



Continuing the Renaissance: Little Magazines and a Late Phase of Scottish Modernism in the 1940s

La poursuite de la renaissance : les « petites revues » et la nouvelle phase du modernisme littéraire écossais des années 1940 et 1950

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Introduction

As in many avant-garde contexts in the early years of the twentieth century, little magazines were at the forefront of the modern—and modernist—Scottish literary revival initiated by the poet Hugh MacDiarmid in the years immediately after World War one, when he challenged existing traditions and sought to remove Scotland and its culture from the subservient status of a provincial “North Britain”. *The Scottish Chapbook* was the first of these MacDiarmid magazines, published in August 1922, a year that also saw the publication of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* by Sylvia Beach of Shakespeare & Co. in Paris in February, and T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, appearing in the American magazine *The Dial* in November. *The Scottish Chapbook* is probably the most memorable of MacDiarmid’s magazines, since it was here that he transformed himself from his editorial role as C. M. Grieve to the new Scots-language poet “Hugh M’Diarmid”, astonishing readers with “The Watergaw” (and with Grieve’s accompanying editorial comments about the poem and its fictional author).¹ It was *The Chapbook* also in which the significant series of editorials (or “Causeries”, as Grieve called them) “A Theory of Scots Letters” appeared in the February and March 1923 issues, arguing out the case for and against the use of the Scots language for a new modern poetry. Having started from a pre-*Chapbook* position that, as in the earlier Irish literary revival, a Scottish revival in literature would have to be carried out in a Scottish form of English, by the end of his “Theory of Scots Letters” self-debates, Grieve found himself insisting that the Scots Vernacular was “a vast storehouse

1. C. M. Grieve, “Causerie”, *The Scottish Chapbook*, no. 1.3, October 1922, pp. 62–3.

of just the very peculiar and subtle effects which modern European literature in general is assiduously seeking".² Formerly despised as an outworn language no longer suitable for a revitalised literature, Scots was now seen as the medium that could fulfil the *Chapbook Programme*'s objective of taking Scotland back into the mainstream of European culture where it had belonged in the earlier historical period of the poets Henryson and Dunbar.

The Scottish Chapbook was followed in quick succession by *The Scottish Nation* and *The Northern Review* which continued to act as a platform for new writing and as a forum for the discussion of the new cultural and political ideas. The title "Scottish Renaissance" was increasingly applied to the revival movement, and it was under this title that Denis Saurat took news of it to French readers in his article "Le groupe de 'la Renaissance écossaise'", published in *La revue anglo-américaine* in April 1924. In the same year, the phrase was used by the academic George Kitchin in an article on the literary movement in the *Scotsman* newspaper; and in October 1925 "The Scottish Renaissance" was the title Edwin Muir gave to his review of MacDiarmid's *Sangschaw* and its revival context in the American *Saturday Review of Literature*.³

Little magazines were therefore central to the establishment of a fresh way forward for Scottish literary identity in the interwar period. However, while the originating phase of this attempt to redirect the course of Scottish culture had lost its vigour by the outbreak of World War Two in 1939, a second phase, again led by little magazines, started up in the early 1940s and lasted into the next decade. The principal focus of this essay will be an exploration of these little known second-phase magazines, and the interaction between their new poetic voices and ideological positions and those of the earlier MacDiarmid-led revival which still acted as an inspiration, despite differences. The effects of wartime conditions on the production and reception of such little magazines will also be considered, together with the relationship between the magazines and other new poetry being published in the war years and the immediate post-war period. Through an examination of the extent to which a new generation of writers (and their readers) either followed or departed from the earlier movement's prescription for renewal, the essay will attempt to evaluate the legacy of the interwar modernist revival and the extent to which

2. C. M. Grieve, "A Theory of Scots Letters", *Scottish Chapbook*, no. 1.8, March 1923; reprinted in Margery Palmer McCulloch (ed.), *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland 1918-1939: Source Documents for the Scottish Renaissance*, Glasgow, Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2004, pp. 27-8.

