'maun' even in the 1920s; MacDiarmid thus out-Eliots Eliot, replacing a minority dialect (Standard English) with a non-existent dialect — a move which does not sit comfortably with the democratizing voice of Robert Burns.

So what the unpacking of the Greater Britain context opens up is the extent to which linguistic variants were already catered for within the British empire redefined as shared Anglophone culture, whether or not these other varieties conceived of themselves as a 'language'. Eliot at times indeed seems to be inviting variants to 'English' to strengthen English as a whole. In one chapter of his 'Notes Towards a Definition of Culture' (1948/1962) dedicated to the culture of the 'region', Eliot stresses the role of regional varieties in maintaining the whole:

The Englishman, for instance, does not ordinarily think of England as a 'region' in the way that a Scottish or a Welsh national can think of Scotland or Wales; and as it is not made clear that his interests are also involved, his sympathies are not enlisted. Thus the Englishman may identify his own interests with a tendency to obliterate local and racial distinctions, which is as harmful to his own culture as to those of his neighbours (Eliot 1962: 53).

Here Eliot seems to put his finger on the serious problem of England's need to provincial-

ize, but soon collapses back into a Greater British framework which sees other Anglophone nations ('satellite cultures') as supporting, indeed as of 'great advantage' to the standard (55). This standard is again made nebulous by the extraordinary conflation, within a mere six lines, of the four entirely different terms "region", 'national', 'racial', and 'culture'. By this time — 1948 — it was already far too late for such a sliding terminology; India/ Pakistan was independent and the Greater British game was definitely up. Eliot's 'Notes Towards a Definition of Culture' indeed possibly represents the last major work of New Criticism. MacDiarmid's time, on the other hand, was yet to come: much of his earlier work was not published until the late 1950s, and the SNP which he helped to found began to enjoy serious success from 1967. Yet what remains to be done is to disentangle MacDiarmid's national metaphors from those which already had a ghostly presence in Greater Britain, and which are simply a repetition of national variants within empire. This critical task has only just begun.

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