Mystical Nationalists: Yeats, Pessoa, and MacDiarmid

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W. B. Yeats, Fernando Pessoa, and Hugh MacDiarmid each came from small European nations in which they helped to spark a literary renaissance that might broadly be described as culturally nationalist. Political activism and cultural revitalisation played some part in this, but this talk is interested in discerning the links between their nationalism and these poets’ spiritual interests. For instance, Richard Zenith describes the Portuguese Pessoa as ‘a self-styled “mystical nationalist” [who] dreamed of a post-Catholic Portugal whose society would be modelled after ancient Greece, where religion, politics, and culture were still intimately linked’. What Pessoa termed ‘the Spiritual Empire’ would only come about upon the return of King Sebastião to redeem his people from national decline. Pessoa shared this mythic belief, called Sebastianism, with other Portuguese people; but he also had other spiritual concerns. Like Yeats, Pessoa was deeply interested in the occult and cast horoscopes. For Yeats, Oisin held a similar relevance to that of Pessoa’s Sebastian: a wandering mythic figure whose return would resurrect national life. Yeats had multiple spiritual concerns, including Rosicrucianism, and he was a member of the Golden Dawn spiritual fraternity. ‘Occult activities could fuse with nationalist activities’, according to Yeats’s biographer R. F. Foster, who argues that ‘occultism had a particularly Irish relevance [...] and when millenarian hopes of nationalist revolution developed [...] occult divination came into its own’. Hugh MacDiarmid was a Scottish nationalist who, in a poem such as *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, proposed to become the Scottish Christ in order to save his people from ‘*their livin’ tomb*’. MacDiarmid called upon the spirit and aesthetic brilliance of poet William Dunbar to revive Scottish literature, but he was also an existential nationalist who sought to carve out a new spiritual reality in a poem such as ‘On a Raised Beach’. The aim of this paper, then, is to chart the cultural, political and possible aesthetic links between these three small-nation ‘mystical nationalists’ and question why their nationalism was grounded upon a spiritual component and how that informed their work as poets and writers more generally.

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My aim in a new book project is to examine modern so-called literary and cultural renaissances in several small nations, and to look at in particular the spiritual and religious ideas that formed the foundation of these renaissances. This talk will focus on three poets who were central to revival in their own countries: Yeats in Ireland, Fernando Pessoa in Portugal, and Hugh MacDiarmid in Scotland.

The turn to religion as a topic of analysis in its own right, and in relation to literature and culture, has particularly interesting implications for how we view the modernist period when these poets were working. The Modernist period (c.1890−1950) was one of massive change, including increasing mechanisation, democratisation and gender parity, as well as catastrophic loss of human life in war. Modernists responded to and helped to create an exciting and troubling paradigm shift at this time in a number of ways. This is an era in which belief in traditional religions such as Christianity was, we had previously presumed, beginning to wane in the West with scientific theories such as Einstein’s relativity and, in the nineteenth century, Darwin’s evolutionary findings undermining a religio-spiritual worldview. Yet Modernism was not the clean break with an irrational past that has often been supposed – as Pericles Lewis says, ‘If God died in the nineteenth century, he had an active afterlife in the twentieth’[[1]](#footnote-1) − and a new and exciting field is emerging in relating Modernism and religion that opens up greater understanding of Modernist texts and the cultural history of the period. Indeed Modernism, according to Erik Tonning, illustrates and involves ‘a pronounced religious impulse’, a striving for transcendence, and a desire to re-sacralise human experience, and crucially here, nations and nationality, through recourse to myth, spiritualism, and traditional religious systems.[[2]](#footnote-2)

My research examines the religious and spiritual forces and ideas behind the Modern movement as these inspired and formed the foundation to movements for national revival in certain small nations. The Modernist period witnessed a remarkable number of ‘renaissances’ in the cultural and political life of many small nations and so-called marginal peoples, from the Irish Literary Revival to the Harlem Renaissance in the United States. These are often, and correctly, seen as (broadly speaking) nationalist movements for cultural and political change in opposition to a larger and more dominant force. Yet it has been very little noted that fundamental to these revivals was a variety of, often antagonistic, religious and spiritual ideas. It is important to understand the religious roots of political ideas, for as Simon Critchley comments: ‘modern forms of politics [...] have to be grasped as new articulations and mutations of the sacred’.[[3]](#footnote-3)

