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**James Barke**

**Politics, Cinema and Writing Scottish Urban Modernity**

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# DOCTOR OF LITERATURE

James Barke

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Keir Elder

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## Chapter 2 – Aesthetics: The Organisation of Experience

But to hell with propaganda. All the writers who have been worth a hoot have written in harmony with their deepest experience. And no one yet has ever been able to write deeply and significantly of a shallow experience.<sup>1</sup>

James Barke (1939)

Even the realistic mode of writing, of which literature provides many very different examples, bears the stamp of the way it was employed, when and by which class, down to the smallest details. With the people struggling and changing reality before our eyes, we must not cling to ‘tried’ rules of narrative, venerable literary models, eternal aesthetic laws. We must not derive realism as such from particular existing works, but we shall use every means, old and new, tried and untried, derived from art and derived from other sources, to render reality to men in a form they can master.<sup>2</sup>

Bertolt Brecht (1938)

Writing his study of the politics of aesthetics published in 2000, *Le Partage du sensible: Esthétique et politique*, Jacques Rancière made the assertion that political art was wholly incapable of operating in any simplistic way as a ‘meaningful spectacle’ in order to bring about an ‘awareness of the state of the world.’ Instead, to be effective political art, there was, he insisted, the need for a ‘double effect’ which entailed a ‘readability of a political signification’ and a ‘sensible or perceptual shock caused [...] by the uncanny, by that which resists signification.’ Rancière posited the ideal effect as arising from a ‘negotiation between opposites,’ in this case the ‘readability of the message that threatens to destroy the sensible form of art and the radical uncanniness that threatens to destroy all political meaning.’<sup>3</sup> Citing the theatre of Brecht as being such a

politicized art by virtue of having its foundations solidly set in the ‘extremely complex and cunning equilibrium’ that balanced ‘political pedagogy’ and forms of ‘artistic modernism,’ Rancière explained,

[Brecht] constantly plays between means of coming to political awareness and means of undermining the legitimacy of great art, which found expression in the theatre by admixtures with the ‘minor’ performing arts: marionette shows, pantomime performances, the circus, the music hall or cabaret, not to mention boxing. His ‘epic theatre’ is a combination between a pedagogical logic legitimated by the Marxist corpus and, on the other hand, techniques of fragmentation and the mixture of opposites that are specific to the history of theatre and production in the 1910s and 1920s.<sup>4</sup>

In Rancière’s assessment, Brecht managed to strike the balance and thereby achieved what could be described as modernised realist art, though by certain dogmatic standards of the time, using unconventional and unanticipated means.

Brecht himself gave the subject some consideration, countering the scathing Marxist critiques of the writing of James Joyce and comparing these to the criticism that Freud had suffered in his day, cataloguing the barbs that ‘rained down: pornography, morbid pleasure in filth, overestimation of events below the navel, immorality...Marxists associating themselves with this nonsense, adding in their revulsion the epithet of petty-bourgeois.’<sup>5</sup> Arguing against the rejection of interior monologue purely on the grounds of its formalism, Brecht regarded it as a valid technical method and makes a very simple case for a diversity of formal approaches: ‘the fact that Tolstoy would have done it differently is no reason to reject Joyce’s method.’<sup>6</sup> After all, he states, all these techniques are ultimately formal; they are all merely a ‘falsification of reality.’

Accepting that this abstraction is a perennial problem of literature, writers, as Barke suggests, must not give up and ‘throw their pens down in

despair.’<sup>7</sup> Instead, therefore, of seeking to perfect the reproduction of reality and measuring all attempts by this exacting yardstick, the more useful terminology that will underpin this chapter is the phrase ‘get at reality.’ Culled from a *Glasgow Herald* review of Barke’s novel, *The Wild MacRaes* (1934), this at once acknowledges the immutable fact of literature as simulacrum but provides a more positive impetus to represent the real as effectively as possible given the constraints of the medium.

Unshackled by formal dogmas, complying neither with restrictive prescriptions nor with literary libertine demands for an entirely detached artistic experimentation – pursuing the middle way, as it were – the method endorsed by Brecht and later by Rancière may be the way to get at reality more authentically. Indeed, as Raymond Williams notes in *Politics of Modernism*, ‘during the Popular Fronts of the 1930s’ far from divided formal schools and traditions ‘there was a reassembly of forces: Surrealists with social realists, Constructivists with folk artists, popular internationalism with popular nationalism.’<sup>8</sup> Equally in the Modernist ‘movement’ (in so far as it can be identified as such) in the rejection of the social order, there was considerable recourse to a simpler native art form, ‘primitive or exotic [...] the “folk” or the “popular” elements of native cultures.’<sup>9</sup> From this mix of ideas, forms and traditions, it is apparent that there was the opportunity to forge a particular style and literary aesthetic drawing on a wide range of extant sources. The opportunities to ‘make it new’ (but for politically applied ends) were considerable.

This chapter will argue that the image of Barke as a purely polemical author waving the metaphorical red flag with every published novel during the 1930s is one that is woefully incomplete. What will be demonstrated is that he

was in fact breaking new ground by marrying his political views to modern forms to construct a new ‘realistic’ literature fit for a modern Scottish readership. What can be said of James Barke’s fiction of the 1930s, and arguably its defining feature, was that his aesthetics and politics were so intertwined as to render them symbiotic. But then there is an argument that would suggest that aesthetics and politics are inextricably linked. Taking cognisance of this factor, whereas the previous chapter examined the author’s writing with the emphasis on the political, this chapter will examine the other side of that particular coin with its focus on the aesthetic. This will involve carrying out a close reading of Barke’s third novel, *The End of the High Bridge* (1935), to contribute to the picture of the author’s development as a writer of the Scottish Left. Using Brecht’s, Williams’ and Rancière’s theories as a starting point, augmented by further theories emanating from the literary Left, the novel will be the central plank in an argument to establish the character of Barke’s literary aesthetic during the period.

### ***The End of the High Bridge***

In *The End of the High Bridge*, James Barke uses the Isle of Skye as the setting for what is an overarching and sustained invective against the influence of the church on Scottish life. Augmenting the mood of the novel, Skye provides a particularly dramatic setting, with a turbulent history of bloody clan battles, famine, clearances and the steady migration of its population both to the city and further afield to the Americas. With the MacLeod family acting as the central characters, the head of the household and estate worker John MacLeod is, in the early stages of the novel, elevated to the rank of elder of his church. From here-on MacLeod’s hubris in dealings with his family, community, church authorities

and even his own God, cause his social status to deteriorate rapidly, and along with it his capacity for reason. Once set in train this ensures his eventual self-destruction. From the point of his ascension to the position of elder, MacLeod goes on to plot and attempt to carry out a murder; develops a damaging tendency for strong drink; impregnates and abandons his lover, Daisy, the housekeeper of the Malleanach estate; drives away his wife, Anna, and daughter, Mary; becomes a destitute wanderer; and ultimately takes his own life. The architects behind MacLeod's downfall, the agents of the church, are themselves shown throughout the novel to be wholly self-serving and rotten with hypocrisy; the vestiges of religious observance ostensibly designed to bind the community together as a cogent, unified whole are exposed instead as being inherently divisive.

In this novel Barke's main focus falls on the religious institutions that support an oppressive capitalist class ideology. The scope across the novel is of course considerably wider and encompasses the traditional aspects – whether seen as beneficial or regressive – of Scottish Highland society: religion was only one of the highly visible schisms between sections of the community. Never one to carry out a critical assault on only one front, in *High Bridge*, Barke adds to his novel layers of class tension, issues of gender and an emphasis on the climate of economic hardship. However, avoiding a mere propagandistic diatribe, Barke takes the traditional motifs of a Highland romance novel and exposes the lie inherent in the form. Here is the manifestation of Rancière's theory regarding the 'double effect' of a 'negotiation between opposites': in this case it is between the literary tradition of Highland romances and the socio-political criticism of the modern day. Conforming to aspects of the tradition, the geographical boundaries for the lives of the villagers of Kinlochdonan form an isolated environment;

described from the perspective of Anna MacLeod, who had a ‘love for the physical world outside their cottage,’ the world was bounded by ‘the end of the High Bridge... the great hills beyond Loch Carron...the dominating Blaaven and the sharp distant Coolins.’<sup>10</sup> Kinlochdonan is central to the narrative and does not find itself ‘relegated to a marginalised position as in many colonial or metropolitan narratives about remote communities.’<sup>11</sup> However, toward the end of the novel there is a tangible shift as Glasgow looms over the horizon and lodges in the consciousness of the younger generation, it is clear that the days of this self-contained community are numbered. Round the ‘parish pump’, *High Bridge* reproduces one of the defining parochial features of Highland romance and kailyard fiction; lush description of the flora and fauna provide the sense of a timeless pastoral: ‘And away back in the hazel wood, away beyond the scent of the bog myrtle, the deeply soothing calling of the cuckoo.’<sup>12</sup> This is a world consisting of gamekeepers, byresmen, housekeepers, crofters and fishermen, all subjects of the local (English and ex-military officer) estate owners. With Kinlochdonan effectively cut off from and virtually untroubled by the outside world, the novel gives no real clue as to the time period in which it is set until approximately thirty pages in when there is a reference to the picture houses in the city. All the makings of a familiar, traditional Highland yarn are present, but modernist elements infiltrate the form. As the narrative unfolds the comfort of linear narration from a clearly identifiable voice is denied the reader in favour of fluid changes of perspective, ambiguous subjectivity and fluctuations in register.

In this uneasy parody of the form, there is a certain impetus that develops from Barke’s previous Highland novel, *The Wild MacRaes*. Similarly to *High Bridge*, this novel uses the isolated Highland setting in which to unfold its



picaresque tale of untameable brothers who carry on their own localised rebellion. At least one testimony to the success of this previous effort (and employing a distinctive phrase), a review of *The Wild MacRaes* in the *Glasgow Herald* adjudged the author to have been ‘original in that he attempts to escape sentimentality and get at reality.’<sup>13</sup> The reviewer also expressed their belief that Barke’s novel was ‘distinctly promising among the many so-called authors of the Scottish Renaissance,’ which at least, from a contemporary critical perspective if not the author’s, associated him with this rather ill-defined corps. If the previous novel’s lack of sentimentality had been a noteworthy and encouraging strength identified by the reviewer, Barke’s promise could be said to have been realised in *High Bridge*.

For this latter novel, Barke’s epigraph signals the target of his latest attempt to ‘get at reality,’ using a particularly apposite quotation from T. F. Powys’ *The Left Leg* (1926):

Sometimes God makes His dwelling-place in the heart of a man. When he settles Himself there, there is generally trouble. The man usually ceases to prosper in a worldly way; his friends desert him. God cuts all ropes that bind the man to his former ways, and the man often runs naked into the wilderness where strange voices sound. These voices are the echoes of God’s voice speaking inside the man. Against the wall of the world they become distorted and sometimes insane. They drive the man to do strange things. He takes all the world perhaps instead of God. Sometimes they bid him destroy himself; this he does. God is a queer fellow.<sup>14</sup>

The use of this quotation elucidates the importance of Barke’s literary didacticism and the imperative of a central thematic concern in his fiction. Charting the decline of John MacLeod, precipitated by a bastardised misapplication of his faith in which he becomes convinced of the righteousness

of any action, we can detect echoes of James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), which ensconces Barke's novel in a vein of Scottish fiction. A contemporaneous novel also dealing with a damaging Scottish religiosity was published by Willa Muir, *Mrs Ritchie* (1933), which tackled the subject from a more psychological perspective. The protagonist in this case has her madness set in motion by early life experiences and complex personal factors, in contrast to Barke's protagonist who is portrayed as more akin to an empty vessel, led on and corrupted by his status in the church hierarchy. Both characters' respective flaws manifest in a religious mania. Annie Ritchie is obsessed with dying in a state of grace and being prepared for judgement day, and John MacLeod feels the pressure of societal expectation on his piety. Ritchie feels she is being watched by God, whereas MacLeod feels he is being watched by the community while simultaneously being stalked by the devil. John MacLeod does not consider the selection for Eldership of the Church as the mechanism for social advancement that it is, but regards it as a divine sanction directly from God.