3. See Palmer McCulloch, *Modernism and Nationalism*, pp. 53-5, 54-6, 65-7.

MacDiarmid and his literary colleagues succeeded in transforming pre-1918 cultural expectations, and, consequently, in writing a new chapter in Scotland's history.

New Magazines in the 1940s

In Scottish literary and cultural history, the 1940s and 1950s have tended to be seen as a kind of no-man's-land, a period where the optimistic aims of the Scottish Renaissance movement had petered out, while the new writing forms and preoccupations associated with the 1960s and later decades had not yet begun. Yet even a modest perusal of the primary sources of this period suggests how wrong such a perception is, and that what we actually find in these World War Two decades is a second or late phase of the earlier and principal revival movement. This later phase may have been short-lived and ultimately superseded by the new ideological and aesthetic values of later decades, but without recognition of its achievements the narrative of Scottish modernism and an understanding of Scotland's continuing literary journey will remain incomplete.

As mentioned previously, one similarity with the principal interwar phase was the important part played by little magazines in the dissemination of the new ideas and new writing. At the same time, one important difference from MacDiarmid's "do-it-yourself" little magazines was the appearance of a supportive publisher in the person of William Maclellan who, having inherited a printing business from his father, transformed this in the early 1940s into a much needed Scottish publishing house. In 1943 Maclellan was the publisher of *Dàin do Eimhir* (*Poems to Eimhir*) by Somhairle Mac Gill-Eain (Sorley MacLean)⁴, a poetry sequence based in the context of the Spanish Civil War and one which at last brought a long-awaited revitalised Gaelic voice into the modernist poetry revival. And it was Maclellan who in 1955 eventually published MacDiarmid's *In Memoriam James Joyce*, a long poem collaged mostly out of work from the 1930s, but with some more recent interpolations, and one which had encountered many setbacks on its route to publication. Maclellan's little magazines of the forties were *Million*, subtitled in its first issue *New Left Writing*, which ran from 1943 to 1946; *Poetry Scotland*, from 1943 to 1949; and *Scottish Art and Letters*, from 1944-1950. He also published a number of solo collections by poets who were contributors to these magazines, new poets such as Adam Drinan (Joseph Macleod), W. S. Graham, George

4. For convenience in this generalised discussion, future references will use the more familiar English form of MacLean's name.

Campbell Hay, J. F. Hendry, Maurice Lindsay, as well as the older Hugh MacDiarmid. An interesting feature of *Poetry Scotland* and *Scottish Art and Letters* in particular was the inclusion of visual material by young contemporary artists associated with J. D. Fergusson's new Scottish Group of artists, while Fergusson, who had returned from France to Scotland in 1939, himself designed the covers for *Scottish Art and Letters* and acted generally as its Art Editor, as he had done in London in the pre-World War One period for Middleton Murry's *Rhythm. Million*, which also included some visual material and occasional articles on visual art, was primarily, as its subtitle *New Left Writing* suggests, a politically-oriented magazine, reflecting the left-wing politics of the socially and economically depressed thirties which led eventually to the Labour government of the post-war period. It was not, however, particularly Scottish, although its editor, the English poet John Singer, was at that time living and working in Glasgow and several of its contributors were Scottish supporters of its political stance. Its first issue, for example, included contributions from several Scottish writers, including the ex-miner playwright Joe Corrie's "Highland Clearance", MacDiarmid's poem "A Poet Rejects a Right-Wing Plea", and Sydney Goodsir Smith's "Llanto for Garcia Lorca". Its editor asked for submissions from contributors who "have something to say and know how to say it", urging the need to "re-read the best of Steinbeck, Hemingway, Blok, Silone, Malraux, Lorca, Kafka, O'Casey, Saroyan, Grassie Gibbon, Mayakovsky, Mann, Sholokhov and Čapek" to find out what art should be concerned with, as opposed to the production of "large abstract themes". Singer's own article in this first issue, "Literature and War", ends optimistically in relation to its belief in a people's politicised art, emphasising that "Creative art is life's greatest ally" in the fight for individual freedom and against Fascism.⁵ On the other hand, the actual creative writing in *Million* did not always live up to its editor's high aims, and as with all these war-time magazines, delays in production were inevitable. *Million*'s second collection did not appear until 1945, while the third, now subtitled *The People's Review* and published in 1946 brought what seems to have been an unforeseen end to the series. Work from Scottish writers declined after the first issue, with MacDiarmid's article "Scottish Proletarian Literature" being the principal contribution in issue two; and he was again the only recognisable Scottish contributor, apart from images by the artist Donald Bain, in the third collection with the second part of his "Proletarian Literature" article.