\* Critchley, in *The Faith of the Faithless*, asks the following questions, which are pertinent also to my purposes in examining modern renaissances:

Is politics conceivable without religion? The answer is obviously affirmative as the evidence of various secular political theories testifies. But is politics *practicable* without religion? [...] Can politics become effective as a way of shaping, motivating, and mobilizing a people or peoples without some sort of dimension – if not foundation – that is religious, without some sort of appeal to transcendence, to externality [...]?[[4]](#footnote-4)

For Critchley, the answer is, regrettably, no, politics is inconceivable without a form of grounding belief, or what he calls, after the Romans, ‘*theologica civilis*, civil theology’.[[5]](#footnote-5) What is key here for Critchley is that, while we may seem ‘in the West’ or ‘western Europe’ to inhabit a secular era, nonetheless, ‘The *secularization* that seems to define modern politics has to acknowledge a moment of what Emilio Gentile calls *sacralization*, the transformation of a political entity like a state, nation, class or party into a sacred entity, which means that it becomes transcendent, unchallengeable, and intangible’.[[6]](#footnote-6)

While I can’t go into it detail here, Gentile’s book, *Politics as Religion*, while acknowledging that ‘Fascism was the first nationalist totalitarian movement that fully displayed the characteristics of a political religion, as indeed it proclaimed itself to be’, argues that ‘Historically, the sacralization of politics [...] commenced with the birth of modern democracy and mass politics. Its origins are democratic, republican, and patriotic’ and began with the American and French Revolutions.[[7]](#footnote-7) In other words, whilst it might be tempting to align the sacralisation of politics mostly with twentieth-century totalitarian movements, especially fascism, Gentile claims that our liberal democracies are also grounded in the sacralising of politics. Renan in 1882 would of course describe the nation as ‘a soul, a spiritual principle’, a formulation central to the romantic nationalism of the era.[[8]](#footnote-8) Yet the idea of sacralisation or resacralisation in the modernist period suggests something more and somewhat different to Renan’s idea: a, perhaps rearguard, opposition to secularisation and materialism as some sort of sign of inevitable progress, and the view of art as replacement religion inherited from the likes of the Symbolists, for instance.

In the case of small-nation renaissances, sacralisation was a bid to lift national revival out of the compromises and divisions of politics and into the purity of an originary realm that awaits rediscovery or rebirth. (In practice of course, at the time and subsequently, the reverse happened, with, for instance, the Irish renaissance causing extreme national dissension; as Michael North says, ‘The Irish cultural revival proved almost exactly the opposite of what Yeats set out to prove. Whatever it touched in its attempt to define Irish culture turned out to be a cause of division instead of unity’.[[9]](#footnote-9) The language question would be a major part of this, but religious denomination was certainly another.) \* Rebirth implies return, which in turn implies homecoming. For Jeffrey M. Perl what he calls the ‘tradition of return’ is central to the modernist conception of history. Perl’s model of a ‘three period, *A−B−A* scheme for history’ sees Christianity, period B, follow the first Classical A period.[[10]](#footnote-10) The third period, also called A, implies a modernist return to classicism for the likes of Pound and Eliot, a proposition not undermined for Perl by Eliot’s Christianity, which Perl sees as the Christianity of a post-Christian society. The return to the second A of the third period for cultural nationalists such as Yeats, Pessoa and MacDiarmid also implies some measure of retrieval work, a going back to go forward, but in their case this has more particular national implications. National rebirth, return, renaissance, whatever we wish to call it, is at once post- and pre-Christian, for varying reasons that I’ll explore in relation to each poet; but yet requires a sacralisation of that return, or second-coming, along Christian lines.

