‘Hauntings of Celticism’: Fionn Mac Colla and the Myth of History

Scott Lyall

In *Literature & History* 23.2 (Autumn 2014), 51−66.

Abstract

Fionn Mac Colla’s ideas of history can be characterised as postcolonial in their critique of historical determinism, Cartesian dualism and Whig progressivism. He utilises his theories, which encompass the psychological implications for individuals and nations of historical deficit, to oppose Scottish Reformation doctrine and the ostensible schisms of Scottish history, particularly the racial polarities promoted through Arnoldian Celticism. Mac Colla seeks to unify what he perceives as a divided Scottish history and identity through the adoption of Thomist religious philosophy.

Keywords

Fionn Mac Colla; Celticism; Historicism; Matthew Arnold; Scottish Renaissance; postcolonial

The work of Scottish novelist Fionn Mac Colla (1906−75) is often viewed in terms of failure and frustration, the inability to achieve an *oeuvre*. Critics have tended to characterise his attack on the Scottish Reformation as extremist and idiosyncratic, personalising their judgements and so isolating Mac Colla from his literary and historical context in the Scottish Renaissance movement of the 1920s to 1940s, and limiting our recognition of his current relevance. Alan Bold comments that Mac Colla ‘is the artist as moralist, aware that his is an unfashionable approach to fiction’.[1] For Roderick Watson, Mac Colla was ‘a flamboyant and unhappy personality whose real gift for vivid writing was fuelled and ultimately

overwhelmed by his own philosophical obsessions'.[2] J. B. Caird, writing in the 1970s, alludes to Mac Colla's 'limited output' leading to 'critical neglect'.[3] More recently, Margery Palmer McCulloch, while stretching our understanding of what Modernism, and a Scottish Modernism, might be, concentrates mostly on the canonical figures (in a Scottish context, at any rate) of Hugh MacDiarmid, Edwin Muir, Neil M. Gunn and Lewis Grassic Gibbon, with only passing references to Mac Colla.[4] Mac Colla is critically marginalised due to his obsession with Scotland's Calvinist past, and the adjectives used to describe his work are often as negative as his assessment of the Reformation is adjudged to be. However, utilising a postcolonial framework, we now have the tools to examine Mac Colla's ideas of history, situating him as an anti-colonial writer with contemporary theoretical resonance. In opposition to Whig history,[5] Mac Colla wished to reclaim Scotland as Celtic. However, one factor frustrating a Scots Renaissance was the discursive power of Arnoldian Celticism, an informing principle behind the Celtic Twilight of the late-nineteenth, early-twentieth century.

Celticism as Colonisation

> [L]et us consider that of the shrunken and diminished remains of this great primitive race, all, with one insignificant exception, belongs to the English empire; only Brittany is not ours; we have Ireland, the Scotch Highlands, Wales, the Isle of Man, Cornwall.[6]

Matthew Arnold claims that *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867) should be read as 'a message of peace to Ireland' (181) at a time of civil disturbance in Ireland and England. However, Arnold's contention that the Celtic lands of Britain are owned by 'the English empire' encapsulates the very imperialist hubris that the participants of the 1867 Fenian Rising were rebelling against.[7] Arnold was 'painfully struck' by the 'profound feeling of

aversion and severance from the English' manifested in those 'many communications from Welshmen and Irishmen' (xii) who had read his essays on Celtic literature and character as they first appeared in the *Cornhill Magazine*. Unperturbed by this response, Arnold advises 'the Celtic members of this empire . . . that they too have to transform themselves' for 'they are inextricably bound up with us' (xvii). The racialism of Arnold's argument is illustrated in his discrimination of 'our European nature' from 'the Semitic bent' (21), and in the common 'Indo-Europeanism' (23) shared by Celt and Saxon. For Arnold the 'English genius' is characterised 'by *energy with honesty*', the Germanic by '*steadiness with honesty*' (97), and the Celt by '*Sentiment*' (100; emphases in original). Influenced by Ernest Renan's 'La poésie des races celtiques' (1854), and following Henri Martin's definition in his *Histoire de France*, Arnold infamously sees the Celt as '*always ready to react against the despotism of fact*' because of a lack of 'balance, measure, and patience' (102; emphasis in original). The Celts' 'want of sanity and steadfastness', their mercurial and poetic nature, means they are doomed to be deficient in the art of statecraft:

> The skilful and resolute appliance of means to ends which is needed both to make progress in material civilisation, and also to form powerful States, is just what the Celt has least turn for (105).

On the Study of Celtic Literature is Arnold's attempt to delineate the Celtic character the better to assimilate and suppress such characteristics both within the English character, which contains 'hauntings of Celticism' (134), and within the body politic of the British State. While it is now more possible to know the Celt through 'the strengthening in us of the scientific sense generally', Arnold argues that 'the political and social Celtisation of which certain enthusiasts dream' (23) is neither desirable nor possible. This 'scientific sense' is

actually the ethnographer's colonising gaze: Arnold 'was the consummate surveyor, the Celt the consummately surveyed'.[8] Inherent to Celticism is the same power/knowledge symbiosis at work in Said's Orientalism. Arnold's Celticism is ultimately a means of control, and the Celt is an anachronism in a modernity that Arnold connotes with England and the centralised British State. The Celt, for the Celticist, is vanquished, and Celtic cultures are vanishing.

