The modernist project of Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid), like that of many other Europeans working in minority cultures in the period, displayed a magpie-like identification with intellectual concepts and currents from abroad. MacDiarmid's oeuvre, as it fleshed out an important part of the Scottish literary renaissance during the interwar period, constantly referred to other minority cultures whose (imminent) emancipation was drawn on as a model to be followed in Scotland. Before his conversion to literary Scots as the language of a modern revival, the poet frequently looked to Ireland to assert that in Scotland also a literary regeneration would occur through the medium of the English language. Similarly, he occasionally referred to the Belgian literary revival (1880-1910) during which a group of francophone writers had managed to put forth a Belgian literature in French distinct from that of France. MacDiarmid's comparison of Belgium and Scotland is well known, because it occurred among others in a text he wrote for the first issue of his Scottish Chapbook, in which he famously gave the 'Scottish Renascence' of the interwar period its name--two years before his French friend, Denis Saurat, did so in his essay 'Le groupe de "la Renaissance Ecossaise"' for the Revue Anglo-Americaine. As far as I am aware, scholars of MacDiarmid so far have taken his comparison of Scotland and Belgium at face-value, assuming that the fundamental correspondences he thought he had detected between the literatures and cultures of both nations were sound. In this essay I intend to demonstrate that the similarities between both ran deep indeed, but not in the way MacDiarmid depicted them. His view of Belgium and its literature amounted to a complex misreading well worth decoding if we want to arrive at a better understanding of emancipatory projects launched from within European minority literatures.

GALLANT LITTLE BELGIUM

Like many Scotsmen MacDiarmid developed an active interest in Belgium shortly before World War One. His 'Ode to All Rebels' and 'A Parable to Chamberlain', written long after that war, bring out forcibly why the little continental country all of a sudden became of topical interest:

There are buildings in ilka toon where daily Unthinkable horrors tak' place
I am the woman in cancer's toils
The man without a face [...] A 'gallant sodgers' murderin' for pay, (Plus 'little Belgium' or like affairs) --And heroic airmen prood to gi'e Puir tribes hell frae the air. (3) Where is the world which answered the call of Belgium? Where is the humanitarian heart of the millions Who go to Church and pray to God, Or of the millions who call themselves idealists Yet go about their business, signing letters, Having manicures, seeing cinemas, While a city of culture and beauty Is being ground into dust? (4)

These two excerpts convincingly recall the representation of Belgium that circulated in British pro-war propaganda (both in and outside literature) during the Great War. (5) In summer 1914, it had taken the Triple Alliance two weeks to invade and bulldoze neutral...
Hugh MacDiarmid was born Christopher Murray Grieve, in the Scottish border town of Langholm in 1892. His father was a postman and the family lived above the town library, so, from childhood, Grieve (or MacDiarmid as he became known from the early 1920s) had unrestricted access to books. This encouraged an interest in reading and in language that would remain with him throughout his life. Hugh MacDiarmid, Lucky Poet: A Self-Study in Literature and Political Ideas (London: Methuen, 1943) p. 156. Further references will be incorporated in the text, citing LP. Google Scholar. 13. Hugh MacDiarmid, The Company I've Kept (London: Hutchinson, 1966) p. 174. Google Scholar. 14. The connections between MacDiarmid and Mayakovsky are discussed in detail in Peter McCarey, Hugh MacDiarmid and the Russians (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987) pp. 129–61. Google Scholar. 15. For a very interesting account of the peculiar appropriateness of Mayakovsky for Scottish writers, see Edwin Morgan, Academic journal article Scottish Literary Review. The Prism of Propaganda: Hugh MacDiarmid's Modernism and the Belgian Literary Revival. By Bru, Sascha. Read preview. Academic journal article Scottish Literary Review. The modernist project of Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid), like that of many other Europeans working in minority cultures in the period, (1) displayed a magpie-like identification with intellectual concepts and currents from abroad. MacDiarmid's oeuvre, as it fleshed out an important part of the Scottish literary renaissance during the interwar period, constantly referred to other minority cultures whose (imminent) emancipation was drawn on as a model to be followed in Scotland. Modernism in Literature does not mean contemporary. In fact, modernism encompasses works of the early 20th century. Read more about this literary movement. The following are characteristics of Modernism: Marked by a strong and intentional break with tradition. This break includes a strong reaction against established religious, political, and social views. Belief that the world is created in the act of perceiving it; that is, the world is what we say it is. There is no such thing as absolute truth. All things are relative. No connection with history or institutions. Their experience is that of alienation, loss, and despair. Championship of the individual and celebration of inner strength. Life is unordered. Concerned with the sub-conscious. Briti Hugh MacDiarmid's work, and the question of Scots as a dialect or distinct language for modernist Scottish writing, warrants no mention in North's account, though questions of race do throw up difficult political resonances within Scottish poetics, not least in the romanticised genealogies of race, nation, and identity that MacDiarmid often promoted. Despite North's subtle intertwinings, the literary articulation of dialect forms is not only a question of race, but also a feature of the radical interest in non-standard English – especially as represented in and through writing –