\* In 1892, in the early years of the Irish Revival, Yeats wrote to the Irish nationalist John O’Leary:

If I had not made magic my constant study I could not have written a single word of my Blake books, nor would the Countess Cathleen have ever come to exist. The mystical life is the centre of all that I do and that I think and all that I write. It holds to my work the same relation that the philosophy of Godwin held to the work of Shelley and I have always considered myself a voice of what I believe to be a greater renaissance – the revolt of the soul against the intellect – now beginning in the world...I sometimes forget that the word ‘magic’ which sounds so familiar to my ears has a very outlandish sound to other ears.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Yeats here relates his interest in magic to the nationalist play *The Countess Cathleen*, first published in 1892. The following year Yeats published the first edition of *The Celtic Twilight*, subtitled *Myth, Fantasy and Folklore*. \* *The Celtic Twilight* provides the prose complement to ‘The Stolen Child’ (1889), with its children taken by faeries from a world ‘full of weeping’, and resurrects the Arnoldian Celt: in touch with the suprarational realm and expressing ‘Celtic sadness, and [...] Celtic longing for infinite things the world has never seen’.[[12]](#footnote-12) Yeats says he wants with *The Celtic Twilight* ‘to show in a vision something of the face of Ireland to any of my own people who would look’, but his vision is of a static, kailyard Ireland of the rural west.[[13]](#footnote-13) His claim to have ‘been at no pains to separate my own beliefs from those of the peasantry’ is questionable given his subsequent description of the Catholic Irishman of stereotype, Paddy Flynn, who possesses ‘the visionary melancholy of purely instinctive natures and of all animals’.[[14]](#footnote-14) Yeats’s relationship to the peasantry of *The Celtic Twilight* is reminiscent of Wordsworth’s recourse to ‘Low and rustic life’ in *Lyrical Ballads*: ‘because in that situation the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language’.[[15]](#footnote-15) While Wordsworth found in the English rural poor open hearts and a plain expression through which he would create a Romantic vernacular, Yeats aligned the Irish peasant and the visionary poet in his belief that ‘Both seek – one in wandering sentences, the other in symbolic pictures and subtle allegoric poetry – to express a something that lies beyond the range of expression’.[[16]](#footnote-16) The earthy, demotic origins of English Romanticism might be contrasted with the Symbolist roots of Yeats’s nationalism, what Murray Pittock terms ‘Symbolism-in-community’.[[17]](#footnote-17)

We may be sceptical of the Yeatsian (and Wordsworthian) poet as anthropologist of the peasantry, but *The Celtic Twilight* seeks the resacralisation of the people and the land through enchantment, the return of the mythical past to the present, and the creation of a ‘Celtic phantasmagoria’.[[18]](#footnote-18) James F. English, writing of a later and different cultural context, terms this ‘magical indigenous’, a class of what we now call world literature of which Yeats’s *The Celtic Twilight* was a forerunner.[[19]](#footnote-19) Yeats was deeply immersed in magic and the occult (as was Pessoa) from the late 1880s, helping to organise the Dublin Hermetic Society in 1885, joining the Theosophical Society in 1887, and the Golden Dawn in 1890 − an observance of the Golden Dawn was ‘QUIT THE MATERIAL AND SEEK THE SPIRITUAL’.[[20]](#footnote-20) W. Y. Evans Wentz’s 1911 book *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries*, which claimed that ‘To the Celtic mystic, the universe is divisible into two interpenetrating parts or aspects: the visible in which we are now, and the invisible which is Fairyland or the Otherworld’,[[21]](#footnote-21) was dedicated to Yeats and AE, and Yeats owned a copy of the Scot Rev. Robert Kirk’s *Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns, and Fairies* (reprinted 1893, from 1691),[[22]](#footnote-22) mentioned by MacDiarmid in *Scottish Eccentrics*.[[23]](#footnote-23) ‘Occult activities could fuse with nationalist activities’, according to Yeats’s biographer R. F. Foster, who argues that ‘occultism had a particularly Irish relevance [...] and when millenarian hopes of nationalist revolution developed [...] occult divination came into its own’.[[24]](#footnote-24)This centrality of magic to Yeats’s Irish Revival downplays the importance and role of Christianity in Ireland and the life of the Irish peasantry. The poor, like the poet, are seers, but they see fairies not God.