Arnold's views reflect what Laura O'Connor identifies as 'the Victorian dogma that the providential spread of English is inextricable from the onward march of progress'.[9] This progressive, Whig view of history marginalises the Celtic cultures 'into a Celtic Fringe that recedes into the distant mists of a faraway place and a once-upon-a-time mythic space', while 'English culture is here and now'.[10] Addressing the prospects of Welsh linguistic differentiation, Arnold believes that

> The fusion of all the inhabitants of these islands into one homogeneous, English-speaking whole, the breaking down of barriers between us, the swallowing up of separate provincial nationalities, is a consummation to which the natural course of things irresistibly tends; it is a necessity of what is called modern civilisation, and modern civilisation is a real, legitimate force; the change must come, and its accomplishment is a mere affair of time. The sooner the Welsh language disappears as an instrument of the practical political, social life of Wales, the better; the better for England, the better for Wales itself (12).

Scotland, or rather, Lowland Scotland, is barely mentioned in *On the Study of Celtic Literature*. For Arnold only 'the Scotch Highlands' are Celtic; Lowland Scotland has the same racial stock as England. 'As a representation of Scottish ethnicity it has limited accuracy', contends Murray Pittock; nonetheless,

> The idea of a Scotland ethnically divided between Celt and Teuton, or more complicatedly, Celt, Pict (or Picto-German) and Teuton, still has an afterlife in internal and external perceptions of the country.[11]

The internal division of Scotland along racial lines facilitated the Britishing of Scotland: the Highlands could at once be cast as barbarian, wild and different, a place of romance and tourism (the Highland Games began in 1867); ambitious Scots could conform to the material and political dictates of the empire; and the English could feel safe in the assumption that, unlike recalcitrant Ireland, at least part of Scotland was securely British. The 'hauntings of Celticism' Arnold discerned in the English, fundamentally 'a Germanic people' (134), would become too a mere ghostly presence in the makeup of the Scots.

Arnoldian Celticism is heavily present in the Celtic cultural revival of the late nineteenth-, early-twentieth century. William Sharp, in the Introduction to *Lyra Celtica* (1896), writes of Arnold's 'beautiful essay on Celtic Literature, so superficial in its knowledge . . . but informed by so keen and fine an interpretative spirit'.[12] Sharp claims that 'there is a touch of melancholy, a "cry of the weary", pervading the spirit of the Celt', epitomised by Ossianic tragic failure.[13] That the Celt has been feminised by Arnold's essentialist criteria is illustrated by Sharp's adoption of the literary pseudonym Fiona Macleod, and there is arguably little to trouble British metropolitan dominance in Sharp's equation of Celtic Twilight mysticism and Arnoldian Celticism, and his call to 'the *Anglo*-Celtic peoples' to pick up the fallen Celtic banner.[14] Sharp's *Lyra Celtica* 'emphasizes Celtic cultural renewal, while taking care to place it in an Arnoldian landscape of Britishness'.[15] W. B. Yeats, himself of the Anglo-Irish and friends with Macleod/Sharp – Yeats described Macleod in 1898 as the 'real voice of the Celt'[16] – would adopt a more sceptical and nuanced

response to the Celticism of Renan and Arnold in his 1897 essay 'The Celtic Element in Literature':

> Though I do not think any of us who write about Ireland have built any argument upon them, it is well to consider them a little, and see where they are helpful and where they are hurtful. If we do not, we may go mad some day, and the enemy root up our rose-garden and plant a cabbage-garden instead.[17]

While Yeats to some extent played the professional Celt early in his career, and Celticist lyrics such as 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' and the folklore collection *The Celtic Twilight* (1893) would remain among his most popular work, he could see that, if thoroughly internalised, the Celticism espoused by the likes of Arnold could lead only to further provincialisation and a cultural kailyard.

Renaissance and Resistance

The Celticist fostering of a racial Highland Line in Scotland between Celt and Teuton is apparent in the dual identities of some of the main protagonists of the Scottish Renaissance of the early twentieth century, particularly Christopher Murray Grieve/'Hugh MacDiarmid' and Thomas Macdonald/'Fionn Mac Colla'. Other writers of the period, such as Neil M. Gunn/'Dane McNeil' and James Leslie Mitchell/'Lewis Grassic Gibbon', would also use pennames, although of less evident Celtic lineage, a point especially true of Gibbon, who disliked what he termed the 'uncivilisable' Kelts.[18] These literary pseudonyms were adopted in each case in order that the writer should sound more Scottish, and, in the case of MacDiarmid and Mac Colla, more Celtic. Despite being a non-Gaelic-speaking Scottish Borderer, MacDiarmid refers to his 'Gaelic pseudonym',[19] and claims that Scotland is 'a

Gaelic country', and that a Scottish Renaissance could only come to full fruition and Scots 'produce a major literature . . . by resuming and renewing the traditions of our ancient Gaelic heritage'.[20] MacDiarmid dedicated to Mac Colla the poem 'Coronach for the End of the World', which was written in 1933, only a year after the publication of Mac Colla's *The Albannach*, a novel praised by MacDiarmid as 'that remarkable study of our lost Gaelic background, which perhaps is the most radical product of the whole Scots Renaissance Movement to date'.[21] Mac Colla claims that *The Albannach* 'was the first novel to treat life in the Gaidhealtachd [the Gaelic-speaking areas of the Scottish Highlands and islands] in a realistic manner', as opposed to the '*authentic*' but romantic portrayal by such as Neil Munro.[22] Mac Colla neglects to mention Neil Gunn, who by 1932 had already published several novels depicting Highland life, such as *The Lost Glen* (1928, 1932), which, similarly to *The Albannach*, follows its main protagonist, Ewan Macleod, as he returns home in failure from university. McCulloch sees Gunn's early work as 'novels of Highland decline' that explore the verisimilitude of Celticism.[23] Significantly, in the later epic novel *The Silver Darlings* (1941), in which Gunn seeks to transcend the fey Celtic Twilight, he names his hero Finn, a derivative of Fionn.