The church folk of Kinlochdonan had asked him to accept eldership. It was an honour, of course – though he was never thinking of it in that light. To be chosen and to be worthy to be chosen – especially in the eyes of the Lord. It was a sacred business.<sup>'15</sup>

This idea persists with him showing a pathological strain akin to Muir's protagonist, the paranoid flaw in the character engineering a split between the lowly types and himself, one of the chosen ones: 'They were getting around him his enemies. He could feel it in his nerves. Jealous because the Lord has seen fit to exalt him in his service.'<sup>16</sup>

### **Effectiveness of Assertion**

For Barke, the mark of significant literature was form at least equal to purpose and he remained true to this ideal throughout the decade, as evidenced in his letter to Albert Mackie of *The Evening News* in 1939. The author explained his aversion to mere literary stylistics, supporting his views with a quotation from George Bernard Shaw:

True, I am far from being an elegant stylist in the sense that Pater, C.E. Montague, Aldous Huxley and Eric Linklater are elegant stylists. But can you think of one great novelist who was a stylist? Tolstoy, Dickens, Dostoieffsky, Dreiser, Hardy – to mention a few who come to mind without reflection. James Joyce is a great novelist and beyond question our greatest stylist: he can do anything he pleases with novels. But he remains the ‘writer’s’ writer. Shaw, when he said “effectiveness of assertion is the Alpha and Omega of style” said the last word.<sup>17</sup>

This ‘effectiveness of assertion’ encompasses the idea that the author is writing with the objective of consciously producing, at least potentially, an instrument for change. What can be said for Barke’s early prose can be summed up in Alan Riach’s observation as regards the enactment of an ‘epiphany of participation,’ entailed in MacDiarmid’s poems: ‘their aesthetics are at the service of a profoundly politicised art.’<sup>18</sup> Barke’s art was indeed profoundly and ineluctably politicised, his aesthetics designed to ensure the message was both as clear and effective as possible. In this approach there is a message that must be conveyed – symptomatic of the decade, there are no mere formal exercises in an artistic crusade that arguably ended in the previous decades with High Modernism; literature can be informed by this modernist project, but ultimately does not escape its socio-political obligation. Barke further explains the formulation of his literary technique, which he refers to as ‘cumulative – it is the sum total of a

book that counts; is or is not effective,' and, while conceding that form plays a vital role in the process, it is eventually subordinate to efficacy: form really serves to ensure a fit vehicle for the content and meaning of a story. Barke belabours his social-realist credentials as a writer producing work fit for the age in reiterating that his primary concern is 'effectiveness of assertion' in a form that mimics the condition of the wider world as closely as possible. Among all this rousing concern for effective writing, Barke did not set about the task of *defining* a socialist-realist form but did dedicate his efforts to producing fiction replete with the 'Alpha and Omega' of style.

Also from this letter we gain an insight into whom (and by what measure) Barke categorised as 'great writers.' Despite his emphasis on the assertion of his work, he is more in tune with Rancière's later thesis on the balance that can be achieved and does not dismiss style as mere bourgeois obfuscation. Indeed his case is that the absence of style reduces literature to mere propaganda; nevertheless, in order to produce a great work style must be coupled with effectiveness. It seems that this ability to combine style and assertion was what moved Barke to evaluate some writers as 'great'; Theodore Dreiser is one such example. This then returns us to Barke's deployment of Theodore Powys' quotation. Powys (1875 – 1953), reportedly a deeply, yet unconventionally, religious man was regarded (in an apparent contradiction in terms) for the 'rich simplicity' of his literary style, one which it was claimed suggested the 'influence of Bunyan [and was] highly appropriate to the function of his narratives as parables of the human capacities for good and evil.'<sup>19</sup> To unravel the oxymoronic character of a 'rich simplicity' in style, we can perhaps interpret simplicity as an unadorned language that is conducive to conveying the richness

of experience and the human condition. It is apparent that not only did Powys' traits as a writer chime thematically with Barke's third novel, in which the reader is afforded a measure of the capacities for good and evil across a broad range of characters, but also the implied privileging (or at least elevation to an equal footing) of function over style was in tune with Barke's aesthetics. The simplicity of style attributed to Powys is adopted by Barke and is one that complemented the narrative, not exceeding the parameters of its functional utility.

The inclusion of this epigraph in *The End of the High Bridge* can also be regarded as a gesture of thanks to Powys for his unwitting inspiration in assisting Barke in clarifying the 'purpose' of his novel. As the author explained in his letter to Powys requesting permission to use the quotation:

It was half-way through my third novel when my wife expressed doubts as to the clarity of my theme – what was I getting at? I immediately glanced through some of your pages and in the *Left Leg* I hit upon the perfect text.<sup>20</sup>

As we can see, again Barke wrestles with the notion that he is trying to 'get at' some particular theme; there is a desire to express a reality adequately. Barke's sense of kinship and his admiration for Powys is demonstrated in the fulsome praise in his letter:

Yours is a wonderful and unique genius and I am convinced that you will be one of the few who will remain and be acknowledged as a master of the pre-Marxian age. There is something eternal in the problems with which you deal. There is a grandeur in your remoteness from the literary fashion of the day long after Wells and Bennett and Galsworthy and the stodgy recorders of superficiality are forgotten and the author of *Mr Pim* and the *Holy Crumb* will be remembered.<sup>21</sup>

From this correspondence, we can also see an example of Barke's tendency to invest his novels with his own life experience. In an exchange between Duncan Carmichael and his city-dwelling cousin Dora in *The World His Pillow* (1933), Dora enquires of the newly-arrived Highland boy: 'You haven't read any of the moderns?' 'The moderns?' enquires Duncan, to be enlightened: 'Yes. Arnold Bennett, Wells, Galsworthy?'<sup>22</sup> As Duncan's education in culture and politics moves along during his time in the city, his reading list, undertaken 'to escape the doubt gnawing at his faith' but ironically plunging him 'further into the whirling chaos of modern thought and experimentation' consists of: 'D. H. Lawrence, Middleton Murry, the brothers Powys, Count Herman Keyserling. T. A. Jackson, Oswald Spengler, Dorothy M. Richardson, Virginia Wolf. Lenin and Trotsky (what he could get of them). All swallowed down neat. Raw.'<sup>23</sup> This mixture of realist literature, modernist literature and political writing combines to form the bedrock of Barke's own enthusiasms in his choice of reading material, attributing this reading list to Duncan in a (slightly ironic) reflection of his own political self-education.

Barke's allusion to the impending Marxian Age in his letter to Powys, suggesting they currently exist at the end-of-days of the pre-Marxian one, as well as his conjecture on the future stalwarts of the literary canon, of course turn out to be wide of the mark. It is fair to say that H. G. Wells and John Galsworthy certainly occupy more secure positions of higher profile in the canon of Anglophone literature than Powys. However, Barke's enthusiasm for Powys' writing is unmistakable and testifies to the aesthetic and thematic ambitions for his own. We may gather from this letter that, in Barke's opinion, Powys was not

just writing works of literary genius, he was dealing with ‘eternal’ problems, this being a key component of that genius.

Having confessed in a previous letter to Powys that he himself was a ‘Marxian Communist,’ Barke admitted the failings in his ideology, suggesting that his critical appreciation of Powys’ writing is for him unquestionable, yet one he finds difficult to define in political terms:

I suppose my Communism cannot be formulated and hardened on every point and front or I would be able to crystallize and objectify any feelings towards your work. So far I can’t; but I cling to you as something precious in this crumbling world of capitalism where the class issue sharpens and intensifies from day to day where the immediate future is inevitably one of blood and iron and honour...<sup>24</sup>

Quite how a more ‘formulated and hardened’ Communism would manifest in literary-critical terms the author does not elaborate, but the suggestion is that Barke believed Powys had achieved an ideal synthesis of function and form that strayed neither into the realms of stylistic indulgence nor tub-thumping propaganda. Powys’ novel, it seems, was one of the few promoting the literary formula Barke aspired to, of writing effective, assertive and crafted fiction fit for the age. Indeed, he emphasised his ambition to emulate Powys’ success in adopting his own meticulous approach when in his letter to Albert Mackie he explained further,

I am deliberate about how I write. I use a very deliberate method of presentation. Form concerns me a great deal. The finding of the most effective form for the content of my story. There is surely an interpenetration of form and style [...] The orthodoxy of word usage in a novel is not my concern. My concern is effectiveness of assertion.<sup>25</sup>

The author's opinions on word usage interestingly hint at a disregard for the conventions of literary language. Considering the precepts that constitute literary modernism, there is, Raymond Williams contends, a propensity for over-used language to become too commonplace and to lack potency. He warns against

[...] a state in which language is dulled and exhausted by custom and habit or reduced to the merely prosaic; a state in which everyday, ordinary language makes literary composition difficult or impossible; a state in which a merely instrumental language blocks access to an underlying spiritual or unconscious reality; a state in which a merely social language obstructs the most profound individual expression.<sup>26</sup>

This is in effect a reiteration of Pound's 'make it new' demand of Modernism and promotes an innovative use of language striving to reach the individual. It could be contended that Hugh MacDiarmid had taken this battle cry to heart and to its logical conclusion in his use of Lallans Scots for literature.

In his 'Literary Lights' article in *Scottish Scene*, Lewis Grassie Gibbon identified MacDiarmid's poetry as having 'demonstrated, richly and completely [...] the flexibility and the loveliness of that alien variation of the Anglo-Saxon speech which is Braid Scots.'<sup>27</sup> Gibbon goes on to reiterate his assertion that there were no novelists writing in Braid Scots, though he cites his own novelistic technique as one that moulds 'the English language into the rhythms and cadences of Scots spoken speech [...injecting] into the English vocabulary such minimum number of words from Braid Scots as that remodelling requires.'<sup>28</sup> Gibbon's intention was to avoid what he described as becoming one of the 'commendable writers of the interesting English county of Scotshire,' or (as he suggests of Neil Gunn, 'writing in orthodox English') 'merely a brilliantly unorthodox Englishman.'<sup>29</sup> To remain true to national or regional characteristics



Gibbon advocates these strategies of rhythm and cadence that express an authentic Scottishness in all its glorious linguistic distinctiveness, but communicates his doubts as to whether this ‘peculiar style’ might eventually become ‘intolerably mannered or degenerate.’<sup>30</sup> Barke’s view is evident in a hand-written review of Edwin Muir’s *Scott & Scotland* (1936) when he declared that ‘Scotland never (for literary purposes) had a language of its own – a homogenous language.’<sup>31</sup> Barke’s potted history of Scottish languages follows thus:

First there may have been a Pictish general language. Second after the first invasion Gaelic was probably predominant [...] What is true however, is that braid Scots is for the twentieth century only of limited value.’<sup>32</sup>

This apparently dismissive attitude to Braid Scots is one that in actual fact chimes with Gibbon’s description of his own technique of moulding the English language to adequately represent Scottish life: ‘limited value’ seems to allow for Gibbon’s ‘minimum number’ of words as ‘remodelling requires.’ Gibbon even concludes his ‘Literary Lights’ article with an extended contribution from Barke on the topic of Gaelic culture in which he asserts that Fionn MacColla’s ‘English is the finest Gaelic we have.’<sup>33</sup>

In Barke’s early novels, he displays a measure of dexterity in his mediation of the speech patterns and idioms of his various characters through the narrator in free indirect discourse, where there is an assimilation of the full spectrum of speech acts across the classes. The working class and the upper class are not merely observed discretely operating within their specific forms of speech acts, these acts are accepted and subsumed into the great melting-pot as equally valid social languages. Preventing these from straying into the tired and commonplace, Barke, as (in more overt fashion) did Joyce, occasionally

produces a fresh use of language in compound nouns and adjectives. In *High Bridge*, Barke talks of Anna having ‘slunk into bed: out of sight: shame ravished.’<sup>34</sup> (Hereafter in this chapter cited as *EHB*) ‘Shame ravished,’ were it to appear in one of Joyce’s bold compositions would likely have been run together as ‘shameravished,’ however Barke has a tendency to present a little more circumspection in this regard.