We see the demotion of Christianity’s significance, or at least its reduction to the same level of importance with other religio-philosophical worldviews, in Pessoa and MacDiarmid, too, and Yeats would continue this in his own work with *A Vision*. *A Vision* might be dismissed as part of the silliness W. H. Auden bemoans in ‘In Memory of W. B. Yeats’, but the book, continually revised by Yeats and published in two editions in 1925 and 1937 (which I will refer to), is a genuine attempt to understand the movements of history. Yeats writes at the beginning of *A Vision* of visiting churches, and says that some of *A Vision* was ‘thought out’ in the chapel of All Souls, Oxford.[[25]](#footnote-25) While not Christian, *A Vision* is what Pericles Lewis, writing on modernist novels, calls ‘a modern form of sacred text’.[[26]](#footnote-26) \* The roots of *A Vision* stretch back to 1917, just after Yeats’s marriage to Georgie Hyde-Lees, when George began to receive instruction from the spirit world which she communicated in automatic writing. The ‘mystical marriage’ Yeats had so desired and been continually refused with Maud Gonne would seem to have come to pass with George,[[27]](#footnote-27) although, for George Mills Harper, the automatic writing of this period was a culmination of Yeats’s occult interests:

as an Associate Member of the Society for Psychical Research for at least fifteen years, Yeats had no doubt read its journals; and he had attended hundreds of séances over a period of many years. Perhaps no great literary figure had observed and tested so many different methods of experimentation with extrasensory perception as Yeats had in the period stretching from 1887 (when he joined the Theosophical Society) to 24 October 1917 (when George began to write).[[28]](#footnote-28)

\* George’s ‘automatic script’ became in *A Vision* an attempt ‘to explain history philosophically’.[[29]](#footnote-29) History, which Yeats envisages in *A Vision* as an interlocking ‘double cone’, is generated by the antithetical movement of Discord and Concord, aristocracy and democracy, and as one civilisation declines another is born.[[30]](#footnote-30) A decadent Christian age is giving way to a new era – but of what; ‘what rough beast [.../] Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?’ asks Yeats in ‘The Second Coming’.[[31]](#footnote-31) Yeats himself acknowledges the correspondence with Spengler’s cyclical conception of civilisation in *Decline of the West*, which was first translated into English in 1926, just after the publication of the first version of *A Vision*. He also cites the importance of the Egyptologist Flinders Petrie’s *The Revolutions of Civilisation* (1911), and the thinking of Vico, of which he claims that ‘half the revolutionary thoughts of Europe are a perversion of Vico’s philosophy’.[[32]](#footnote-32) Elizabeth Cullingford argues that, ‘Conceived and written while the Bolsheviks were consolidating their power in Russia, *A Vision* offers an alternative to the Marxist interpretation of history. Yet Yeats’s myth owes much to the philosophical structures which it is designed to refute’ – in other words, he employs a dialectical method.[[33]](#footnote-33) However, Cullingford admits that *A Vision* is Yeats speaking primarily to the Irish, citing a letter he wrote to Lady Gregory in which he says: ‘I would prefer to stay out of Ireland till my philosophy is complete & then settle there and apply its doctrine to practical life’.[[34]](#footnote-34) *A Vision* is in fact a central document of the Irish renaissance as a modernist movement, a movement of return, because the idea of the ‘Otherworld’, the spirit world George met with through the instructors, is connected in Celtic mythology to ‘belief in re-birth’.[[35]](#footnote-35) *A Vision* is about the importance to history of the force of personality, what Yeats calls the ‘Assertion of Individuality’.[[36]](#footnote-36) But it is also about the (hoped for) rebirth of an aristocratic civilisation. Yeats’s interest in the occult is not, then, merely the mystical search for enchantment of the elite poet-mage. Rather, as Leon Surette argues, ‘the notion of a cultural “renaissance” conforms to the occult paradigm of change – itself modelled on the ancient cultic practices of palingenetic initiation – and is in strong contrast to the Enlightenment notion of a revolution, or overturning, of the status quo to form a new order’.[[37]](#footnote-37) \* Palingenesis, meaning rebirth, has been linked to fascism by Roger Griffin in his book *Modernism and Fascism*,[[38]](#footnote-38) and other writers have accused Yeats of fascism beyond his dalliance with the Irish Blueshirts in 1933.[[39]](#footnote-39) I would argue that Yeats’s nationalism remains conservative-Burkean, and must be seen in Irish terms as a contrast to the revolutionary (if still arguably anti-Enlightenment) republican martyrology of the 1916 Easter Rising. *A Vision*, written by an Irish Protestant, is, in these terms, a Symbolist interpretation of history, a defence against the chaos and horror of human history, and in particular, the direction in which that ‘history’ would, in Yeats’s time and subsequently, tend in Ireland.