Macdonald's alias certainly has Celticist overtones of racial, national and personal division. This is particularly true of the name Fionn, which in Scots is Fingal, father of Ossian. Arnold's epigraph to *On the Study of Celtic Literature* is from Macpherson's *Ossian*, 'They went forth to the war, but they always fell' (xiv), a quotation, in Arnold's hands, signifying the conquering of the brave but hapless Celt. But the choice of Mac Colla as a pseudonym, like that of MacDiarmid, actually signifies the wish to reject's Arnold's ideological schema and promote unity on all the aforementioned levels, especially the political unification of Scotland in the cause of national independence. 'Fionn Mac Colla' is in fact a rebellious counterblast against a unionist Celticism that has facilitated the

dismembering and pacification of Celtic cultures. Cairns Craig points to the 'pan-Celticism' of the likes of MacDiarmid and Gunn, and writes that 'Celticism linked all of the arts in Scotland in the 1930s and 1940s'.[24] But while the Celticism of the Scottish Renaissance shares facets of the Celtic Twilight of Fiona Macleod that Craig claims inspired the Irish and Scottish revivals, it is ultimately a resistance to Arnoldian Celticism; notably in that 'Fionn Mac Colla' also symbolises a re-Gaelicisation of Scottish culture and an acknowledgement of the shared cultural heritage of Ireland and Scotland. Of Colla, William F. Skene tells us: 'In the fourth century before Christ the three Collas play a great part in the mythic history of Ireland, and are likewise connected with a supposed settlement in Scotland.'[25] Fionn and his followers the *fianna* are mythic Irish warriors appearing in the *fiannaíocht* (Fenian, or Ossianic Cycle):

> Manuscript evidence of Scots Gaelic *fian* lore, traditionally ascribed to Fionn/Fingal's son, Oisín/Ossian, extends back to the twelfth century and the Irish collection *Acallam na Senorach* (*The Colloquy of the Ancients*), whose contents can be traced still farther to the seventh.[26]

In adopting the name Fionn Mac Colla, Macdonald is remaking himself as he seeks to make Scotland anew by looking to the nation's forgotten Celtic past. His claim of ancient autochthonous lineage and the alignment of his personality and his literary and cultural aims with the original Fenians is a move that lays the mythic foundation for a programme of modern cultural and political renewal. Mac Colla, writing largely of the Scottish Highlands and the fate of Gaelic civilisation, is an anti-colonial writer who sees Scotland, in particular the Highland region, as an 'internal colony' of the Great British State.[27] Mac Colla's politico-

aesthetic, like much of that of the modern Scottish Renaissance, repudiates the imperial direction of history.

History as Myth

Mac Colla gives his own post-factum reply to Arnold's monoglot wish to see the extinction of the Welsh language in his 1933 article 'Welshing the Scottish Race'. Mac Colla is responding to a report from the Scottish *Daily Record* newspaper that discourages the BBC from broadcasting Gaelic lessons in Scotland following an initiative that Welsh lessons should be transmitted for the benefit of schoolchildren in Wales. According to the newspaper, Welsh is worthy of airtime because the language is taught in Welsh schools and is central to life in Wales; Gaelic, by contrast, should not be broadcast because it is a dying tongue that is neither taught nor sought after in Scottish schools. Mac Colla argues that the 'myopic Anglicism' of the *Daily Record* fails to see that Welsh is flourishing precisely because it is integral to the curriculum, and that it is not schools in Scotland that are resistant to the teaching of Gaelic, but a centralised administration that wants to keep Scotland British.[28]

> Admit Gaelic into the schools and you commence the destruction of the whole English-ascendancy ideology which our rulers have been at such pains – largely through the agency of those same schools – to build up.[29]

Education is central to a changed conception of Scottish society, as well as to a more affirmative attitude to Scottish history. However, the Press, anti-Gaelic, 'Anglophile and pseudo-Scottish', continues to plays its part in the propaganda war to frustrate Scottish political and cultural self-realisation through its influence over public opinion.[30] Mac Colla predicts that the Press will suggest

> in a thousand subtle ways that as the majority of Scots are Teutons . . . Gaelic is [therefore] a foreign and not merely a forgotten language, [and] that it is a rude and barbarous language . . . .[31]

Above all, the Press will imply that any attempted revival of Gaelic is 'contrary to modern progress'.[32]

Mac Colla was a Gaelic-learner, and the recuperation and promotion of Gaelic was important to other writers of the period such as MacDiarmid and Sorley MacLean. Gaelic linked Scotland once more to a Celtic and autochthonous history, and provided a key plank in the attempted de-Anglicisation of Scottish literary culture. Mac Colla's inference that those who oppose the revival of Gaelic will characterise it as a 'barbarous language' displays a proto-postcolonial discernment that the centralising power will endorse English as a marker of an enlightened selfhood and nationhood, while deeming the likes of Gaelic and Gaelic society to be primitive and contra to the direction of civilised modernity. As such, Mac Colla's 'philosophical obsessions' (as Watson puts it) concerning historical determinism and, in particular, the negative role of the Reformation in Scottish history, need not be seen as the personal flaws of a marginal crank. Rather, Mac Colla can now be better understood as an anti-colonial writer who believed the laws of a progressive Whig history to be historiographical mythologisation in the service of imperial political control.