5. John Singer, *Million*, no. 1, p. 2, p. 62.

Poetry Scotland

A little magazine more committed to furthering Scottish writing in particular was *Poetry Scotland*, edited by Maurice Lindsay, who was simultaneously serving in the forces: hence, no doubt, his use of the less usual terminology “editorial letter”. Lindsay’s editorials demonstrate a shift in the Scottish position from the nationalist and Scots-language stance which so characterised the earlier MacDiarmid magazines. Although his opening editorial points to the main purpose of the magazine as being to “show Scotland herself, and the outside world, that she can produce poetry to-day, which is as strong and moving as the poetry of England, Ireland, Wales or America”, he goes on to insist that “POETRY-SCOTLAND can have no axe to grind and no creed to further—except the creed of artistic strength for Scotland”. And he adds: “Because I do not believe in a strictly national outlook in art, I have included a Welsh, Irish and an English section.”⁶ In these specific references to British and American poetry, and in his dedication of the first issue to the editor of *Poetry London*, “that discriminating artist who is the friend of so many of the Scottish poets, Meary J. Tambimuttu”,⁷ Lindsay’s editorial also marks a move away from the European inspiration and orientation of the MacDiarmid magazines and the interwar phase of Scottish modernism. For these younger 1940s writers, the context of Europe was that of the troubled 1930s and the ongoing war as opposed to the philosophical influences of nineteenth-century European writers such as Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, and the stylistic innovations of the early continental modernists. And although in the Scots-language poetry of Sydney Goodsir Smith and the Gaelic of Sorley MacLean we do find two late modernists who in the breadth of their cultural reach and artistic ambition take their place alongside the European MacDiarmid and Muir, there is a sense here that younger poets, and especially poets writing in English, are moving towards the local/international axis which would become more prominent with the 1960s generation of writers, and where “international” would most often mean America as opposed to Europe. What continues, on the other hand, is the insistence on the importance of encouraging work in all three of Scotland’s indigenous languages, Scottish English, Scots, and Gaelic, with Scots, however, now mostly being termed “Lallans” as opposed to MacDiarmid’s earlier “the Doric” (which should of course have been applied only to the dialect of Aberdeenshire). There is no sign here of a wish to return to T. S. Eliot’s (or Edwin Muir’s in his *Scott and Scotland* argument)

6. Maurice Lindsay, *Poetry Scotland*, no. 1, pp. 3–4.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

insistence that what is necessary for a discrete national literature is a single language.⁸ And alongside the new poetry of the younger writers, continuity with the earlier revival movement is emphasised by poetry contributions from older generation writers such as MacDiarmid and Edwin Muir as well as introductions to the various issues by Neil Gunn, Eric Linklater and Compton Mackenzie. Despite differences of aim in some respects, the intention behind the new magazines would appear to be to keep a connection between the two phases of the literary revival and to show that what had been gained during the interwar period could continue to inspire and support future new developments.