With Barke’s early writing being peppered with these near-miss neologisms, the course between Ibsen’s ‘language of the gods’<sup>35</sup> and the prosaic is steered by means of shifts in register that replicate Scottish idioms, as demonstrated in these examples from *The End of the High Bridge*: ‘At such moments when the beast stood transfixed in terror Adam had a mind to climb down and trust to get home more safely by the aid of his own legs.’ (*EHB*, p. 85) Here the pattern of language is particularly colloquial: ‘the aid of his own legs’ is a curiously convoluted euphemism for walking. Similarly, when colouring the character of the estate-owning admiral, the narrator shifts the register and idioms again: ‘Now the admiral did not give as little as a *quarter deck damn* for a pack of lazy crofters. But Major Murray would learn to keep his deer on the right side of the fence, by gad!’ [emphasis added] (*EHB*, p. 26) Even when the narrative appears to flow more uniformly, there are interjecting voices that shift the perspective and register more subtly than straight-forward first-person dialogue. Yet again, the perspective shifts and another character’s idiosyncrasies of speech bleed through, this time briefly flitting into Mary’s consciousness: ‘They both trudged on in silence. The sun met the clouds above Raasay and God! *It would have stopped the breathing on you* - such splendour of red and gold, crimson and yellow.’ [emphasis added] (*EHB*, p. 36) This is yet another colloquialism that

recreates a certain speech pattern and acts as an identifying community voice recognisable to Scottish readers. The surrounding text is in a more conventional register and remains in the traditional Highland romance style.

In another example, the free indirect speech of the minister's housekeeper Jenny MacAskill is reported by the narrator: 'Jenny MacAskill answered the door and said that the minister was in – would Mr MacLeod just go into the study a minute and she would tell him: he was at his supper. Had Mr. MacLeod a match at all and she would be putting a light in the place? It was getting dark now...'(EHB, p. 62) Thus, more of the Gaelic speech patterns and syntax of the working classes are aggregated to flesh out the sense of the community as a whole. The narrator again conveys the sense of speech without recourse to dialogue and these recognisable Gaelic speech patterns of the Scottish Highland working classes bring the text to life: 'Stewart was quick to see that John MacLeod was the *sly, sleekit type* of highlander he did not like.' [emphasis added](EHB, p. 96) Enlivened with these forms, Barke produces fiction that reflects the diversity of speech acts integral to literary modernism.

### **Cosmopolitanism and the Dialectic**

The second epigraph to Barke's novel consists of the following quotation from Philip Rahv:

One cannot, at all times, draw a hard and fast line separating progress from reaction. Frequently the positive and negative exist side by side in the same work. Only the 'leftist' philistine, whose metaphysical conceptions are utterly at variance with dialectic, is apt to pose irreconcilable antithesis.<sup>36</sup>

This quotation exemplifies Barke's interest in the theory of the dialectic and the political and cultural sympathies he held throughout the 1930s. The pivotal role

he envisioned for the dialectic was expressed in a letter he wrote in 1936, when he informed the correspondent, ‘I need to oppose you from the standpoint of Marxist literary theory [...] For while I think your line is to some extent basically and profoundly correct it is generally too narrow and undialectical.’<sup>37</sup> Additionally, the following year Barke supplied a book review to the *Glasgow Weekly Herald* in which he praised Mr T. A. Jackson, the author of *Dialectics* (1937), as ‘after Bernard Shaw’ the ‘most brilliant writer in Britain today.’<sup>38</sup> Claiming that, in general, ‘everyone is talking about dialectics nowadays – and for the most part talking arrant nonsense,’ Barke recommended the book to all those who wished to be ‘educated, entertained and entranced.’ More emphatically, in a letter to Neil Gunn, Barke dramatically opined that ‘the hammer blows of history are driving dialectics into the dullest skulls.’<sup>39</sup> His assertion that ‘art is organised experience’ too, Barke held to be a ‘dialectical formulation.’<sup>40</sup> The crucial benefit of this, he claimed, was that ‘it eliminates such mechanical and nonsensical phrasemongering as the author being objective or fair or balanced.’

Equally, Barke’s inclusion of this epigraph is an indication of the politically slanted fiction and opinion pieces that formed Barke’s reading in this decade. The author of the quotation, Philip Rahv (1908 – 1973), was a Ukrainian Jew who made his way to the United States where he became a member of the American Communist Party and co-founded *Partisan Review* in 1933. Breaking with the Soviet line in the wake of the Moscow Trials of 1937, *Partisan Review* established itself as arguably one of the most influential journals of its time, its transatlantic credentials strengthened by frequent contributions from George Orwell. A leading light of the New York intelligentsia, Rahv ‘remained a Marxist

and was committed to the idea of achieving a synthesis of radical social criticism and literary excellence,<sup>41</sup> an unwritten manifesto equally professed in many of Barke's proclamations.

As a critic, Rahv followed his own path and retained little in common, as Mark Krupnik argues, with 'the technicist preoccupations of the New Critics'; for Rahv, each essay had to adopt a particular position and was 'a tactical exercise in a continuing war of ideas, usually between Christians and Communists.' Here, the critique of religion has its basis in a political objection rather than any theological one. Establishing a confluence with the prominent Marxist critics of the age, Rahv's energies were directed to 'reconciling his revolutionary politics with an admiration for decidedly illiberal modernist writers.'<sup>42</sup> While the obvious Marxist connection, albeit inflected and influenced by the prevailing national concerns, between Rahv – 'one of the central figures in the cultural warfare of the thirties'<sup>43</sup> – and Barke could be taken at face value, their apparent shared desire to blend the radical politics of the left with the literary forms of the 'illiberal' modernists established more particular common ground. The possibilities that Rahv recognised in this resolution also seemed to be such as would have appealed to Barke and which he increasingly prosecuted in the writing of his novels. His citation of the Jewish-American author merits considerable further examination to reveal just how adroit the inclusion of this epigraph is in terms of Barke's inevitably political aesthetic sensibility. Indeed, it is the very idea of a 'sensibility' that Rahv attempted to define and that informed much of his theory on literature to become the underpinning tenet of a phenomenon he described as 'cultural cosmopolitanism.'

The attraction of cultural cosmopolitanism for Left intellectuals like Rahv

was that it offered the possibility of a viable international culture. According to Terry Cooney the central characteristics could be defined thus:

[Cultural cosmopolitanism] implied for its adherents the conquest of crippling parochialisms, the attainment of intellectual sophistication, the triumph of secularism and rationalism, and, from all of this, the development of new literary forms which would place American culture on a par with, or ahead of, its European equivalents.<sup>44</sup>

As Cooney explains, the attraction of the ‘expansive possibilities’ of cosmopolitanism for Rahv and his peers was that, as second-generation immigrants to America, they felt simultaneously ‘alienated from Jewish tradition’ while being ‘repulsed by the dominant American culture.’ In this regard, there were certain analogues between Rahv’s theories on culture and politics and what Barke was striving to achieve in his ‘effectively assertive’ novels and by virtue of his active political engagement. Rahv’s sense of nationality and cultural identity was problematised by personal complexity, while Barke felt a deep dissatisfaction with the legacy of traditional modes of Scottish identity. Both men were similarly alienated by the superficiality of ‘dominant’ culture – for Rahv the American one, in Barke’s case the Anglo-centric British one, increasingly subordinated to an overarching capitalist nexus underpinned in any case by an American culture. Each man also held a commitment to Marxist dialectical conceptions of the development of society.

In Rahv’s expounding of the cultural tenets of ‘cosmopolitanization’ through *Partisan Review* – ‘internationalism, cosmopolitanism, humane values; and the alternative...disastrous barbarism’ – the ‘emphasis on city forms as superior to rural values implicit’ in the term, Terry Cooney contends, is unmistakable.<sup>45</sup> In the consciousness of the Left writers of the era there was an

inherent assumption that 'complexity and sophistication' were the inevitable by-products of life lived in the big city. This association is explored with a measure of ambiguity in Barke's earlier novels, but is more decisively expounded in *The End of the High Bridge*, where, in accordance with the dialectic prescriptions in the Rahv epigraph, Barke's novel suggests he consciously strove to avoid the pitfall of the 'leftist philistine' who creates an 'irreconcilable antithesis'. Instead, in invoking the traditions and forms of an earlier period, both in literary and cultural terms, and confronting them with the exigencies of a new era, Barke sought to achieve a higher synthesis of forms and content. Thus he was engaged in the business of creating a progressive literature commensurate with Scotland's specific cultural, social and political contexts. Not only that, but with his outward-looking gaze, this progressive literature would link Scotland to the world. In practice, this meant that the author adopted some of the motifs of an idyllic Highland romance then subjected these to an ironic undertow by laying bare the insidious ideological influences that proliferate in this setting. Thereby Barke, on the one hand, recalled an earlier Scottish literature that held a lasting influence over the nation's sense of identity and figured Scotland in the collective imagination as a pre-industrial, feudal backwater. On the other, the author applied a modern gloss to these conventions, augmenting this subversion by introducing modernist literary forms, such as: stream-of-consciousness; interpolations that disrupt the narrative; fragments of memory which imply an unreliability of knowledge; uncertain and fluid notions of personal and national identity; and the complexity of psychological subjectivity.

The resistance to writing a modern Scotland was partly based in fears that cultures were set on a convergent course toward a form of metropolitan

homogeneity; these fears were unfounded. As Raymond Williams argues, ‘the preoccupying visual images and styles of particular cultures did not disappear.’ Neither did existing languages, folk tales, and traditional forms of music and dance. What did occur was that these aspects of indigenous culture ‘passed through [the] crucible of the metropolis,’ which did not merely fuse emergent facets of modern culture together with local traditional ones but was instead ‘an intense and visually and linguistically exciting process in its own right, from which remarkable new forms emerged.’<sup>46</sup> This posits a transitional phase, though there is an argument to be made for continual evolution subject to occasional accelerated phases. *The End of the High Bridge* is certainly published in one of these phases and indicates a transformation in Scottish society as well as a shift in literary forms. Alluding to this evolutionary process, Barke wrote that, ‘as artists, [we are] conscious of our traditions, grateful for our heritage and imbued with a deep sense of the responsibility we share for that grand total of all art and human endeavour – civilisation.’<sup>47</sup>

An illustration of the striding toward the future embodied in the synthesis of old and new forms comes in a meta-fictional episode in the novel whereby the increasingly feral character, John MacLeod, begs for food at the home of a (fictional) ‘author of fifty late Victorian Highland romances,’ (*EHB*, p. 240) Elizabeth Anne Cummers. In this meeting the two characters are shown to be highly wary of each other but maintain a courtesy and appropriate social distance:

John MacLeod did not realise how evil and haunted his face appeared. A thick black stubble was on his chin: the cheek bones protruded gauntly through lack of food and sleep: his, eyes were sunken and haunted with worry fear and desperation. Miss Cummers would not have been surprised to hear that he had



committed some horrible and bloody murder – every external evidence was against him. (*EHB*, p. 240)

Elizabeth Anne Cummers, faced with the down-at-heel Highlander ravaged by alcoholism, religion, vice and unemployment, is a literary embodiment of the tradition of something akin to ‘Victorian Highland romances’ – or equally its Lowlands equivalent, Kailyard fiction – confronted by the debased modern manifestation of Highland Scotland. Each character plays their part in a sub-textual, doubled metonymy whereby a literary legacy of distorting traditional fiction comes face-to-face with a representation of the ‘realistic’ present. Margery Palmer McCulloch points the disparity between the perception and the reality of Highland Scotland, whereby ‘Scott’s early nineteenth-century fiction transformed the Highlands into an icon of Romanticism,’ this notion being reinforced by ‘Queen Victoria’s love of Balmoral [which] “civilised” both Highlands and Highlanders in the imagination of southerners.’<sup>48</sup> In actual fact, the true state of the Highlands was one of a socially moribund environment, ‘depopulated as a result of the Clearances and economic conditions generally, the Gaelic language in severe decline, and the remaining population demoralised.’<sup>49</sup> The fictive, illusory Scotland perpetuated by decades of Highland romances is confronted in appropriately Dickensian fashion by its earthly ‘ghost’ that combines elements of the country’s past, present and future which it repressed. The comfortable retreat occupied by Cummers in which she perpetuates the myth of a feudal, pastoral Scotland is invaded by the reality of Highland society in the guise of John MacLeod: ‘[he] began to feel resentment. Who was this woman, sheltered and shielded from life, that she should presume to question and probe into the secrets of a man? A frown gathered on his brow and the black eaves of

his eyebrows jutted out in protest.’ (*EHB*, p. 242) The path to a higher synthesis of forms will be a brooding and contingent negotiation.