The two interrelated strands to Mac Colla's critique of history – that the laws of history are mythical (in Barthes's sense of myth as ideology, as elucidated in *Mythologies*) and that the history of post-Reformation Scotland has seen the end of myth-making (in the creative sense of myth) – inform all of Mac Colla's work. These two factors emerge most clearly together as a thesis in one of the most *curious* books of twentieth-century Scottish

writing: *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* (1967) – curious, in that it illustrates the windings of Mac Colla's maverick enquiry into the workings of History-as-idea; but it is curious, too, that this book should remain critically neglected, despite anticipating by several decades some of the major strands in postcolonial thought.

Mac Colla's primary assertion in *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* – upon which he goes on to build his case against the Scottish Protestant Reformers of the 16th century – is that there are no certainties in history, that 'there is no such thing as *any* "law of history"', and that the winners write history, which he characterises as the 'winning-side-is-always-right interpretation of history'.[33] But history, for Mac Colla, could have been otherwise, in that history is actually historiography and our interpretation and understanding of history need not be what we read in history books. Education is pivotal in this regard, and Mac Colla uses the example of the Russian Revolution to illustrate his point that history is presented by the governing order as a fait accompli:

> Had the Communist revolution failed in Russia and victory gone to the Kerensky democrats, the history now being taught in Russian schools and taken for granted as the 'obvious' truth about history . . . would have been vastly different from the view now actually held and assumed to be the only possible and 'obvious' view (20).

Mac Colla is especially keen to expose the determinism of Marxism as a myth. Marxism for Mac Colla is system which, had the Bolsheviks failed, 'would be known only to students of philosophy as a curious German-Jewish mental aberration' (20), rather than a political science of world significance. He sees Marxism as being particularly guilty of a dualistic mode of adversarial thinking that, much in the simplistic manner of the American Western genre, interprets history as a battle between good and evil. This dialectical approach reads

history in a highly partisan way, but is simpler to grasp and therefore more popular than a multivalent historiographical investigation:

> *To dualise your material is the quickest and easiest way to feel you possess it and have power over it*. It is also, where any question of humanity is involved, the surest way to falsify it (27; emphasis in original).

The good/evil dualism intrinsic to this theory of history, which the Marxist trusts will issue in a revolutionary synthesis, leads more broadly in Mac Colla's argument to 'the great myth of "Progress"' (31) – the sense that 'our era', 'our nation', or 'the West' is the best and represents the apotheosis of historical development. Striking a Spenglerian note, Mac Colla points out that 'History shows as numerous examples of decline and retrogression among societies as of advance and progress' (36). The idea of progress, Mac Colla believes, has little to do with any historical evidence, but is actually a form of myth-making to which the Western mind is particularly prone.

The epigraph to *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* comes from an interview given by C. G. Jung to the BBC in 1959 which warns that 'WE NEED MORE UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN NATURE BECAUSE THE ONLY REAL DANGER THAT EXISTS IS MAN HIMSELF', and ends with the portent: 'WE ARE THE ORIGIN OF ALL COMING EVIL' (5; emphasis in original). In quoting Jung, Mac Colla illustrates that he believes historical movements such as the Reformation to be products of human will and character rather than the result of social forces. Indeed for Mac Colla many of the theories as to why the Reformation happened – 'the hagiolatrous, the scholarly, the psychological – even the medical – and the social approach' (51) – do no more than account for the external effects of the Reformation; they do not explain what the Reformation was and is as a human

phenomenon, or why it came about; they do not penetrate to the essence of the movement, the metaphysics of what made the Reformation. To do so, Mac Colla adapts the Jungian model of the persona − which functions, at least in part, to hide our authentic nature from the world − in order to suggest his own theory of the Face and the Mask. The Mask is that which happens in the world. In relation to the Reformation:

> The Mask was the system of Reformation doctrines, it was the organisation of the Kirk, it was the account the Reformers gave of themselves, it was even what they *consciously* knew or thought was going on in them (149; emphasis in original).

The Mask is 'something secondary, an epiphenomenon' (149). The Face − the phenomenon, the primary factor, or 'true event' – is not strictly speaking an event at all, but a 'condition in the personality or soul or psyche' (149). Mac Colla's definition of the Face remains vague, perhaps unsurprisingly given its ontological, almost spiritual status. The Face seems to be an act of human will – 'an event in the metaphysics of the will' (149) − and while aspects of the Face in some measure cause those things that Mac Colla calls the Mask, he never reveals what the first cause of the Face might be. A simplification of Mac Colla's theory would be to say that while the Mask is what we ordinarily understand as reality, the Face is the Real.

The terminology of Face/Mask has similarities to W. B. Yeats's dramatisation of the self/anti-self in a dialogue poem such as 'Ego Dominus Tuus' and in his asystematic, occultist reading of history, *A Vision* (1925, 1937). However, Yeats's belief that 'we come to the self through the mask' is ultimately a denial of the self in the other.[34] Yeats expounded a Coleridgean 'extremes meet' philosophy in pursuit of a creative unity of being, but, as Peter Howarth points out, this 'has serious problems as a view of history, since if all enemies can be seen as anti-selves, then all conflict is really a process toward unity, and an artistic

necessity'.[35] For Mac Colla, on the other hand, the inability to imagine oneself as 'other', a central facet of the dualistic mode of thought emanating from Descartes and implicit in Arnold's racial typologies, is what enables the inferiorisation and colonisation of a people such as the Gaels. Descartes initiated 'a vital cleavage between mind and matter, soul and body, spirit and nature' (171).