Poetry Scotland 2 is “inscribed, without permission, to Christopher Murray Grieve, a very great Scot”,⁹ and Lindsay’s editorial letter takes up again the question of nationalism in art, about which there would appear to have been some back-room objections to his previous stance. This time his editorial is less obviously hostile to the nationalist dimension, commenting that “quality and nationalism have advanced together” in the new poetry.¹⁰ The varied nature of this poetry is, however, emphasised, as is the importance of encouraging work in English, Scots and Gaelic; and readers are reminded of the difference between diversity and disunity. On the other hand, the first issue’s sections of English, Welsh and Irish poetry (which were in fact the weakest sections of the previous issue) are dropped without comment, while the inclusion of an article by J. F. Hendry on the New Apocalypse poets would appear to be an attempt to answer criticisms of, and throw some light on, the more obscure imagistic poems contributed to the previous issue. Several of these poems had been war poems, but they did not belong with the kind of combatant’s poetry of Sassoon, Owen and Rosenberg in World War One, offering instead a more objective, enigmatic, demoralised poetry in which, as the speaker in G. S. Fraser’s “Egypt” comments: “the dry grounds” of the soldier’s “thick sweet coffee [...] like the moral to my fable, / Are bitter at the bottom of the cup”.¹¹ In W. S. Graham’s narrative of the ships “cast to perish” in “His Companions Buried Him”, the speaker sees “earth’s operator within his glade / Gloved in the fox of his gigantic hour”.¹² J. F. Hendry’s apocalyptic “Ballad for Heroes” opens with an evocation of drums: “Deep in the midnight flood the drums of the dead still dance / Derided pregnancy. The seed divines the sword.” This opening

8. See T. S. Eliot, “Was There a Scottish Literature?”, and Edwin Muir, excerpt from *Scott and Scotland, Modernism and Nationalism*, pp. 7–10, pp. 39–40.

9. *Poetry Scotland*, no. 2, p. 2.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

11. *Poetry Scotland*, no. 1, p. 15.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

is followed by a woodwind section, wailing the lost humanity: “What is Humanity fleeing? Why is it flailed in sheaves? [...] How can a smiling wound heal doubting hands? [...] She breaks her mirror by a lake in the dead wood, where rime / distils her cities rippling from the pools of dawn.”¹³ There is something terrible going on here which the poet is struggling to communicate, but the piling up of image upon apparently unconnected image (which may well be intentioned to pattern the speaker’s inability to make any philosophical or human sense out of the horror of the war experience) obstructs the reader’s attempt to connect, other than observationally or in a cerebral manner, with what is being communicated. The images, although individually striking, seem to erect a barrier between reader and poem as opposed to drawing out a meaningful response. There is horror, pain, disorientation imaged here, but little to help readers empathise with the incoherent scenarios presented.

However, not all the war poetry in the first issue of *Poetry Scotland* was of a similar cryptic nature. Sorley MacLean’s *Glac a’ Bhais* (“Death Valley”), published in both Gaelic and English, succeeds in communicating what Wilfred Owen called “the pity of War”,¹⁴ as his speaker observes “Sitting dead in ‘Death Valley’ [...] a boy with his forelock down about his cheek / and his face slate-grey”, and ruminates on the possible reasons that have led or compelled him to reach this end. It is MacLean’s sparse comment, and his understated irony, as opposed to any exaggerated imagery, that brings an immediate reader response here: “Whatever his desire or mishap, / his innocence or malignity, he / showed no pleasure in his / death below the Ruweisat Ridge.”¹⁵

Poetry Scotland’s third issue, published in 1946, looked forward to its editor’s release from the army and to the magazine settling down to a bi-annual appearance, something which unfortunately did not happen. Simultaneously with this apparent optimism, however, Lindsay’s third editorial evinced an irritation with what appears to have been a persistent nagging about the importance of the role of the Scots language in the poetry movement and in *Poetry Scotland* in particular. Scots-language poets were in fact the most cohesive group among the new poets, working together to find new ways forward for the language. They formed a Makars Club and produced a style sheet which banished MacDiarmid’s apologetic apostrophes, and attempted to standardise spelling. In contrast, the Gaelic contribution was limited largely to poems by Sorley MacLean

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 20–1.

14. Wilfred Owen, “My subject is War, and the pity of War”, in draft preface for a future volume of poems, found among his papers after he was killed on 4 November 1918.