### **A Marxian Cultural Movement?**

Barke, like Rahv, a self-proclaimed Marxist, was set on attempting to reconcile his revolutionary politics with a literary form that was fit for purpose. If effectiveness of assertion was a key quality in writing for the age, then it followed that there was necessarily an assertion to be made, and narrow prescriptions for literature would reduce the chance of successfully divining the most pertinent form. What became obvious as the decade unfolded was that the highly doctrinaire Stalinist blueprint for proletarian literature, increasingly divergent from the comparatively more liberal literary theories promoted by ‘Trotskyism’, imposed an orthodoxy that limited the parameters of artistic freedom to the extent that validity of representation was fatally hampered. Of course the rigid application of this doctrine other than in the form of a self-imposed observance, as Peter Marks notes, did not extend in any significant way to Leftist writers in Britain. Unlike their Russian peers, British writers, though subject to indirect pressures and involved in lively debates, were free from any threat of retribution and exile. In this comparatively libertarian atmosphere they generally did not conform to central orthodoxies but enjoyed the lack of restrictions where artistic consideration was largely placed in the hands of the author.<sup>50</sup> A major objection to the narrow prescriptions for literature was that an effectiveness of assertion could not be achieved within such confines.

Undoubtedly, Barke did strive to achieve a new and invigorated realism in his novels; however his novels demonstrate that this could be achieved from a number of approaches by employing a range of differing techniques and forms.

The Stalinist ideal for a proletarian literature in Soviet Russia resulted in a reductive correlation of political and cultural orthodoxy. This created something of a *de facto* formal schism between the adherents of Stalinist Communism and the broader artistic spectrum of a Marxian cultural movement. One establishing basis for the more open-minded ethos was that, thus far, the ‘emergent proletarian class,’ as Jeffrey Segall notes, had failed (and were not expected any time soon) to produce a ‘literature of its own.’ Therefore, as ‘culture was above classes,’ for Left authors to apply the Stalinist doctrine – a doctrine of denunciation and critique more than a positive impulse to nurture literature – so rigidly to the literature of the 1930s would be to adversely affect the ‘culture of the future.’<sup>51</sup> This argument would retain an appeal for both Rahv and Barke as it allowed an avenue of reconciliation between the formal innovations of modernism and the quest for an effective revolutionary literature.

However, one further consideration in the adoption of a particular position on the formal spectrum was to challenge the *laissez-faire*, literary liberalism of the preceding decades: the idea that these forms were sufficiently and substantively revolutionary in themselves failed to grasp the exigencies of the decade. Devoid of a function that was allied to the real, novels written in them arguably would be mere exercises in stylistics: artistic revolution, in the quickening political ferment of the 1930s, did not equate to socio-political revolution. The flaw of the preceding decades that became both glaring and untenable was, as Harvey Teres explains, that ‘the highly politicized debates taking place over modernism [...] discourse and ideology, “high” and “low” culture, canons and conventions [...] occurred largely without crucial references to political events, movements, causes, or constituencies.’<sup>52</sup> Effectively, Teres

suggests that these cultural debates were carried out exclusively in the rarified atmosphere of literary criticism remote from events or more practical concerns. This is a disjunction with the real that rendered the foregoing debate ethically meaningless. Teres here has highlighted the characteristics of the cultural debates that would make them susceptible to accusations of being solely ‘bourgeois’ distractions. The remedy was to connect the debates and discourse to the real, to ground them in experience. In this regard, Barke waded into the fray in a letter to a would-be author in February 1938:

It’s true they publish all sorts of rubbish – Gollancz no less than Mills and Boon – but even rubbish has got to conform to certain standards – unless it’s terribly highbrow stuff like Virginia Wolff [sic] or W. H. Auden when it can have neither form nor content – but even then you’ve got to have a gang of half-wits going around acclaiming you and be able to pull certain wires. Auden gets the King’s Gold Medal for – yes – Poetry (so help me God: but you’ve got to recognise that being King of Great Britain and Northern Ireland has its penalties). Still, if you’re not catering for Bloomsbury or the Left Infants you’ve got to conform, as I say, to certain standards.<sup>53</sup>

In his vitriol, Barke lampooned the stylistic contortions of Woolf and Auden as well as pillorying the critics who acted as cheerleaders for this particular ‘highbrow stuff,’ which, in Barke’s opinion, was at its most risible when devoid of both ‘form [or] content.’

Though there is a considerably weightier argument for Auden attempting to anchor his poetry in ‘political events, movements, causes, or constituencies’, as elsewhere, Barke here reveals his continued disdain for the ‘Left Infants’ of his group. It is safe to assume that Barke’s view was that, if genuine proletarian literature was to emerge in Britain, it was not going to emanate from this particular source. Clues to the fatal flaws in the ‘engaged’ literature of those such

as Auden are expressed in Barke's letter to his publisher when he states that, 'art is organised experience – experience organised harmoniously as an art form.'<sup>54</sup> This sentiment was restated in the preface to *The Land of the Leal*, when the author claimed that 'the basic material of imaginative literature is the product of experience.'<sup>55</sup> This speaks to the imperative of an autobiographical authenticity and a prevalence of the documentary impulse of the age, the latter epitomised in literature by George Orwell, on film most notably by John Grierson, and enshrined in the central ethos of the Mass Observation movement established in 1937. By contrast, the experience of the Auden Group was one of privilege and entitlement – for Orwell there was a notion of necessarily 'going over' – thus undermining an autobiographical authenticity that could speak to the working class. This intrinsic link between literature and experience was to remain one of Barke's primary convictions throughout his writing career. In a letter to Barke in 1947, one of his friends recalls to the author his definition that 'art is the organisation of experience.'<sup>56</sup> Even in writing his Burns novels, the author had undertaken exhaustive research to the extent that he reputedly amassed 15 tonnes of printed material, spending countless hours reading on the subject before committing any words to paper, thereby gaining some form of (albeit second-hand) extensive 'experience' of his subject.

The widespread though not broadly articulated belief on the Left that proletarian literature could only emanate from genuinely working-class authors was an ideological precept that could be deemed false and obstructive: conversely, the development of an aesthetic in line with the interests of the proletariat was the key to successful connection between literature and the real. Thus Barke's particular formula for a genuine and effective proletarian literature

begins to emerge: the writer must have a particular politics and aesthetic that act as the litmus test of the age; these should be unconstrained by overbearing and prohibitive cultural doctrines; and the writer must have had the experience necessary to represent the experiences of the masses at large authentically. Crucially, this last criterion does not define a class status for the author – and tellingly, MacDiarmid, in his eulogy for Barke at the committal service in 1958, described the author as a ‘Scottish writer who *sided* [emphasis added] with the working class,<sup>57</sup> rather than a man *of* the working class – it merely implies that the perspective should be one that is sufficiently aligned with the experience of the masses. As only one element that feeds into the process of writing literature, this was more complex than simply being the first-hand reportage of mass proletarian experience, such as that vital component conceived in Lenin’s theory of ‘reflectionist epistemology.’ Marxist-Leninist epistemology understood knowledge as the mirror image of reality, which satisfied ‘materialist descriptions’ but failed properly to consider active cognitive function, tending to posit consciousness in a passive role.<sup>58</sup> More wide-ranging considerations of epistemology held that the knowledge derived from experience was in fact augmented by cognitive subjectivity as well as factors of ‘national culture, religion, [and] socialization.’<sup>59</sup> This all points to Rahv’s idea of an informed sensibility that is firmly lodged with the wider public and serves to enlighten the masses.

### **Literature for the Age**

As if to exemplify the chasm that existed between the theoretical debate that proposed the creation of a proletarian literature (or at least a literature for a ‘proletarianized audience’<sup>60</sup>) and the immediate and quotidian experience

affecting the writer, we can usefully turn to James Gilbert's citation of the prominent American poet, Maxwell Bodenheim. In an essay entitled 'The Revolutionary Poet' published in *The Little Magazine* in 1934, Bodenheim, in this 'denunciation of bourgeois society' claimed that 'no proletarian worker on the face of the earth is more shamefully and deceitfully exploited than is a poet in any capitalist country.'<sup>61</sup> Bodenheim here assumes a global capitalism that transcends local economic models and specific cultural conditions. Though his statement is designed to encourage the assimilation of the Left-leaning literati into a series of international soviets, the sentiment is a highly polarising one that would be unlikely to generate much purchase or endear poets to the masses. In fact, there is a decidedly hollow ring to this statement that makes it echo like the complaint of a Left wing *arriviste*. In light of such unhelpful and histrionic bourgeois 'double-speak', many of the Left-wing American intellectuals continued to look to Russian literature for the lead on how to 'overcome the alienation of the artist from industrial society.'<sup>62</sup> Conversely, Barke himself looked to the West, taking the novels of Theodore Dreiser as an exemplar of effective writing. Throughout the personal papers in the Barke archive, the name of Theodore Dreiser repeatedly occurs. The author was even described as a 'Scottish Dreiser' by James Russell in his obituary for Barke in 1958. He explained that, somewhat enigmatically, despite the author's admiration for Dreiser, the 'comparison [he had proposed to Barke on a couple of occasions prior to his death] by no means pleased him.'<sup>63</sup>

In pursuit of the ambition to overcome the alienation of the artist from society, many writers on the Left throughout Europe and the USA (though in very different social and political environments and to differing agendas) rejected

propagandistic prescriptions to steer a subtler course. This project Barke referred to somewhat euphemistically as being ‘at one with his civilization.’ He expressed this desire in the note that was to form part of the foreword to *The Land of the Leal* when he wrote:

And if honesty compels us to face the major political and economic issues of our generation then we confront an obligation which we must discharge, not as politicians or economists (far less as propagandists of a political party), but as artists, conscious of our traditions, grateful for our heritage and imbued with a deep sense of the responsibility we share for that grand total of all art and human endeavour – civilisation.<sup>64</sup>

This statement proposes a practical application of the dialectic to his artistic project. Indeed, Barke took on a decidedly Stephen Dedalus-like note when he wrote to his publisher in 1938 proclaiming that,

Everything springs from the nature of my characters in conflict with circumstance and environment as it is – and not because I would like to see things any particular way. Above all in this book [*The Land of the Leal*] I have striven to bring into relief the spiritual heritage, greatness and potentiality of my race.<sup>65</sup>

Compare this excerpt to Joyce’s ‘I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race,’<sup>66</sup> and there is revealed a shared desire to devise a progressive literature that encapsulates the experience of the people and, for Barke certainly, to provide an unified voice for a socialist future. Where the expressions of sentiment differ is in the optimism of their outlook: Joyce’s observation (through the conduit of Dedalus) is arguably a negative and critical one; Barke’s is a far more positive statement of intent.