From 1935 to 1938 Mac Colla gave a series of lectures on the history of philosophy called 'The Makers of Modern Thought' to the New University Society, based in Edinburgh's New Town. He talked on the foundations of philosophy; subjective idealism and solipsism; Kant, Hegel, Marx and the Marxian revolution; psychology, notably Freud and Adler; Bergson; Whitehead; Kierkegaard; and ended with a lecture on 'The New Scholasticism and St. Thomas Aquinas'. He gave two lectures on Descartes, 'The Cartesian Revolution' and 'The Final Effects of the Cartesian Revolution', showing the extent of his interest in and opposition to Cartesianism. In the first of these lectures he claimed that the 'strict dualism' of the Cartesian system was responsible for forging 'two separate worlds totally different from each other'.[36] The dualism of the Cartesian worldview, which Mac Colla equates with the Mask, divides reality into two categories, above all 'I' and 'not-I', 'self' and 'other'. On confronting a being-not-ourselves, we can say Yes, No, or be indifferent. For Mac Colla, 'To say Nay to – that is, to *will the non-being* of – an other *being*, is to be impoverished', while 'saying Yea to or embracing at the level of *being* an other *being*, is [to be] interpenetrated by that "other", [so that our being] becomes one with it, is enriched by it in the degree in which in a sense it *becomes* that other' (119; emphasis in original).

A critique of the Cartesian model of identity has been an important starting-point for 'post'-theory analyses of governing and hegemonic practices. The postcolonial critic Leela Gandhi, for instance, writes that Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard object to Cartesianism because they see it as being 'premised upon an ethically unsustainable omission

of the Other'; indeed for Gandhi, 'Descartes' philosophy of identity is also sustained through a violent and coercive relationship with its omitted Other'.[37] Descartes' dualistic concept of identity is pivotal to the dominative nature of the coloniser-colonised relationship, such as that at the heart of Arnoldian Celticism. Mac Colla's Mask covers those doctrinaire dualistic systems that discipline and punish those 'others' who do not abide by the law: in the case of the Reformers, it is the Chosen, the Elect, who ostracise the reprobate. According to Mac Colla, dualist 'philosophical notions, as in the French Revolution and Descartes, equally with theological formulations as at the Reformation', function as masks 'fitted to rationalise a movement of ego-aggression against the non-"I" at the ontological level of primary motivation' (176).

At the Sign of the Clenched Fist, indeed all of Mac Colla's work, is an attempt to understand just how the Reformation could have happened, and to map its effects in Scotland. Mac Colla believed that the Reformers were Nay-sayers to life, and he was not alone among the writers of the modern Scottish Renaissance in castigating the Reformation for its supposedly negative cultural and political consequences. Edwin and Willa Muir, MacDiarmid, Compton Mackenzie and Grassic Gibbon, to name only a few, all thought in some measure that the Knoxian revolution had been harmful. Edwin Muir in particular believed that the Reformation constituted a dissociation of Scottish sensibility akin to T. S. Eliot's objection to English Puritanism.[38] But Mac Colla went beyond these writers in making it his life's work to understand the Reformation *from the inside*, to speculate on the 'condition in the soul or psyche, which caused the effects of the Reformation' (149). Mac Colla claims in his autobiography that the Reformers' life-denial constitutes a national psychosis.

> Since the 'Reformation' the Scots were universally trained to accord a deliberate, comprehensive *Nay* to the very principle of life [making it] entirely possible that the

> world might have witnessed the altogether singular spectacle of an entire nation-community going stark, raving mad.[39]

The insanity of Reformation doctrine, which Mac Colla, like Edwin Muir,[40] compares with that of Bolshevism, is 'A CLENCHED FIST IN THE FACE OF APPREHENDED BUT REPELLED OR REPUDIATED REALITY' (178; emphasis in original). Turned outwards, Calvinism, with its '"built-in" ontological negation and radically dualised apprehension of human reality', divided Scotland along racial lines and exiled the Gael, the other-in-the-self that the lowland Protestant Scot is unwilling or unable to recognise. The Reformation constitutes 'the fatal dualisation to which Scotland fell victim',[41] a self-splitting of the Scottish body politic and personality continued by Arnoldian Celticism. For Mac Colla the Scots 'were all the same people' until the Reformation distanced Scotland from its past and the 'identity of Scotland as a basis for action was disposed of, and replaced by a confusion of impulses and a frustrating and action-arresting struggle in the personality'.[42] Mac Colla's view of the Reformation as divisive, like Arnold's idea of the fallen Celt, militates against self-government. Indeed, the Celts were doomed to historical destruction by the Whig idea of political advancement inaugurated, not, as usually assumed in 1688, but at the Reformation, and inherited by the Celticist Unionism of Arnold and Sharp. 'Rejection of self and love of another are common to all candidates for assimilation', writes Albert Memmi; following such self-immolation, 'the ideology of a governing class is adopted in large measure by the governed classes'.[43] The Scots colonisers of the Gael internalised Celticist views of the Highlands and implemented the imperial idea of historical progress, so perpetuating a divided Scottish identity.