15. Sorley MacLean, *Poetry Scotland*, no. 1, 1943, p. 27.

and George Campbell Hay, and the younger poets in English were more individualistic and diverse in poetic nature. Those who initially worked under the New Apocalypse umbrella did not necessarily continue as a group, with Norman MacCaig, for example, later refusing to allow his early apocalyptic poetry to be included in his *Collected Poems*, while others eventually moved on in their individual ways. The new Scots-language poets, on the other hand, had the continuing presence of MacDiarmid to inspire them, as well as the belief that the Scots language itself was a signifier of the new literary way forward which had developed in the 1920s, resulting in a literature freed from provincial North British connotations. Not all new Scots-language writing lived up to the example set by the modernist MacDiarmid, however; something Lindsay was not slow to point out. Taking up the defence of poets who write in English (but an English, he insisted, that had “unmistakably Scottish characteristics, of feeling, imagery and colour”), he attacked the “fashion for supposedly patriotic reviewers (as opposed to objective critics, of whom we have singularly few in Scotland!), to sneer at the work of these poets, and exalt, by way of comparison, thoroughly mediocre pieces whose sole merit is that they are couched in the Doric”. And he rightly insisted that “from the point of view of national poetry, Scots on its own account, is of no value”, emphasising that “the value of a poem is its effectiveness as a whole, be it in Gaelic, English or Esperanto”. He continued:

I do not wish my attitude to this language question to be misconstrued. I wholeheartedly believe in the urgent need for preserving and reviving the Scots and Gaelic tongues. I am only pleading that the quality of a poem, and not the choice of language, isolated from all criteria, may be the touchstone for criticism of new Scottish work. Inferior writing harms, not strengthens a language. Brilliant Scots cannot turn a bad poem into a good one. Since Scots and Gaelic are no longer our only languages, English must have its place in our future literature.¹⁶

This Scots language argument resulted also in the “Plastic Scots” controversy in the pages of the *Glasgow Herald* in 1946, and it continued to run throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s, taking the Scots-language debate further and further away from its original modernist origins in MacDiarmid’s language innovations of the early 1920s, and showing how little the Scottish reading public, both general and specifically literary, had learned from that earlier revolution.¹⁷ Although there continued to

16. *Poetry Scotland*, no. 3, 1946, pp. 3–4.

17. Following the *Glasgow Herald* controversy, Douglas Young was invited to address a meeting under the auspices of the Dunedin Society on Sunday 22 December 1946, with Hugh MacDiarmid

be good poetry written in Scots, Sydney Goodsir Smith is the only Scots-language poet of this 1940s and 1950s generation who can be compared with MacDiarmid intellectually and in relation to his innovative modernistic use of poetic language. In contrast, the outstanding poets of the 1960s and later decades such as Edwin Morgan, Norman MacCaig and Iain Crichton Smith chose to write principally in English, or English and Gaelic in Crichton Smith's case, yet as Lindsay suggested, their writing is recognisably Scottish, not English. Despite this general move towards English, Tom Leonard in the 1960s developed an urban form of demotic Scots, very different from MacDiarmid's language, but still recognisably Scottish, while in the late 1980s Liz Lochhead opened up new possibilities for Scots-language poetry and poetic drama with her adaptation of Molière's *Tartuffe* and her wide range of language registers in *Mary Queen of Scots Got her Head Chopped Off*.

It may be that this continuing Scots-language friction within and beyond *Poetry Scotland* eventually began to modify Lindsay's own attitude to the language and to the continuance of *Poetry Scotland* as he had initially envisaged it. Despite his hopes for a biennial publication, the next *Poetry Scotland* (no. 4) did not appear until 1949, when its small book format, published by Serif Books, was very different from that of the original Maclellan magazines, and had no illustrated cover or internal images. Even more surprising was Lindsay's change of editorial position. MacDiarmid was brought in as co-editor, and Lindsay himself contributed four poems in the Scots language. Writing in Scots was given a high priority in the publication which appeared now to be seen by its former solo editor as a new beginning for the magazine as a publication of the Scottish Renaissance movement. On the other hand, although Scots-language poetry was in the majority among the contributions to the magazine, an objective perspective would almost certainly have had to acknowledge that the most modern, and intellectually and imagistically most forward-looking poem was MacDiarmid's "Crystals Like Blood" with its memorable metaphor of the extraction of mercury from cinnabar. That poem was written in English—something, however, that did not prevent MacDiarmid himself preaching the need to use Scots in his Afterword "A Word to the Wise".¹⁸ Yet despite MacDiarmid's preaching and Lindsay's conversion, the trajectory of the new writing was, as mentioned previously, actually moving against Scots, with the outstanding poets of the younger generation writing principally in Scottish English.

in the chair, on the topic of "Plastic Scots" (Synthetic Scots). His lecture was subsequently published as a booklet by William Maclellan in 1947.