Lofty ambition and edifying rhetoric alone, however, were not going to



produce a literature fit for this purpose. The creation of a literature for the age of opposed grand ideologies was mired in an atmosphere of Leftist factional squabbles. Jostling for their position, Rahv and his collaborator on *Partisan Review*, William Phillips, were at odds with doctrinaire criticism which they dismissed as mere ‘literary leftism’. Apart from its often pan-national, reductive Soviet jingoism, in which cultural differences were too easily (and idealistically) dismissed, this Leftism was also too rudimentary to be a success. The vulgar conception of a straightforward link between the economic base and society’s structure was unable to accommodate the complexities of human experience and consciousness competently; or the public and private lives of individuals. In their revaluation of literature and criticism’s range of problems, Rahv and Phillips, revitalised the term ‘sensitivity’ to the extent that in his essay ‘Sensitivity and Modern Poetry’ (1934) Phillips urged the proletarian movement to ‘adopt as its slogan “Let sensitivity take its course.”’<sup>67</sup> Teres explains the signification and hopes invested in the concept:

[G]iving the term such prominence [...] meant to counterpose it to the terms of the dominant reflectionist epistemology and corresponding social realist aesthetic of doctrinaire Marxism. The idea of sensitivity represented a complex, mediated version of subjectivity in place of the reified antithesis of behaviourism and a spurious voluntarism that beset the Comintern’s analysis of the ‘subjective factor’ during its sectarian Third Period.<sup>68</sup>

Brecht seemed to gesture toward the notion of an embodied sensitivity, though utilising the description of a sensuous mode of writing, ‘where one can smell, taste and feel everything.’ This, he warned, should not automatically ‘be identified with a realistic mode of writing,’ as he explains ‘there are works which are sensuously written and which are not realistic, and realistic works which are

not written in a sensuous style [...] Realism is not a mere question of form.<sup>69</sup>

Brecht also seems to encompass Rahv's notions of sensibility in his ruminations on realism; what could be argued of Brecht's definition is that it is a wide-ranging one with the revelation of truth at its core, instead of limitations placed on artistic conventions:

Realistic means: discovering the causal complexes of society / unmasking the prevailing view of things as the view of those who are in power / writing from the standpoint of the class which offers the broadest solutions for the pressing difficulties in which human society is caught up / emphasizing the element of development / making possible the concrete, and making possible abstraction from it...Moreover we shall allow the artist to employ his fantasy, his originality, his humour, his invention, in following them. We shall not stick to too detailed literary models; we shall not bind the artist to too rigidly defined modes of narrative.<sup>70</sup>

Freedom to experiment is encouraged here to achieve the authenticity of class representation, mount a challenge to ideological orthodoxy and to get at the nature of society. Adorno acknowledged Brecht's efforts in providing works of art that had become 'self-consciousness [...] as an element of political praxis,' and become invested with a certain power that defied 'ideological blindness.' This 'cult of practicality' was a central aesthetic constituent of Brecht's work.<sup>71</sup>

The project that Rahv and Philips undertook was to devise (or discover) a proletarian literature, but using elements that were anathema to orthodox cultural Marxists. In *The End of the High Bridge*, there are signs that Barke too was similarly engaged and confident that the route to success was the introduction of subjective psychological interiority and narrative disruptions that flew in the face of conventional social realist aesthetics. True to the theory of the dialectic, in their respective endeavours, Rahv, Philips and Barke appeared to

acknowledge that taking existing forms and blending these with antithetical aesthetics, i.e. parodying romantic motifs, would produce the higher synthesis from which effective proletarian literature would emerge. Thus, 'bourgeois' literature was not rejected out of hand for its class associations but instead used as one of the assimilated elements vital to the production of a truly proletarian literature. These 'supposed universals' that nonetheless undergo a process of modernization constitute a literary tradition which was 'both creatively preceded and creatively succeeded.'<sup>72</sup> And while the Futurists asserted the necessary destruction of this tradition, which overlapped with 'socialist calls to destroy the whole existing social order,' the reality was that they remained in mere transition more than subject to radical demolition.<sup>73</sup> From this we can again recognise an aspect concomitant with Rancière's 'double effect' where there co-exists both a familiar 'readability' and a 'perceptual shock' of the uncanny which resists signification. In Rancière's paradigm, this is driven by the 'negotiation between opposites' – the dialectic, in effect – which then transforms the art form.<sup>74</sup> Barke's introduction of psychological subjectivity, contemporary political connotations, and un-Presbyterian lasciviousness into the genre of Highland romance produces just this effect. This was the author assimilating a tradition of Highland romance and striving toward an effective, modern proletarian literature adapted to socio-political criticism.

Barke's early Highland novels used the familiar motifs of romantic popular fiction in order to present a vision of Scotland that was recognisable to his readership while leading them, as T. C. Smout articulated of Edwin Muir's writing, to correct the 'effusions [that] blinded Scotland to the possibility of seeing itself as it really was.'<sup>75</sup> Once more we may detect in

Barke's literary ambition an echo of Joyce's implied intention when he famously likened *Dubliners* to a 'nicely polished looking glass.'<sup>76</sup> Most glaring of the range of falsehoods that continued to obfuscate the reality of Scottish life and culture, Edwin Muir contended, were the traits of 'couthy sentimentality and religiosity.'<sup>77</sup> Though far from couthily sentimental, a nightmarish religiosity was a trait directly dealt with by Willa Muir in *Mrs Ritchie*, and similarly one component of Scottish identity that Barke savaged in *The End of the High Bridge*. To challenge these damaging national delusions identified by Muir, in his fiction Barke revisited the late nineteenth-century staples of Scottish literature in order to subvert them. In doing so, Barke could be said to be influenced by Rahv and Philips in his application of their critical strategy, thereby laying himself open to allegations by conventional Leftists that he was merely conforming to the bourgeois traditions that had formed the bedrock of the Scottish novel. Anticipating such criticism, Barke provided a pre-emptive response in his letter to Albert Mackie when he wrote:

I have my waywardness. I use clichés, the most shocking clichés: sometimes in a gently ironic sense, sometimes bitterly, occasionally with brutal intent.<sup>78</sup>

The ironic mirroring of the sentimentality inherent in Highland romance was the principal currency in Barke's critique of Scottish society, forming part of his sensibility as an effective Left writer.

It was surely the confluence of aesthetic commitment that drew Barke to Rahv as a literary critic, and the sentiment of the epigraph testifies to Barke's desire to radicalise and revitalise Scottish culture. In an evaluation of his literature on the event of the author's death, his aim was summarised as being to 'inject realism, actuality, and a sense of political commitment into the Scottish

novel.<sup>79</sup> This sentiment was closely echoed by another obituary writer who described Barke's mission as being 'to put life into the Scottish novel [which] as he saw it, was something formal, too cosily literary, and middle-class.'<sup>80</sup> In the opinion of that particular eulogist, these were 'frightful failings, especially to young men on the political Left,' during the 1920s and 1930s. Reading *The End of the High Bridge* in light of Rahv's conception of the dialectic, it is evident that Barke had produced a novel that conformed to these prescriptions transmuted into a Scottish idiom. Thematically exemplified in the tension between religious traditions holding social control and a fiercely protected right of individual recourse to rational humanism, religious doctrine as expounded by the church is adhered to and appearances kept up, but when prevailing circumstances are such that basic individual freedoms are threatened, the controlling forces of religion are defied. *The End of the High Bridge* is in parts ironically nostalgic for the rural Scotland of the past while scathing in its portrayal of the worst excesses of this unsophisticated – or un-cosmopolitan – way of life. John MacLeod is (initially) an archetype of the virtuous, God-fearing Highland worker, while his wife, Anna, is the very model of the pragmatic individual, sceptical about the value of the church and its influence on the everyday lives of the people: 'Anna was not religious. Pagan she was in her heart. The forms of religion had no validity for her. So little did the church matter to her that she did not trouble to oppose it.'<sup>81</sup> This is the first notification to the reader of the ideological tension that exists within the fictive world of Barke's story; a tension within the smallest unit of societal bond, between husband and wife. From this point the tensions are shown to extend across the scope of the Highland society depicted in the novel, taking in class, economic, generational and religious antagonisms. In accordance with

Mathias Nilges' argument on the dynamic narrative, rather than indicative of a 'static form of thought that reduces characters to types', the characters in *High Bridge* conform to a Lukácian interpretation of Marxist notions of social typicality in that they 'indicate a form of thought directed at historicity and historical change.'<sup>82</sup> In this way, Barke 'writes' the dialectic into his novel.

### **Innovative Forms**

Outside the story-world of the novel, and as a matter of form, Barke also nourished the dialectic with the introduction of modernist techniques to this debased Highland romance. Employing a rudimentary technique of simultaneity the author describes the scenes at Meallanach and Allt nam Mearlach, colliding images that are ostensibly pastoral in their attention to nature's sublime beauty and soothing effects. These images are then contrasted with the rather less pastoral actions of his characters who, in the midst of this Highland splendour, are engaged in the pursuit of purging their bodily needs:

An old grey buck found the fence closed against him, sniffed the late presence of man and turned back towards the corrie of Meallanach with a warning snort. A dog fox, ears back, nose quivering, ventured out from his den among the bracken and rock and young birches high in the steep banks of Allt nam Mearlach. Great silent hawk moths awoke ghostlike stirred themselves abroad. A brown owl blinked, yawned and felt hungry. With an anticipatory scraich it floated off on to the night. The eagle of Blaaven lowered the shutters on its steely eyes. Below the dog-trap at Meallanach eight sleepy ducks, wearied with their long waddle to Abhainn na Beiste, tucked away their heads with faint dreamy quacks and settled firmly on their downy keels. At the same Meallanach John MacLeod threw pebbles at Daisy Harrison's window and Adam Sinclair coughed up his last quota of lung cells for the day. (*EHB*, pp. 43 – 44)

Serving as a comedic juxtaposition, this nod to innovative literary forms of simultaneity disrupts the linear narrative to provide a temporal thickening and an

illustration of the plurality of perspectives. Throughout the novel, there are frequent interludes of explication where the characters' interior selves are brought to the fore to break the narrative flow, and the subjectivity of these perspectives is suggested, as above, by the elliptical descriptions of the events.

Further reverberating with the echoes of Joyce's writing, the author also employs a stream-of-consciousness technique in Daisy's recollections, though this appears in free indirect discourse rather than full-blown interior monologue:

Oh lordie! What a sweet sad world of crying flesh and aching hearts. Standing here at the bottom of John MacLeod's garden and remembering curious far-off things: dusty railway compartments: the first demented babble of foreign tongues in the hot jostling pavements of Ostend. The first ice-cream vendor at Eastbury: the first ice-cream in the world. And the young cadet's arm round her and her young breasts tortured behind bars of stiff whalebone and walls of stitched drill. Lordie, lordie! Would not the world stand still for a moment and let her look back for a little: till she could get her bearings: till she could think: consider the way out? Now she was realising among the far-off dust of dimly recollected railway carriages that she loved John MacLeod. Not only did she cry for him: somewhere deep in her innermost core there was a terrible yearning for his presence. She did not want the marriage of dish washing and sock darning. But if that was the price she must pay...(*EHB*, p. 52)

The transience and uncertainty of memory fragments, as well as a form of Modernist disorientation, are suggested in Daisy's pleas: 'Would not the world stand still for a moment and let her look back for a little: till she could get her bearings: till she could think: consider the way out?' This fleeting reminiscence has a psychological aspect that yearns to recapture the excitement and innocence of youth, and though the choice of free indirect discourse sees the narrator, to a certain extent, encroach upon the interiority of the memories, there remains a Molly Bloom-like undertone to these recollections.