The Divided Scot

The two novels Mac Colla published in his lifetime, *The Albannach* (1932) and *And the Cock Crew* (1945), examine the effects on the individual and the community of the division theorised at a 'psycho-historical' level in *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist*.[44] Both novels deal with the Scottish Highlands and the externally-imposed decline of Gaelic society. *The Albannach* seems to confirm Arnold's and Sharp's account of the Celt's inability to carry things through, but whereas this is romanticised by the Celticist, Mac Colla's novel addresses what such failings might mean in reality and, in opposition to migration, assimilation or managed decline, proposes a solution in a return to Gaelic culture. The novel's style follows the cadence and circumlocutory grammar of the Gaelic speaker of English, but includes Gaelic words. *The Albannach* reads like the translation of an original that no longer exists, and for Mac Colla, the true Scotland, which is Gaeldom, has all but vanished since the Reformation. He declares in the novel's foreword that the continuance of Catholicism in Scotland 'would have prevented the destruction of the Gael and the eventual elimination . . . of the last remnants of the Scottish nation'.[45] Mac Colla sees Catholicism as a doctrine that views human nature as essentially good, while 'Reformation Protestantism', which 'was not Christianity or even a form of Christianity', views human nature as 'irredeemably evil'(II−III).

Mac Colla can himself be accused of a partisan and dualistic view of Scottish history, which may seem ironic given his hostility to dualistic theories. However, as a Scot who has inherited the self-divisions of Calvinism and Celticism, he attempts to work through this paradox in his fictional depictions of the divided Scot. There are several dualities set up in *The Albannach*. The first is that between Murdo Anderson, whom Mac Colla calls 'the protagonist of my own attitude', and Roderick Urquhart (IV). Murdo, despite his superior intellect, drops out of Glasgow University when his father dies and goes back to the Highlands. He becomes a drunk, is brutally indifferent to his wife and child, and only

gradually regains his equilibrium through acceptance of Gaelic culture and becoming a master piper. Rory achieves academic success, travelling to Canada, and ending as an academic in Sheffield (symbolising soulless industrial development) in a manner that would seem to imply Murdo's failure to fulfil his own talents. But it is the exiled Rory who has alienated himself from his own culture in order to progress in a world that never really accepts him. Rory himself seems to recognise this:

> 'I don't think I would effer be feeling at home among the English. . . . O worthy men, some of them, but somehow—somehow you neffer seem to make contact with anything deep down in them. They don't seem—*interested* at all' (309−10; emphasis in original).

Rory has lost touch with his past in the same manner as post-Reformation Scotland.

That post-Reformation nation is seen at its most competitively brutal and hollow during Murdo's disastrous spell at Glasgow University. Glasgow is depicted as a materialist hell in *The Albannach*, as it is by many other writers of the modern Scottish Renaissance. In *The Albannach*, a filthy, noisy Glasgow stands for civilisation and progress − ideas that Murdo is sceptical of − as against the purity and solitude of the Highlands:

> There had come into his head a picture of one million and more of people hanging on to each other's tails and tearing breathlessly round and round in circles gesticulating wildly and shouting to each other: *This is Civilisation! This is Progress! We are getting on!*—That was it! The fools were rushing round and round in circles and did not know it; with the great speed they were going and the terrible intentness that was

on them they were under the impression they were getting somewhere. That for you your Glasgow! (288; emphasis in original).

The hellishness of Glasgow is compounded by the city's sectarian divisions. As a Gael, Murdo is mistaken for an Irish Catholic, and is drawn into a fight in a public house. The only people Murdo warms to in Glasgow are his Catholic landlady Mrs. O'Callaghan, who speaks Gaelic, and the Irish priest Father O'Reilly who, in stark contrast to the grim Calvinism of Murdo's parents, is alive to Scots and Irish poetry and music.

And the Cock Crew continues Mac Colla's attack on Reformation Protestantism and the destructive ethos of progress it inculcates. It is one of the three great novels of the Highland Clearances with Gunn's *Butcher's Broom* (1934) and Iain Crichton Smith's *Consider the Lilies* (1968). Like *The Albannach, And the Cock Crew* is a book of division and duality, fundamentally between Gaelic and British society, but more particularly in the central dialogue between the minister Maighstir Sachairi and the Gaelic poet Fearchar. This is a novel about internal colonisation; as Fearchar says, those who have come to clear the glen of people to make way for sheep are Scots, but they have 'deserted the things of our nation' and are 'the same as an English army occupying our country'.[46] The self-division of Maighstir Sachairi is crucial to the facilitation of internal colonisation. The minister is torn between helping his parish resist the Clearances and believing that the will of God is implicit in the course of events; he decides that 'progress' and 'historical development' represent God's Truth and the Clearances are God's judgement on a sinful people. The dualism of Reformation Protestantism means the parish's representative is divided against himself and his community, unfitting the minister and the community for action. As Fearchar says, it is 'bad for a nation when its people become converted to that Faith. While they save their souls, their enemies will have their way with them in this world'.[47] For Mac Colla the exiling of the

visionary poet, usurped by the minister and the law of progress, is to the detriment of Gaelic society. In *The Ministers* (1979), unpublished in the author's lifetime, Mac Colla combines the visionary with the minister. Ewen MacRury, who is said to have 'That certain "national" something about him', believes there was a 'sense of right' in the Jacobite Risings and laughs at the concept of progress:

> 'Look at your notion of "Progress". It's a dead cert to become a component of popular mythology. The idea in it is utterly clear and simple—the course of history is seen as a completely firm, straight line rising continuously.'[48]

This linear history is not only for the Reverend MacRury a myth; it is a hegemonic historical principle that has divided a people, assisting in the colonisation of the Gael and the Britishing of Scotland.