18. Hugh MacDiarmid, "A Word to the Wise", *Poetry Scotland*, no. 4, pp. 44–6.

Scottish Art and Letters

Scottish Art and Letters, which ran in parallel with *Poetry Scotland* from 1944 to 1947 but continued to 1950, had from its beginnings a more overt nationalist context and stronger links with writers of the earlier generation of the revival movement. In its first issue, the editor, R. Crombie Saunders, took up the question of the new writing in Scots which had caused Lindsay some difficulties, calling it “an enterprise which *Scottish Art and Letters* will be glad to encourage”, while simultaneously lamenting the lack of a tradition in Scottish music and painting: “there are some Scottish painters, not Scottish painting as there is a French painting or Italian painting”.¹⁹ The sense that we are back in the campaigning MacDiarmid territory of the early twenties is strengthened by James Bridie’s article on Scottish Theatre and his comment that “A Scottish Theatre is something new. Scotland has only recently given up burning down theatres on the grounds that such buildings are unpleasant to God and are hotbeds for all kinds of social vice”.²⁰ In addition to Fergusson’s artistic influence throughout its five issues, literary material in its first two issues also included articles such as Sorabji’s “The Songs of Francis George Scott”, and a surprisingly critical article by MacDiarmid on Lewis Grassie Gibbon. There were reviews of MacDiarmid’s autobiography *Lucky Poet* and Edwin Muir’s recent collection of poems *The Narrow Place*. J. F. Hendry contributed an article on “The Element of Myth in James Joyce”, a title reminiscent of Muir’s earlier *Transition* essay on Joyce and myth, but this time dealing with the more cryptic *Finnegan’s Wake*—a fictional work perhaps more attuned to Hendry’s Apocalyptic Poetry interests. As in *Poetry Scotland*, the new group of Apocalyptic Poets had themselves made a strong showing in the first issue of *Scottish Art and Letters*, but they disappeared from issue two in which the editor R. Crombie Saunders, drew attention to what might be considered its “more conservative nature”, commenting that writing that is “experimental” for the sake of being experimental has been rejected.²¹ Readership too was potentially a problem for all the war-time magazines and this was reflected in the nature of the advertisements in the magazines. *Poetry Scotland*, perhaps looking towards a more specialised poetry readership and with many of its contributors as well as possible readers themselves in the forces, limited its advertisements to related publications by Maclellan and publishers such as Faber. In contrast the wider range of advertisements in *Scottish Art and Letters*, especially strong in

19. *Scottish Art and Letters*, no. 1, 1944, p. 4

20. James Bridie, *Scottish Art and Letters*, no. 1, p. 29.

21. *Scottish Art and Letters*, no. 2, 1946, p. 2.

issues three and four, suggests that not only did the magazine need to raise money, but that, with the men in the forces, its readership had become to a significant extent an Edinburgh-based, middle-class female one with a general interest in the arts. Thus, we find MacBrayne's Steamer Services advertised over a colour reproduction of a painting of Iona by Denis Peploe—the kind of image one would like to have in one's drawing-room—together with advertisements for Edinburgh's Scottish Gallery, department stores and music shops, for Saxone shoe shops and even for female sanitary protection: a consumerism which appears at odds with the third editorial's discussion of increasing state management and an ideological struggle "which is now between the principle of centralisation and decentralisation".²² The final issue of *Scottish Art and Letters*, a PEN Congress Edinburgh Festival issue guest-edited by MacDiarmid in 1950, was also polemically its most exciting, with an editorial on "The Freedom of the Writer" which questions the actual "freedom" of the sessions on "The Writer and the Idea of Freedom", organised under the auspices of PEN and UNESCO at the Festival, but at which attendance was to be "by invitation only".²³