Barke's possible source for these near-interior monologue interpolations is gleaned from a letter he wrote in 1935 when corresponding with his film-student friend in Russia, to whom the author revealed his feelings on Joyce:

I didn't get Joyce; I understand why. But I have since read him. Without doubt there is some wonderful writing in it. The first and last sections [of *Ulysses*] are magnificent. The rest is, I think, pathological.<sup>83</sup>

As an aside, as well as perhaps being a little disingenuous in his criticism of Joyce, evidenced by his emulation of many aspects of his writing, Barke's use of the term 'pathological' is interesting in itself and identifies one of the terms associated with psychological discourse brought to the fore by Freud and that feeds into Modernism. It may reflect a more hard-line Marxist judgement on modernism, though given Barke's willingness to engage with these forms, it seems likely to be less dismissive than this. The 'last section' which Barke finds 'magnificent' of course would include, though not necessarily be limited to, Joyce's 'Penelope' episode. The influence of this episode is evident in one of Daisy's later monologues with truncated parallels to that of Molly Bloom: each woman ruminates on the practicalities of the menstrual cycle, albeit Daisy's concerns are more urgent and she is thrown into panic by her calculations, fearing (rightly) that she may be pregnant:

She tore the calendar from the wall beside the fireplace: turned to the month of August and feverishly tried to count backwards and forwards...There could hardly be any doubt about it: she was caught with child. (*EHB*, p. 124)

In her predicament, Daisy turns to an unlikely source of comfort and advice in John MacLeod's wife, Anna. Her instinct is that Anna is bound neither by the tyranny of appearances perpetuated by the rituals and dogmas of the church, nor a loyalty to her husband. For her part, Anna justifies this faith and overlooks the



actions of Daisy in sleeping with her husband. In contrast with John MacLeod's reaction to the situation he has been instrumental in creating, she approaches the problem to hand in a sympathetic yet practical way. Anna informs her that the city alone offers a solution for Daisy's 'problem' in the form of an abortion, the salvation from this very earthly predicament created in Skye: 'I have heard of things being done in the cities that couldn't be done here at all. You'll not be so well known there for one thing.' (*EHB*, pp. 138 – 139) As well as this opportunity to solve a personal problem, the anonymity offered by the city is a comfort unavailable in the traditional villages of the Highlands. Here is the first occasion that the idea of a world beyond the confines of Kinlochdonnan encroaches on the everyday life of the villagers.

Interpolated between Daisy's initial interior discourse and a more conventional narrative scene where John MacLeod is repairing a deer fence, there is an unattributed passage of distinctly Old Testament hue.

The world was old – older than time. The Ancient of days was parched: hair cracked: laminated. The dust of ages burdened the earth. The hills wavered a little in the terrific heat. But they would outlast all the heat of all the suns. And all day and all night through all eternity they would stand. Aye, they would wither – a little. In the beginning had been the Word. Now the Word was rising from afar off, belching out of the great cities of the world, rising, growing, spreading. But the hills knew the Other Word. In what mysterious and manifold forms had they heard it? Even yet in the corries the whispers would be lingering faintly in the silence of the night.

Or would the mills of God grind down even the mountains till all was arid desert and burning sea? And still the Word – senile, maybe – a death whisper. But still the Word? (*EHB*, pp. 52 – 53)

Is this how the inherently adversarial dialectic between religion and a rising tide of modernity manifests for the religious faithful? Clinging to its last vestiges of

influence in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, moribund religion – the ‘Other Word’ – feels the pressure but still lingers ‘faintly in the silence of the night.’ The implication in the narrative is that the reader has leapt from a privileged access to the psychological subjectivity of Daisy to a contrasting insight into the aggrandised religious meditations or doubts of her lover, John: the contrast is jarring. Where Daisy is shown to be anodyne in her negotiations of the self, lost in the reverie of her personal (and at this point escapist) memories, John’s consciousness is ravaged by religious tracts and threatened by a sense of an impending grand battle. In this depiction of the deterioration of John MacLeod’s mental state, Barke sets about attacking the influence of a religion that forms a supporting structure for class oppression and augments societal control.

Preparing himself for the ideological confrontation he senses and precipitates within himself, John MacLeod has long since devolved all personal responsibility to the ‘Evil One [...] with tail and cloven hoof’ (*EHB*, p. 69) to whom any aberrant behaviour or insidious character trait may be attributed. If the reader were in any doubt as to how religion, at its worst, can affect a soul, when Anna berates MacLeod and informs him she is leaving she warns him that ‘giving your madness a holy sanction is tempting providence too far.’ (*EHB*, p. 184) But there is a fanatical confidence in MacLeod’s religious righteousness. Anna’s homespun brand of rational wisdom is what is called for, but it is eclipsed in the blazing hubris of MacLeod’s mania. Again echoing the writing of Hogg, once MacLeod convinces himself that it was the ‘Evil One’ that had prompted him to visit the minister, Mr MacVicar, in a state of agitation about the possibility of being possessed, he sets in motion a process by which he believes

his actions either to be the predetermined will of God or carried out unwittingly under the influence of the Devil. Expunging all capability for rational contemplation, MacLeod devises a plan to murder the new factor, Adam Sinclair, in MacLeod's view a devotee of 'the heathenish evils of Rome,' (*EHB*, p. 54) for a perceived slight on John's character:

The Lord did not look kindly on a Papanach humiliating His devout and humble servant. The Almighty was no less than himself slow to anger. But the Lord his God was a jealous God suffering no rivals and no enemies to gain the upper hand in the end. (*EHB*, p. 88)

Suitably fortified in his justification, MacLeod engineers the circumstances that ensure Sinclair falls to his death over the parapet of the High Bridge during a violent storm.

MacLeod being made an elder of the church and becoming enmeshed in the upper echelons of the fabric of Highland society, an office he assumes with feigned humility, is the catalyst that triggers the Calvinistic escalation in his own mind. When invited into the lodgings of the new factor, Andrew Stewart, MacLeod allows himself to be coerced into taking a glass of whisky. Having overcome MacLeod's instinctive aversion to taking strong drink, Stewart then tells him of his own experiences as an elder where it was 'very necessary to keep up a very strict public appearance.' (*EHB*, p. 103) In a series of actions that are calculated to ensnare MacLeod, the factor then relates the tale of when he and the minister, Mr Gilmour, sat through the night at the bed of Stewart's dying mother. Stewart expresses to MacLeod the sense of shock he felt that night when the minister had accepted his offer of a glass of whisky. In his ploy to undermine MacLeod, Stewart then recounts the words of the minister as he drank: 'You know, Andrew, I think our Lord would have appreciated a glass of whisky that

night He waited in the garden.’ (*EHB*, p. 103) Exaggerating and emphasising his sense of surprise for MacLeod’s benefit, Stewart claims ‘you could have knocked me over with a feather at that.’ But he goes on to explain to MacLeod the contrived philosophy behind the minister’s quasi-theological, pseudo-medical justification for drinking whisky:

Alcohol is the surest proof of God’s mercy and the loving kindness with which He looks after us [...] Everywhere in the world there is pain and anguish, trial and tribulation. There exists no joy that I know of that does not turn sooner or later into sorrow. Where even is the health that does not turn sooner or later to disease and death? I have seen many death-beds, Andrew, but I have seen few peaceful ones. Now in whisky, Andrew, the Lord provides a palliative for all our suffering. It cannot cure disease it is true: it cannot give health where there is none. It can, however, assist and help to overcome infection and disease. But what it can do, Andrew, and I know nothing else equal to it in this respect: it can lift the melancholy from the spirit: it can melt the sorrow from the heart: it can dissolve the vapours of distemper from the brain. (*EHB*, p. 106)

In terms of the narrative, the story told by Andrew Stewart is designed to ensure MacLeod is tempted astray, but it also serves as an implicit authorial attack on the hypocrisy of the church. The novel in its entirety is a sustained attack on the belief promoted by the institution itself of the role of the church as a moral beacon at every level of life. Flowing out of this critique is the wider suggestion that the traditional view of the Highlands as the seat of a settled, transhistorical Scottish identity is illusory: it is, in Barke’s depiction, a place comprising irreconcilable factors of religious tradition maintained by a powerful and controlling church, clan loyalties sustained by family, friends and a social bonding, often tied to the ritualised (if furtive) imbibing of alcohol. These factors are implied to be interlocked in a mutually perpetuating bondage, rather than being simply oppositional, and the very characteristics that yoke Highland

society to regressive traditions, thus revealing the contradictions that inhere in Scottish life. Illuminating this social paralysis, Barke's novel is both idealistic and radical in its attempts to fuse socialist realist purpose, modern motifs and the traditions of Scottish novels in order to dismantle the pernicious, self-perpetuating fiction of Highland identity.

Running through the novel is an expressionist motif; the Scottish Highlands, with their light and fog, lends itself – provides a palette, as it were – to a certain chiaroscuro. For example, on being informed that John had been chosen to have the status of church elder conferred upon him, Anna goes to gather her thoughts in the garden:

By this time the western sky was glowing beyond the intensely black Coolins. But such a brooding interrogatory silence had settled down over the land and sea that she was glad to get in again. (*EHB*, p. 18)

As the symbol of the natural world, Anna discerns the portent in the sunset, the lights and dark of the Highland weather continually reflecting the psychology of the characters. As John awaits the arrival of Sinclair in order to carry out his murderous plan, 'the whole night seemed an inferno of fire and chaos hurling through a terror-shot darkness of wind and rain.' (*EHB*, p. 86) Building to the climax of the scene, the staple pathetic fallacy of gothic fiction is heightened, and the passage resonates in the style of German Expressionist cinema of the 1920s: 'The lightning had ceased to flash so continuously and vividly...But now the great jagged streaks of it zigzagged across the sky throwing up the hill tops for a brief second.' (*EHB*, p. 89) Here it is at its most dramatic, though these contrasts of light and dark appear throughout the novel.

Onto this black and white screen, John MacLeod's unconscious preoccupations are superimposed: 'For new in the shadows, as he peered furtively about him, he could see naked women beckoning to him silently. They would flit and fade, only to reappear somewhere else: vague: shadowy and yet, somehow, horribly real.' (*EHB*, p. 62) This reveals the Dionysian frenzy that is being repressed by John. From these beginnings of a carnal obsession, John MacLeod becomes tortured by the existence of his own libido, in conflict with his self-perception as one of God's chosen people:

He now began to see hell as a place of monstrous caricatures and images. No longer did the Devil stick the three prongs of his fork in you and toast you in the flames. He flung you among a filthy crowd of demented nymphomaniacs. Grotesque slaving monsters whose indescribable motions and gestures indicated their sex [...] But now his aqmind was a whirling maelstrom of insane eroticism. Caught in the vortex of his own madness it seemed that he was about to be destroyed. (*EHB*, p. 61)

The counterbalance to MacLeod's symbolic deterioration and eventual ruin is exemplified in the form of the progressive-minded Keith Cameron. Suitor to MacLeod's daughter, Keith is the ferryman employed by Uilleam Mór to row passengers across the Minch – a Charon in reverse, as it were. As the novel's emblem of the new generation, Keith's desire is to get away to Glasgow, though he is not so naïve and idealistic as to be unaware of the scarcity of jobs and the onerous burden of rent payments for lodgings: he harbours no 'streets paved with gold' fantasies. With his parents set against the idea – 'What would he, a simple Highland lad, be doing in a wicked place like Glasgow: without a friend at all?' (*EHB*, p. 112) asks his mother – Keith longs to get away from Skye, 'this dismal hole of a place where a lad never got a chance of seeing anything.' From

his youthful viewpoint, Keith's dissatisfaction with his prospects are simply stated:

What interest had he in his native Skye? It was a dreary place for an active intelligent youth who had no desire for the quiet placid country existence. Natural beauty did not excite him. He could feel no response to the glory of a sunset. The awe and majesty of mountain ridges did not inspire him. (*EHB*, p. 113)

The author provides a degree of continuity here in foreshadowing the opening of his next novel. In *Major Operation's* opening sunset, the Glasgow policeman who had been born and raised on the Isle of Skye 'had little use for the more noteworthy and spectacular of Nature's effects.'<sup>84</sup> A sense of wounded disillusionment hangs around both men. Keith's ruminations on Glasgow, however, offer him 'the dream of a new life: a new world.' His youth cannot be contained and satisfied by Skye's outmoded forms of living and he is acutely aware of the opportunities that are being denied him by this isolation. The truth of this is present in his everyday toil:

A dream that was the more bitter and the more real because the lad that dreamed it did so while he racked his guts on the oars of an old ferry-boat – the relic of a dying and decayed existence. (*EHB*, p. 113)

He feels bound to an existence that is peopled by the older generation, stagnant and smothered by tradition. Keith is reluctant to perpetuate a traditional life, the worst aspects of which should die out with the preceding generation.