\* Like Yeats, the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa was interested in the occult. Pessoa, born in Lisbon in 1888 and dying there in 1935, cast horoscopes, implied he was an initiate of the Templar Order of Portugal, the A∴A∴ (Argentum Astrum), inspired by MacGregor Mathers’s Golden Dawn of which Yeats was a member, began automatic writing in 1916−17, around the same time as Yeats, and met with Aleister Crowley in Lisbon in 1930.[[40]](#footnote-40) According to Patricia Silva McNeill:

The similarity between the geometrical figures in *A Vision* and those that recur in Pessoa’s automatic writing is striking, especially the symbol of the interlocking double-cones. Like the Yeatses, Pessoa was consciously or subconsciously reproducing symbols he had encountered in the teachings of the Golden Dawn on the Kabbalah in Mather**s**’s and Crowley’s books.[[41]](#footnote-41)

Pessoa read the ‘first two volumes of Crowley’s *The Confessions of Aleister Crowley* (1929)’,[[42]](#footnote-42) owned a copy of Crowley’s *777 and other Qabilistic Writings* (1909), and his personal library also contains books on Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism. (However there are also lots of books on Christianity, many by the Scottish rationalist freethinker John Mackinnon Robertson (1856−1933).) Like Yeats, the esoteric mattered to Pessoa at a fundamental creative and personal level. In a letter from 1935, the final year of his life, Pessoa writes: ‘there are three paths toward the occult: the path of magic [...]; the mystical path [...]; and the path of alchemy, which is the hardest and most perfect of all, since it involves a transmutation of the very personality that *prepares* it’.[[43]](#footnote-43) If Yeats’s key poetic credo is ‘Myself must I remake’[[44]](#footnote-44) − the ‘holy fire’ of alchemical transmutation is central to Yeats’s ‘Sailing to Byzantium’, for instance,[[45]](#footnote-45) − then Pessoa (which means ‘person’ in Portuguese) is best known for the invention of his many heteronyms. \* While for Yeats the concept of the Mask is ‘a form created by passion to unite us to ourselves’,[[46]](#footnote-46) for Pessoa the heteronyms were in many ways a release from the self (or non-self) of the individual personality.

While a pseudonym is merely the adoption of a different, ‘false’, name, heteronym is Pessoa’s term for the invention of entirely different writers. Pessoa is estimated to have created around seventy heteronyms in all, some more fully developed than others. Many of the heteronyms were not only given names, but assigned birth and death dates, physical and mental characteristics, horoscopes, and distinct worldviews and writing styles. His main three poetic heteronyms, Alberto Caeiro, Ricardo Reis and Álvaro de Campos, he invented in 1914. However it would be a mistake to assume that Pessoa created his heteronyms as various masks through which he could express his self or selves, which would be to miss the point that that self did not exist. Pessoa wrote under his own name, but he termed this an orthonym, which still suggests distance from the self. Pessoa was, for K. David Jackson, a ‘quintessential modernist’, and as such his heteronyms dramatise the crisis (if such it is) of the modern personality.[[47]](#footnote-47) Richard Zenith says that Pessoa ‘created [...] a series of characters but no play for them to act in’.[[48]](#footnote-48) But in their multiplicity, and through commenting on each others’ work, they are also designed to create (or create the illusion of) a modernist literary movement in Portugal – something that also informed MacDiarmid’s *modus operandi* in Scotland at the same period. \* Little magazines were part of this: Pessoa founded *Orpheu* (1915 – two issues) and *Athena* (1924 – five issues), and his contribution to the only issue of *Portugal Futurista* (1917) saw it seized by the police. He also, in 1912, envisioned a ‘New Renaissance’ emanating from Portugal.[[49]](#footnote-49)