Thomism and Unity

In a lecture on 'The Influence of Religion on Civilisation' Mac Colla argues: 'The unity of a culture rests not only on a community of place, a community of work, and a community of blood, it arises also, and above all, from a community of thought'.[49] If the idea of unity and a 'community of blood' sounds perilously fascistic, then in another lecture, 'Nationalism – The True and the False', Mac Colla distinguishes between 'national *self-affirmation*' and 'national *self-assertion*' (1; emphasis in original). The former, of which Mac Colla approves, 'proceeds from self-acceptance and results in an increase in the quality of self-respect', while the latter shows dangerous 'designs on their neighbours' territory and resources' (3). For Mac Colla, the Reformation and the Renaissance 'sprang from a common impulse and were animated by a similar spirit . . . variously designated individualist, humanist, subjectivist' ('The

Reformation and Nationalism', 1). Both the Reformation – 'anti-intellectual from the start' (1) – and the Renaissance were 'inspired and brought about [by] a movement of particularism and self-assertion on the part of nations and peoples' (3). As such, Mac Colla believes that modern nationalism 'can be traced back in a direct line to the Reformation and Renaissance from which it arose' (6), both of which 'produced a *secularisation* of life' (7; emphasis in original).

Mac Colla was raised by Plymouth Brethren but converted to Catholicism, seeing it as the pre-Reformation 'community of thought' that could once again unify Scottish culture against the divisions wrought by Calvinism and Celticism. Writing to David Morrison, Mac Colla says that he was influenced in his Catholicism by Jacques Maritain's *The Things That Are Not Caesar's* and *Religion and Culture* (both 1930), given to him when he was living in Montrose by – ironically – a minister of the Church of Scotland, the Reverend C. P. Robertson, who also happened to be vice-chairman of the Montrose branch of the National Party of Scotland.[50] For Maritain, who thought 'Catholicity . . . the last hope of the human race', only St. Paul and the Gospel are more important than Thomas Aquinas.[51] Mac Colla saw Thomism, the philosophy arising from the works of thirteenth-century Catholic theologian Saint Thomas Aquinas, as a means to make whole again the dualist secularism of modernity. In 'The New Scholasticism: Conclusion', Mac Colla avers that

> Thomism resolves the Cartesian dualism of mind and matter, soul and body; and avoids the excesses both of philosophic Rationalism and of Subjective Idealism and Solipism [*sic*] by establishing the true relation between the senses and the intellect in the building up of ideas and the formation of knowledge (7).

Although he does not explain how this would be achieved, Mac Colla claims that Thomism 'would put an end to the present economic disorder and social anarchy' (8).

Fergus Kerr argues that the Thomism of the early modern period was critical of Spanish colonisation of the Americas, and was instrumental in the development of human rights theory.[52] For Mac Colla, seeking to combat what he sees as the schisms of post-Reformation Scotland and the imperial impetus of a linear conception of history with its divide-and-rule machinations, of which Arnold's theories of the Celt form a main discursive plank, the importance of Thomism is as a unifying principle: '*History cannot begin to exist until the conception of Man as a Unity has been attained*'.[53] Mac Colla adopted the myth-thought of a Catholic mystic in order to expel from his own divided personality the hauntings of Arnoldian Celticism, and contest the anti-mythic rationalism of the Reformation.

Maritain writes that 'the spirit knows it own country'.[54] Mac Colla's spiritual journey was an intimate travail with his nation's history.

Notes

1 Alan Bold, *Modern Scottish Literature* (London and New York, 1983), p. 205.

2 Roderick Watson, *The Literature of Scotland: The Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke, 2007), p. 69.

3 J. B. Caird, 'Fionn Mac Colla – The Twofold Heritage', in David Morrison (ed.), *Essays on Fionn Mac Colla* (Thurso, 1973), pp. 31−7 (p. 37).

4 Margery Palmer McCulloch, *Scottish Modernism and its Contexts 1918−1959: Literature, National Identity and Cultural Exchange* (Edinburgh, 2009).

5 See Michael Fry for 'The Whig Interpretation of Scottish History', in Ian Donnachie and Christopher Whatley (eds), *The Manufacture of Scottish History* (Edinburgh, 1992), pp. 72−89.

6 Matthew Arnold, *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London, 1867), p. 177. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition. Page numbers will follow in brackets.

7 The insurrectionary 'events in Manchester [and Clerkenwell prison] strengthened the impression that Fenianism was a powerful and sinister force at work in the very heart of

English society', according to F. S. L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine* (London, 1985), p. 137.

8 Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London, 1996), p. 31.

9 Laura O'Connor, *Haunted English: The Celtic Fringe, the British Empire, and De-Anglicization* (Baltimore, 2006), p. xvi.

10 O'Connor, *Haunted English*, p. xiv–xv.

11 Murray G. H. Pittock, *Celtic Identity and the British Image* (Manchester, 1999), p. 58.

12 William Sharp, cited in Margery Palmer McCulloch (ed.), *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland 1918–1939; Source Documents for the Scottish Renaissance* (Glasgow, 2004), p. 273.

13 Sharp, in *Modernism and Nationalism*, p. 274.

14 *Ibid*., p. 275 (my emphasis).