So what of 'wicked' Glasgow? Keith Cameron is, naturally enough, smitten by the promise of excitement while his parents' view is that it is no place for the Highlander. What worse wickedness, the reader may ponder, lies in the city that the unsuspecting Highlander should beware? Kinlochdonan is depicted

as a fundamentally and paradoxically anti-pastoral place. The antithesis of a traditional Highland romance portrayal, it is a place rife with petty jealousies, power struggles, hypocrisy, over-bearing religious interference, violence, a stagnating economy and a scarcity of opportunity. What corruption can the city offer to vie with these aspects of Island life? Keith's mother is perhaps aware of such possibilities as the previously discussed anonymous abortion that attracts Daisy, and it may be that this is the moral corruption to which she refers.

Again Barke develops a strand of continuity with his later novels, foreshadowing the influx of Highland immigration to Glasgow. Anna, Keith and Mary, in making their plan to escape to Glasgow ponder on how they will fare with accommodation. Anna assures them:

Your Uncle Roderick MacLean is from Mull and it's always to his place they'll be going when he gets his leave from the police [...] And by all accounts Roderick MacLean is a good man and a sergeant itself now with the police. (*EHB*, p. 149)

This specific feature of Glasgow's demography was to recur in Barke's novels throughout the 1930s. Despite its industrial and economic decline, the migration from country to city was to continue ensuring that the population of the city would steadily increase, fuelling a corresponding withering of the Highland communities.

Depictions of the city in *The End of the High Bridge* are differentiated from Barke's other novels in that it features only as an otherwise absent psychological presence in the consciousness of the population. It is here either a fantasy 'otherworld' of excitement attracting the younger generation, or a dystopian counterpoint in the established narrative of the older generation. While these are the binary significations attributed to Glasgow by Barke through the



characters of the novel, the paradoxical truth of the City in the 1930s was that it was neither one nor the other but comprised elements of both. The process of mythmaking and selective view could focus on either aspect depending on agenda. However, many of the restrictive traditions, sectarian tensions and economic constraints experienced in the rural regions persisted in the city. These conditions could co-exist with the more freeing attributes available in the urban environment.

Writing for his age, for Barke there was no big city boom-time to contrast the withering of rural communities. Instead, if seeking to assert the real, there was a need for the depiction of a choice to be made between probable hardship and failure in the Highlands or hardship and failure in its urban guise in depression Glasgow. Keith's desire to escape his humdrum existence on Skye comes with the tacit understanding that participation in the heterogeneity and excitement of modern life as the father of Mary's unborn child, means inevitable economic hardship. At the point of Keith's resignation of his post as the pilot of the Ferry, the tendrils of capitalist exploitation are already exposed in Uilleam Mór's reaction:

“Ha: you can't leave your job like that, Keith Cameron. You'll require to stick to your bargain.”

“What bargain?”

“You'll need to stay till the end of the month – or till I get another man.”

“Well, you'll need to get another man to-night for I'm knowing of no bargain that can keep me. There's my takings and my receipt book and you can be checking up on them.”

“I'll have the law on you, you scart. Have you no sense of decency at all to be putting me in this fix? I'll see your father.”

“But my father knows I am leaving,” Keith lied. “So you'll get your walk for nothing, Mr MacKenzie.”

“We’ll see about that,” said Uilleam Mór. “You’ll get no character from me that’s one thing lad. Tach! You ungrateful young black-guard. To think I’ve kept you in employment all these years to find you would be turning on me and leaving me in the lurch without as much as a thought of gratitude.”

“You can keep that for the Sunday School, Mr MacKenzie. It’s no gratitude I’m feeling for you or the job. I’ve rowed my guts out on that Ferry for twelve shillings a week. You would keep me rowing till I was grey-headed and never say ‘There’s a rise to you.’ And the day’s coming I can tell you when you will have the Ferry to yourself and the rowing of it too: and we’ll be seeing what you can make of it.” (*EHB*, pp. 214 – 215)

There is an uneasy feeling that this demonstration of the exploitative nature of the labour market and the proprietary attitudes of Uilleam Mór (in treating Keith as an indentured servant and with high regard for his own beneficence) will simply be replicated in Glasgow. However, and despite the economic gloom, the city still offers the benefits of modern cosmopolitanism that Skye, and by extension all of rural Scotland, does not: the abandonment of the country for city seems irreversible.

So, as Keith, Mary and Anna leave to go to the city, they embark upon a leap of faith in what will be a redefinition of their formerly ‘stable’ identities. Left behind on Skye to contend with his tumultuous re-evaluation of his life and land, John MacLeod attempts to validate his own sense of identity and righteousness by ‘[casting] back for the ideological line of his fathers.’ (*EHB*, p. 192) His own flawed historical narrative of self-identity revises the Highland clearances by loading them with a heavy burden of religious tradition:

But Jehovah had servants in the South in whom he was well pleased and to them he handed over the bens and glens [...] Then the rich servants from the South, seeing that the people were about to perish entirely, cried out to Jehovah. And Jehovah lent his ear for he was well pleased with his servants and saw that the deer and grouse would need attention and that the estates would have to be

cared for. And he eased his wrath from the people [...] Thus had Jehovah delivered the forefathers of John MacLeod and their gratitude still survived in him [...] For him life began in the Garden of Eden and had developed in accordance with divine plan ever since[...] What the full details of this divine plan were was beyond the comprehension of John MacLeod. But he felt now that he had come to an end. Not a final end that signified a new beginning. He was alone now: utterly alone without a soul standing between him and his God. (*EHB*, pp. 193 – 194)

In his deranged state, MacLeod remoulds Scotland's recent history to an Old Testament narrative, exposing the taproot of Calvinism that convinces him that all events are predestined and unqualified justification is his birth-right. Not only that, but this is a passage that retrospectively sheds more light on the 'ownership' of the previous unattributed interpolation. MacLeod's faith in a divine plan, a passive acceptance of a specific teleology based on purely religious doctrine is shown, for the victims of the clearances and by MacLeod's haggard state, to be a calamitous folly.

Anchoring his sense of self ever more maniacally to the titular High Bridge, this feature is a multifarious symbol: it is a place of reckoning (the death of Sinclair) and contemplation; a place where lives change and decisions are made; a place of crossing over in literal and metaphorical terms; both a symbol of MacLeod's hubris and Anna's stoicism. On leaving the cottage to travel together to Glasgow, Anna, Mary and Keith cross the bridge on the way to the Stornoway boat: 'Keith was the first to break the silence – after they were over the High Bridge.'*(EHB*, p. 188) For this group, variously tyrannised by this place, it is the High Bridge that dominates the psycho-geography of Kinlochdonan. Having been abandoned, John MacLeod finds himself wandering Lear-like in the land, brooding on his concept of God, seeking 'spiritual validity

for his actions' and 'isolated from any mass consciousness.' (*EHB*, p. 191) Equally for John, as for his family, the High Bridge can be evaluated in psychological terms, not as a route to emancipation from social oppression but rather a monumental symbol of his God, his sense of self, and a tradition threatened by 'a decadent form of society.'

Testament to the success of this style, and perhaps providing an emigrant's perspective, a review of *The End of the High Bridge* by the Broadcasting Station, Toronto CFRB proclaimed of the novel:

This is a Scotch [sic] book. Scotch in feeling, in setting, in the idiom in which it is written, and even (to make a bad joke) in that economical use of words that comes only from a genuine sense of their value [...] The theme here is splendidly treated, and unlike the deep and almost moribund story of John which moves upon a plane that is, for the most part spiritual, it is an entirely material affair. A matter of young love struggling triumphantly against the forces of environment and economics; something that we see every day, and therefore (under the circumstances) somewhat comforting!<sup>85</sup>

By this measure, Barke had succeeded in positioning his novel identifiably within the developmental continuum of the Scottish literary tradition while conveying his social and political themes with great effect. A book reviewer from the *Daily Mail* was less able to master Barke's approach to Scottish idioms in *The Land of the Leal*, bemoaning with a modicum of self-deprecation that, 'many words of strange appearance are used which doubtless present no difficulty to the [...] Gibsons and Ramsays [central families in the novel] and their ilk and fellow countrymen, but are stumbling blocks for this Sassenach.'<sup>86</sup> Barke's ability to maintain the essential Scottishness of his novels from his early publications at the beginning of the decade onwards is evident; in the case of *Land of the Leal* the barrier to a universal appeal was to be remedied by the

inclusion of a short glossary of Scottish words prepared by Barke, this being a feature that failed to make the published edition much to the chagrin of the *Daily Mail* reviewer.

Continuing the development of his style and Leftist sensibility, Barke takes the forms and assertions that he employed in *The End of the High Bridge* and moves forward to his next novel, *Major Operation*, broadening the scope of his theme. Armed with his cultural cosmopolitanism and his own experience as a resident and worker in Glasgow, he moves the setting of the novel from Highland Scotland into the city, while applying the approach that has served him in realising his goal of effectiveness of assertion. Buoyed by faith in his own craft, Barke writes to his publisher providing a list of people to whom the book should be sent in the hope of favourable reviews.<sup>87</sup> Barke, in rather self-congratulatory terms, suggests his publisher inform the potential reviewers that

apart from its high literary merits or qualities [...*Major Operation*] deals with the most vital political and economic problems confronting the people of Great Britain today. And all this despite the fact that the novel is not a propagandist effort but a work which will probably be the most importantly discussed of the year.<sup>88</sup>

Describing the novel as a ‘credo’ for which the ‘basis [...] dialectical materialism,’ Barke considers the novel ‘of unique importance in that it is one of the very few novels written from the standpoint of dialectical materialism.’<sup>89</sup> For his fidelity to the ideals of sensibility, dialectic and ‘experience organised harmoniously,’ Barke felt his place as the foremost in the pantheon of Scottish socialist writers was assured:

Actually, of course, I do not consciously imitate or align myself with any group, school or tendency. On the contrary, as far as this country is concerned I am initiating and experimenting – if not heroically blazing a trail!!! Already (vide

critics) I am a novelist of distinction – and presumably in my own right (of course you know I have no illusion about this: I will see if I live – or am allowed to live – one of the most important writers of my generation) the question is: therefore how far are you going to blow bugles to this end?<sup>90</sup>

Self-regarding though this may appear, Barke comes across as a man highly optimistic about his attempt to hold a mirror up to Scottish society and to revitalise and radicalise its culture. His success in achieving this he feels is assured in the use of his ‘effective writing,’ grounded as it is in political exigencies and utilising the synthesis of forms to get at reality.

What his novel certainly achieved was to provide a rare depiction of the modern Scottish cityscape. Its ‘unique importance’, it can be argued, was far less for its ‘standpoint of dialectical materialism’ and more for its fidelity to a new urban Scotland. The following chapter takes into account the role of the city in modern literature and examines the vitally important influence that Glasgow exerted on Barke and his 1930s fiction.