New Writing by Sorley MacLean and Sydney Goodsir Smith

Despite their wartime difficulties, these new little magazines of the 1940s demonstrated how far Scottish culture had travelled as a result of the literary revival initiated by MacDiarmid and his supporters in the immediate World War One period, and how confident writers now were in a literature that was self-determining as opposed to provincially imitative or parochially inward-looking, even if they did still quarrel over specific details. A particularly important result of the support these magazines gave to new writers was the emergence of two outstanding late modernist writers in Gaelic and Scots who could in the quality of their poetry match MacDiarmid's poetry of the earlier period. One of the objectives of the *Scottish Chapbook* programme in 1922 had been to encourage the development of writing in Scots, Gaelic and Scottish English, and one of the regrets expressed by MacDiarmid in his *Albyn* of 1927 was that despite the considerable success of writing in Scots in the 1920s, there was still no sign of the wished-for renaissance in Gaelic poetry. This challenge was soon to be taken up by Sorley MacLean who discovered MacDiarmid's poetry while a student in Edinburgh in the late 1920s, and was

22. *Scottish Art and Letters*, no. 3, 1947, pp. 3–4.

23. *Scottish Art and Letters*, no. 5, 1950, p. 4.

encouraged by this new writing in Scots to make his own experiments with Gaelic. The poems collected in MacLean's *Dàin do Eimhir* (Poems to Eimhir) were written in the 1930s, grounded both in his political struggle with himself in relation to participation in the Spanish Civil War, and in his personal struggle with human love and loyalty, as well as commitment to his art as poet:

Girl of the yellow, heavy-yellow, gold-yellow hair
the song of your mouth and Europe's shivering cry [...]
What would the kiss of your proud mouth be
compared with each drop of the precious blood
that fell on the cold frozen uplands
of Spanish mountains from a column of steel?²⁴

Just as MacDiarmid had sought to take Scotland and its culture back into the mainstream of European culture, so MacLean in *Dàin do Eimhir* and the poetry that followed it brought the Gaelic contribution into a new relationship with European culture through his capacity to use contextually in his poetry references to Celtic and European literature, classical and modern, as well as the modern political and historical crises of Europe and the Gaelic-speaking world.

MacDiarmid himself found a follower and in some respects a challenger in relation to Scots-language poetry when Sydney Goodsir Smith began to publish in the early 1940s. Like the linguist and classical scholar Douglas Young, Goodsir Smith was one of the emergent poets who, although encouraged and influenced by MacDiarmid's recovery of the Scots vernacular for modern and avant-garde literary purposes, sought to explore other possible routes for a modern poetry in Scots, and in particular sought to explore the possibilities offered by the classical Scots tongue of Henryson and Dunbar. At first Smith's own biographical background might seem antipathetic to such an activity. He was born in New Zealand, the son of a doctor, but with ancestors who were Scottish, and he was educated at school in England before studying first of all at Edinburgh University (very briefly as a medical student against his own wishes) and then at Oxford. He was therefore, unlike MacDiarmid, not a native Scot, or even someone who had been in contact with Scots speakers when growing up. Scots to him was in the nature of a foreign language. Yet, as he himself commented, when a friend sent him a copy of MacDiarmid's *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* the course of his life

24. Sorley MacLean, Poem IV, *Dàin do Eimhir/Poems to Eimhir*, edited by Christopher Whyte, Glasgow, Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2002, p. 48. Quotation here in MacLean's own English translation.