15 Pittock, *Celtic Identity and the British Image*, pp. 71–2.

16 W. B. Yeats, cited in R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life. Vol. I: The Apprentice Mage, 1865–1914* (Oxford, 1997), p. 196.

17 W. B. Yeats, *The Major Works*, ed. Edward Larrissy (Oxford, 2008), p. 370.

18 Lewis Grassic Gibbon, 'The Antique Scene', in Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Hugh MacDiarmid, *Scottish Scene, or The Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn* (1934); reprinted in Valentina Bold (ed.), *Smeddum: A Lewis Grassic Gibbon Anthology* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2001), pp. 3–22 (p. 8).

19 Hugh MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet: A Self-Study in Literature and Political Ideas*, ed. Alan Riach (Manchester, 1994 [1943]), p. 6.

20 Hugh MacDiarmid (ed.), *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* (London, 1948 [1940]), p. ix.

21 Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Literary Angus and the Mearns', in *Fife and Angus Annual* (1933); reprinted in Hugh MacDiarmid, *The Raucle Tongue: Hitherto uncollected prose, Vol. II*, eds. Angus Calder, Glen Murray and Alan Riach (Manchester, 1997), pp. 387–90 (p. 389).

22 Fionn Mac Colla, *The Albannach* (London, 1971 [1932]), p. I (emphasis in original). All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition.

23 Margery McCulloch, *The Novels of Neil M. Gunn: A Critical Study* (Edinburgh, 1987), pp. 9–61 (p. 19).

24 Cairns Craig, ‘The Criticism of Scottish Literature: Tradition, Decline and Renovation’, in Ian Brown et al. (eds), *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature, Vol. 3: Modern Transformations: New Identities (from 1918)* (Edinburgh, 2007), pp. 42−52 (p. 50).

25 William F. Skene, *Celtic Scotland: A History of Ancient Alban. Vol. III: Land and People* (Edinburgh, 1890), p. 113.

26 O’Connor, *Haunted English*, p. 15.

27 For an explication of the phrase ‘internal colony’ see Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536−1966* (London, 1975).

28 Fionn Mac Colla, ‘Welshing the Scottish Race’, *Freeman* (March 1933); reprinted in McCulloch (ed.), *Modernism and Nationalism*, p. 292.

29 Mac Colla, in *Modernism and Nationalism*, p. 293.

30 *Ibid*., p. 293.

31 *Ibid*., p. 294.

32 *Ibid*., p. 294.

33 Fionn Mac Colla, *At the Sign of the Clenched Fist* (Edinburgh, 1967), pp. 23, 27. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition. Page numbers will follow in brackets.

34 W. B. Yeats, letter to Iseult Gonne, 18 Aug. 1918; quoted in R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life. Vol. II: The Arch-Poet, 1915−1939* (Oxford, 2003), p. 129.

35 Peter Howarth, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modernist Poetry* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 90 (emphasis in original).

36 National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh (hereafter NLS), Dep. 239/12/b Box (i).

37 Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh, 1998), pp. 39, 40.

38 See Edwin Muir, *Scott and Scotland: The Predicament of the Scottish Writer* (London, 1936).

39 Fionn Mac Colla, *Ro Fhada Mar So a Tha Mi / Too Long in This Condition* (Thurso, 1975), pp. 21−2 (emphasis in original). As a nationalist, Mac Colla wanted Scottish independence. It is noteworthy that those who wish to retain the Union in the 2014 Referendum on Independence, campaign for a No vote. A 2014 Stirling University study, ‘Citizen Preferences for Constitutional Change in Scotland’, found that Catholics and the non-religious were more likely to vote Yes in the Referendum than members of the Church of Scotland.<http://www.theguardian.com/politics/scottish-independence-blog/2014/may/07/scottish-independence-voters-risk>

40 Edwin Muir, 'Bolshevism and Calvinism', *European Quarterly*, I (May 1934); reprinted in Andrew Noble (ed.), *Edwin Muir: Uncollected Scottish Criticism* (London and Totowa, NJ, 1982), pp. 123−30.

41 Fionn Mac Colla, 'Mein Bumpf', in *Essays on Fionn Mac Colla*, pp. 11−30 (p. 16).

42 Mac Colla, *Ro Fhada Mar So a Tha Mi*, pp. 22, 23.

43 Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans. Howard Greenfield (London, 1990 [1957]), pp. 187, 154.

44 Frances Russell Hart, *The Scottish Novel: From Smollett to Spark* (Cambridge, MA, 1978), p. 330.

45 Mac Colla, *The Albannach*, p. II. Page numbers will follow in brackets.

46 Fionn Mac Colla, *And the Cock Crew* (Edinburgh, 1995 [1945]), p. 116.

47 Mac Colla, *And the Cock Crew*, p. 123.

48 Fionn Mac Colla, *The Ministers* (London, 1979), pp. 238, 53, 101.

49 NLS Dep. 239/12/b Box (i), p. 2. All subsequent quotations are taken from this archive. Page numbers of each lecture to the New University Society will follow in brackets.

50 NLS Dep. 239/12/b Box (i), Miscellaneous Notes.

51 Jacques Maritain, *The Things That Are Not Caesar's*, trans. J. F. Scanlan (London, 1939 [1930]), p. 93.

52 See Fergus Kerr, *Thomas Aquinas: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 105−7.

53 Mac Colla, *Ro Fhada Mar So a Tha Mi*, p. 75 (emphasis in original).

54 Maritain, *The Things That Are Not Caesar's*, p. 61.