- <sup>1</sup> James Barke, in a letter to Albert Mackie at *The Evening News*, Glasgow, dated 29 April 1939, retained in the James Barke Archive, Special Archives Collection, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>2</sup> Bertolt Brecht, 'Popularity and Realism' (1938), *Schriften zur Kunst und Literatur* (Frankfurt: Artisjus, 1967); reproduced in *Aesthetic and Politics*, trans. and ed. by Ronald Taylor (London: NLB, 1977), p. 81.
- <sup>3</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. by Gabriel Rockhill (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 63.
- <sup>4</sup> Jacques Rancière, pp. 62 – 63.
- <sup>5</sup> Bertolt Brecht, 'On the Formalistic Character of the Theory of Realism' (1938), *Schriften zur Kunst und Literatur* (Frankfurt: Artisjus, 1967); reproduced in *Aesthetic and Politics*, trans. and ed. by Ronald Taylor (London: NLB, 1977), p. 73.
- <sup>6</sup> Bertolt Brecht, 'On the Formalistic Character of the Theory of Realism', p. 73.
- <sup>7</sup> James Barke, in a letter to Collins Publishers, dated 6 December 1938, retained in the James Barke Archive, Special Archives Collection, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>8</sup> Raymond Williams, *Politics of Modernism* (London and New York: Verso, 2007), p. 59.
- <sup>9</sup> Raymond Williams, p. 58.
- <sup>10</sup> James Barke, *The End of the High Bridge* (London: Collins, 1935), p. 13.
- <sup>11</sup> Margery Palmer McCulloch, 'Neil M. Gunn, Chinua Achebe and the Postcolonial Debate', in *Scottish Literature and Postcolonial Literature: Comparative Texts and Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Michael Gardiner, Graeme MacDonald and Niall O'Gallagher (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 124 – 135 (p. 128).
- <sup>12</sup> James Barke, *The End of the High Bridge*, p. 14.
- <sup>13</sup> Review of *The Wild MacRaes* from the *Glasgow Herald*, dated 6 March 1934, in collection of reviews collated by Barke, retained in the James Barke Archive, Special Archives Collection, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>14</sup> Epigram to James Barke, *The End of the High Bridge* (London: Collins, 1935).
- <sup>15</sup> James Barke, *The End of the High Bridge*, p. 15.
- <sup>16</sup> James Barke, *The End of the High Bridge*, p. 60.
- <sup>17</sup> James Barke, in a letter to Albert Mackie at *The Evening News*, Glasgow, dated 29 April 1939, retained in the James Barke Archive, Special Archives Collection, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>18</sup> Alan Riach, 'Wole Soyinka and Hugh MacDiarmid: The Violence and Virtues of Nations', in *Scottish Literature and Postcolonial Literature: Comparative Texts and Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Michael Gardiner and Niall O'Gallagher (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 111 – 123 (p. 123).
- <sup>19</sup> 'T. F. Powys (Theodore Francis Powys) Biography – (1875 – 1953): (Theodore Francis Powys), An Interpretation of *Genesis, Soliloquies of a Hermit, The Left Leg*', [http://www.jrank.org/literature/pages/5439/T-F-Powys-\(Theodore-Francis-Powys\).htm](http://www.jrank.org/literature/pages/5439/T-F-Powys-(Theodore-Francis-Powys).htm) [accessed 07 January 2010]
- <sup>20</sup> James Barke, in a letter to T.F. Powys, written in 1934, retained in the James Barke Archive, Special Archives Collection, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>21</sup> James Barke, letter to T.F. Powys.
- <sup>22</sup> James Barke, *The World His Pillow* (London: Collins, 1933), p. 237
- <sup>23</sup> James Barke, *The World His Pillow*, p. 311
- <sup>24</sup> James Barke, letter to T.F. Powys.
- <sup>25</sup> James Barke, in a letter to Albert Mackie, dated 29 April 1939, retained in James Barke Archive, Special Archives Collection, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>26</sup> Raymond Williams, pp. 69 – 70.
- <sup>27</sup> Lewis Grassie Gibbon, 'Literary Lights' in *Scottish Scene: or The Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn* (London and Melbourne: Hutchison, 1934), p. 172.
- <sup>28</sup> Lewis Grassie Gibbon, 'Literary Lights', p. 173.
- <sup>29</sup> Lewis Grassie Gibbon, 'Literary Lights', pp. 168 – 169.
- <sup>30</sup> Lewis Grassie Gibbon, 'Literary Lights', p. 173.
- <sup>31</sup> James Barke, in a review of Edwin Muir's *Scott & Scotland* (1936). It is not known if this review was ever published and exists in the archive only in hand-written form, retained in James Barke Archive, Special Archives Collection, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>32</sup> James Barke, review of Edwin Muir's *Scott & Scotland* (1936).
- <sup>33</sup> Lewis Grassie Gibbon, 'Literary Lights', p. 175.
- <sup>34</sup> James Barke, *The End of the High Bridge*, p. 19.
- <sup>35</sup> Raymond Williams, p. 66.
- <sup>36</sup> It has not been possible to trace the original source of this quotation, though it is likely to have been from an issue of *Partisan Review*.
- <sup>37</sup> James Barke, in a letter addressed to 'My Dear Kerr', dated 27 February 1936, retained in the James Barke Archive, Special Archives Collection, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>38</sup> James Barke, 'Dialectics, World Politics and a Lovely Girl', *Glasgow Weekly Herald*, 2 January 1937, retained in the James Barke Archive, Special Archives Collection, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>39</sup> James Barke in a letter to Neil M. Gunn, dated 29 October 1938, retained in the James Barke Archive, Special Archives Collection, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>40</sup> James Barke, in a letter to Collins Publishers, dated 28 April 1936, retained in the James Barke Archive, Special Archives Collection, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>41</sup> 'Philip Rahv Biography (1908 – 1973): *Partisan Review*, Discovery of Europe: The Story of American Experience in the Old World', <http://www.jrank.org/literature/pages/5489/Philip-Rahv.html> [accessed on 3 March 2010]
- <sup>42</sup> Mark Krupnik, *Jewish Writing and the Deep Place of the Imagination*, ed. by Jean K. Carney and Mark Shechner (Madison, Wisconsin and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), p. 159.
- <sup>43</sup> Jeffrey Segall, 'Between Marxism and Modernism, or How to Be a Revolutionist and Still Love "Ulysses"', *James Joyce Quarterly*, 25.4 (1988), 421 – 444 (p. 435).
- <sup>44</sup> Terry A. Cooney, 'Cosmopolitan Values and the Identification of Reaction: *Partisan Review* in the 1930s', *The Journal of American History*, 68. 3 (1981), 580 – 598 (pp. 582 – 583).
- <sup>45</sup> Terry A. Cooney, p. 584.
- <sup>46</sup> Raymond Williams, p. 45.

- <sup>47</sup> James Barke, in an unattributed note, dated 19 December 1938, retained in the James Barke Archive, Special Archives Collection, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>48</sup> Margery Palmer McCulloch, p. 128.
- <sup>49</sup> Margery Palmer McCulloch, p. 128.
- <sup>50</sup> Peter Marks, 'Illusion and Reality: the Spectre of Socialist Realism in Thirties Literature', in *Rewriting the Thirties: Modernism and After*, ed. by Keith Williams and Steven Matthews (London and New York: Longman, 1997), pp. 23 – 36 (p. 34).
- <sup>51</sup> Jeffrey Segall, p. 424.
- <sup>52</sup> Harvey Teres, 'Remaking Marxist Criticism: Partisan Review's Eliotic Leftism, 1934 – 1936', *American Literature*, 64.1 (1992), 127 – 153 (p. 129).
- <sup>53</sup> James Barke, in a letter to E. Gaitens, dated 3 February 1938, retained in the James Barke Archive, Special Archives Collection, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>54</sup> James Barke, in a letter to Collins Publishers, dated 28 April 1936, retained in the James Barke Archive, Special Archives Collection, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>55</sup> James Barke, in a note written in April 1938 and later included in *The Land of the Leal* (London: Collins, 1939; repr. Edinburgh: Cannongate, 1987), retained in the James Barke Archive, Special Archives Collection, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>56</sup> J. Nobbs, in a letter to James Barke, dated 22 August 1947, retained in the James Barke Archive, Special Archives Collection, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>57</sup> C. M. Grieve, eulogy at the Committal Service of James Barke, at New Kilpatrick Cemetery, Bearsden, 24 March 1958, a transcript of which is retained in the James Barke Archive, Special Archives Collection, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>58</sup> Thomas J. Blakeley, 'Open Questions in Soviet Epistemology', *Studies in Eastern European Thought*, 5.3 (September 1966), 185 – 189 (p. 185).
- <sup>59</sup> A. J. Polan, *Lenin and the End of Politics* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 171.
- <sup>60</sup> Harvey Teres, p. 132.
- <sup>61</sup> James Gilbert, 'Literature and Revolution in the United States: *The Partisan Review*', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 2.2 (1967), 161 – 176 (p. 164).
- <sup>62</sup> James Gilbert, p. 165.
- <sup>63</sup> James A. Russell, obituary for James Barke, *Scottish Co-operator*, 29 March 1958, retained in the James Barke Archive, Special Archives Collection, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>64</sup> James Barke, in a note dated 19 December 1938, retained in the James Barke Archive, Special Collections Archive, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>65</sup> James Barke, in a letter to Collins Publishers, dated 6 December 1938, retained in the James Barke Archive, Special Archives Collection, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>66</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, pp. 275 – 276.
- <sup>67</sup> Harvey Teres, p. 133.
- <sup>68</sup> Harvey Teres, p. 133.
- <sup>69</sup> Bertolt Brecht, 'Popularity and Realism', p. 82.
- <sup>70</sup> Bertolt Brecht, 'Popularity and Realism', p. 82.
- <sup>71</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedmann, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970); trans. and ed. with introduction by Robert Hullot-Kentor (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 316.
- <sup>72</sup> Raymond Williams, p. 46.
- <sup>73</sup> Raymond Williams, p. 50.
- <sup>74</sup> Jacques Rancière, p. 63.
- <sup>75</sup> T. C. Smout, preface to Edwin Muir, *Scottish Journey* (London: W. Heinemann, in association with V. Gollancz, 1935; repr. Edinburgh and London: Mainstream, 1979), p. xxvii.
- <sup>76</sup> Jeri Johnson, Introduction to James Joyce, *Dubliners* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. vii.
- <sup>77</sup> T. C. Smout, p. xxvii.
- <sup>78</sup> James Barke, in a letter to Albert Mackie at *The Evening News*, Glasgow, dated 29 April 1939, retained in the James Barke Archive, Special Collections Archive, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>79</sup> 'Biographer of Burns in Five Novels', an obituary for James Barke, *The Glasgow Herald*, 21 March 1958, retained in the James Barke Archive, Special Archives Collection, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>80</sup> 'Death of a Scots Novelist', an obituary for James Barke, *The Scotsman*, 21 March 1958, retained in the James Barke Archive, Special Archives Collection, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>81</sup> James Barke, *The End of the High Bridge*, p. 17.
- <sup>82</sup> Mathias Nilges, 'Marxism and Form Now', *Mediations*, 24.2 (Spring 2009) 66 – 89 (p. 79), [www.mediationsjournal.org/marxism-and-form-now](http://www.mediationsjournal.org/marxism-and-form-now) [accessed 28 June 2010].
- <sup>83</sup> James Barke, in a letter addressed to 'Arthur', written in 1935, retained in the James Barke Archive, Special Archives Collection, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>84</sup> James Barke, *Major Operation* (Collins: London, 1936; repr. 1955), p. 16.
- <sup>85</sup> Review of *The End of the High Bridge*, by Broadcasting Station, Toronto CFRB, dated 3 March 1935, retained in the James Barke Archive, Special Archives Collection, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>86</sup> Review of *Land of the Leal*, *Daily Mail*, 1 June 1939, retained in the James Barke Archive, Special Archives Collection, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>87</sup> This list comprises: J.B. Priestly, A.J. Cronin, Henry W. Nevinson, Storm Jameson, Naomi Mitchison, Bertrand Russell, John Strachey, Prof. John MacMurray, Ernst Toller, Prof. Levy, C. Day Lewis, Gerald Heard, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Aldous Huxley, Julian Huxley and Prof. Harold Laski.
- <sup>88</sup> James Barke, in a letter to Collins Publishers, dated 20 August 1936, retained in the James Barke Archive, Special Archives Collection, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>89</sup> James Barke, in a letter to Collins, dated 28 April 1936, retained in the James Barke Archive, Special Collections Archive, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
- <sup>90</sup> James Barke, in a letter to Collins, dated 28 April 1936, retained in the James Barke Archive, Special Collections Archive, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.