\* *Mensagem* (or *Message*), the only book Pessoa published in his lifetime, in 1934, and written under his own name, is central to his plans for a Portuguese renaissance. *Message* recreates Portugal’s high imperial era for the modern period, linking the nation’s most renowned sea explorers, Bartolomeu Dias [Diaz], Ferdinand Magellan, and Vasco da Gama, with prophetic figures such as Bandarra, Dom Sebastião, and António Vieira, whose *History of the Future* (1718) is a source of the myth of the Fifth Empire – the idea that Portugal would be the fifth great imperial and spiritual world power after Greece, Rome, Christianity, and European imperialism. \* The Symbolism of *Message* is conveyed in its somewhat vatic-sounding title and in its opening note in Latin, which translates as: ‘Blessed be the Lord our God Who gave us a sign’, the ‘quotation engraved on the Symbol of the Rose and Cross of the Rosicrucian Order’.[[50]](#footnote-50) The opening poem of *Message*, ‘The Castle’, illustrates a renaissant Portugal’s mythic role: Europe is a woman, and different body parts correspond to nations, such as ‘Greek eyes’: ‘She stares with a fatal, sphinxian gaze / At the West, the future of the past. // The staring face is Portugal’.[[51]](#footnote-51) Many of the poems of *Message* are quite martial, in surprising contrast to the modernist introversion of *The Book of Disquiet*, perhaps Pessoa’s best known book for English-speaking readers. The poem ‘The Fifth Empire’, in part three of the book, ‘The Hidden One’, exemplifies the idea of Portugal as the coming spiritual and cultural power, but one reliant on the return of King Sebastian. \* Sebastian was a Portuguese king in the sixteenth century who had tried and failed to conquer Morocco, disappearing in battle. The myth that he was still alive and would return resurfaced at key moments of Portuguese history, especially under Spanish (Castilian) rule, and Sebastian became a ‘folk hero’ after the restoration of Portuguese independence in 1640.[[52]](#footnote-52) In Pessoa’s ‘The Fifth Empire’, Sebastian is a Christ-figure, with Portugal, and the world, awaiting the return of the ‘hidden one’: ‘Who / Will come to live the truth / That King Sebastian died?’ Pessoa asks.[[53]](#footnote-53) Pessoa, whose main heteronyms often adopt a pagan worldview, adapts the Christian myth of the second coming to the idea of national renaissance, just as he develops his heteronyms partly in order to suggest the multiplicity of Portuguese nationality.

The idea of mythic return is also employed in the work of Scottish modernist poet Hugh MacDiarmid. (Often, if MacDiarmid’s own propaganda is to be believed, he fulfils the role of second coming, but he did want to see a return to the renaissance Scots of William Dunbar as a model of poetic practise.) MacDiarmid was the pseudonym of Christopher Murray Grieve, but it might be more helpful to see ‘MacDiarmid’ as a Mask or persona, if not exactly a heteronym, rather than being merely Grieve’s main penname. Grieve used a multitude of names, such as A. K. Laidlaw, A. L., Arthur Leslie, Gillechriosd Moraidh Mac a’ Gheidhir, Isobel Guthrie, James Maclaren, Mountboy, Pteleon, and Stentor, and ‘Grieve’ commented on and promoted MacDiarmid’s work, especially at the beginning of MacDiarmid’s career as a Scots language poet who was central to a so-called national renaissance in the early 1920s.

\* MacDiarmid had no deep occult interests, but he did utilise Yeats’s idea of the Great Wheel from *A Vision* in his *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*. (Yeats’s Great Wheel is a somewhat deterministic division of life into twenty-eight phases patterned on the movement of the moon; a revolution of the wheel takes two thousand years, which of course corresponds to the Christian era.) MacDiarmid expressed incredulity over Yeats’s ideas just after the publication of the first version of *A Vision* in 1926: ‘How grotesque, how far-fetched, how insanely ingenious all these esoteric properties, these paraphernalia of *romanticism*, these endless Chinese puzzle-boxes are’.[[54]](#footnote-54) In *A Drunk Man*, MacDiarmid uses the Great Wheel with the half-satirical, half-serious purpose of ridiculing and attacking the Scots. (Read pp. 188−190 of Buthlay). This hardly represents a sacralisation of the nation. Like Yeats and Pessoa MacDiarmid uses Christian imagery, as here with the sacrificial poet-Christ, and also in the ‘Ballad of the Crucified Rose’ section of *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, although this refers to the waste of the workers’ revolutionary hopes in the 1926 General Strike, and not to a linking of theological and national concerns and imagery. \* In *A Drunk Man*, MacDiarmid claims that ‘He canna Scotland see wha yet / Canna see the Infinite, / And Scotland in true scale to it’, a thought which both relativises and eternalises Scotland in one.[[55]](#footnote-55)

In this period, for Alex Owen,

‘mysticism’ was representative of a crisis of the disenchanted Weberian subject. The new ‘spiritual movement of the age’ confirmed the authority of rational self-authenticating subjectivity and at the same time spoke to the inadequacies of a worldview that did not include the possibility of living with God.[[56]](#footnote-56)

For the nationalists Yeats, Pessoa and MacDiarmid, religion and mysticism allowed them a means to return their nations to history through a symbolical rebirth that, while borrowing from Christian myth, is at once pre- and post-Christian.

1. Pericles Lewis, *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Erik Tonning, *Modernism and Christianity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Simon Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless: Experiments in Political Theology* (London and New York: Verso, 2014), p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless*, p. 24. Italics in original. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless*, p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Critchley, *The Faith of the Faithless*, p. 24. Italics in original. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, trans. by George Staunton (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006 [first published in Italian 2001]), pp. xvii, xvi. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ernest Renan, ‘Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?’ [‘What is a nation?], Sorbonne, 11 March 1882, trans. by Martin Thom, in *Nation and Narration*, ed. by Homi K. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Michael North, *The Political Aesthetic of Yeats, Eliot, and Pound* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. ?, cited in Yeats, *Norton*, p. 388. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Jeffrey M. Perl, *The Tradition of Return: The Implicit History of Modern Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Letters [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. W. B. Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight: Myth, Fantasy and Folklore* [1893] (Bridpont, Dorset: Prism Press, 1990), p. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight*, p. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight*, p. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. William Wordsworth, ‘Preface’ to *Lyrical Ballads*, in *Wordsworth’s Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Nicholas Halmi (New York and London: Norton, 2014), p. 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight*, p. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Murray G. H. Pittock, *Spectrum of Decadence: The Literature of the 1890s* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight*, p.12. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. James F. English, *The Economy of Prestige: Prizes, Awards, and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 320. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. William H. O’Donnell, ‘Yeats as Adept and Artist: *The Speckled Bird*, *The Secret Rose*, and *The Wind among the Reeds*’, in Yeats and the Occult, ed. by George Mills Harper (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1976), pp. 55-79 (p. 58). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. W. Y. Evans Wentz, *The Fairy-Faith in Celtic Countries* (London, New York, Toronto and Melbourne: Henry Frowde, Oxford University Press, 1911), p. 492. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Kathleen Raine, ‘Hades Wrapped in Cloud’, in *Yeats and the Occult*, pp. 80-107 (p. 87). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Hugh MacDiarmid, *Scottish Eccentrics* [1936], ed. Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 1993), p. 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life. Vol. 1: The Apprentice Mage, 1865−1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 106-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
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