was changed. He wrote: “As with so many other people it was like a flash of lightning to my unawakened and groping faculties [...] until reading *The Drunk Man* [sic] I might say I hadn’t been born.”²⁵ Smith made himself familiar with MacDiarmid’s poetry, but he also made himself familiar with the poetry of the fifteenth and sixteenth-century Makars, and gradually began to develop a modern Scots literary language drawing on that earlier Scots. He was himself well-read in European poetry, in modern English-language poetry and criticism, and therefore aware also of the current reawakened interest in John Donne and the Metaphysicals whose formal approaches to poetry seemed to have something in common with contemporary experimentation. Smith also knew his Joyce, as can be seen in his inventive prose work *Carotid Cornucopius*. All these influences, together with the strong influence of MacDiarmid’s versatility and linguistic achievement, came together in Smith’s work to form a new poetry in a modern Scots language that sounds and looks on the page like a discrete language—with no apostrophes to suggest something missing—and one capable of sustaining a range of registers, voices and themes. In this achievement, Goodsir Smith is an important marker of the future potential within the Scots language, as well as a significant poet in his own use of the language. For what his experience and the resulting work demonstrate is that Scots can be used as a literary language in itself, and without the national dimension which was so much a part of the early revival movement. It is not necessary to have grown up speaking Scots in order to learn to use the language for literary purposes. In this respect, it is interesting to note also that among the most successful Gaelic poets in the present-day generation of writers are some who have been Gaelic learners as opposed to native Gaelic speakers: poets such as Christopher Whyte and Meg Bateman, for example. Sydney Goodsir Smith’s achievement opens up a similar new way forward for Scots-language poetry.

This is not the place for a detailed discussion of Goodsir Smith’s late modernist poetry in Scots, but as with MacDiarmid and with MacLean in Gaelic, he is able to bring together politics and poetry in his work. His 1940s poems on the ongoing European war are among the best of the war poems of that period. Having been considered unfit for health reasons for military service, his poems are poems written by an observer, a witness who suffers with the suffering he observes, yet is forced by circumstances to be a bystander, incapable of intervening or preventing such suffering. Just as the Spanish civil war was in large part a context of MacLean’s *Dàin do Eimhir*, so the Polish participation in World War Two

25. Sydney Goodsir Smith, *Saltire Self-Portraits*, no. 3 (comprising a letter written by Smith to Maurice Lindsay in 1947), Edinburgh, The Saltire Society, 1988, p. 9.

features strongly in Smith's war poems, in his translations of the poems of Stefan Borsukiewicz, a member of the Polish Parachute Brigade in Scotland killed at the age of 26, only one year older than Smith himself, but also in his own compositions:

Poland, the warld is greitan as they read,
 O Polska martyr, raxed on a wreistit rood,
 Frae Scotland tak oor tears, oor blinnd and burnan dule [...]
 An nocht is shair but wanhope, nicht, an fear.²⁶

Such war poetry might come as a surprise to readers who know Goodsir Smith's poetry principally through his love poetry, and especially through the poems of his *Under the Eildon Tree* sequence. Yet the humanity—the sense of the tragedy of the human story, as well as its capacity for love and for folly—which underpins the poems of *Under the Eildon Tree*, and makes it so much more than a series of love poems, is that same sense of our common humanity which is declaimed more directly in his European war poems.

Conclusion

In "A Torchlight Procession of One", a chapter on MacDiarmid in his book *The Redress of Poetry*, Seamus Heaney points to "a demonstrable link between MacDiarmid's act of cultural resistance in the 1920s and the literary self-possession of writers such as Alasdair Gray, Tom Leonard, Liz Lochhead and James Kelman in the 1980s and 1990s". For Heaney, MacDiarmid's poetry "prepared the ground for a Scottish literature that would be self-critical and experimental in relation to its own inherited forms and idioms, but one that would also be stimulated by developments elsewhere in world literature".²⁷ In that regard, I would argue that this journey to self-possession was aided in no small measure by the small magazines of the 1940s and 1950s, especially those published by Maclellan; and aided also by the writers who came to prominence in these decades, encouraged by these new magazines. They instituted a new phase of Scottish modernist writing at a time when the revival instituted in the post-1918 years could so easily have been destroyed by the circumstances of a new world war. And they showed in their writing that

26. Sydney Goodsir Smith, "On Readan the Polish Buik o the Nazi Terror" (1942), *Collected Poems 1941-1975*, London, John Calder, 1975, p. 250.

27. Seamus Heaney, "A Torchlight Procession of One: On Hugh MacDiarmid", *The Redress of Poetry*, London, Faber, 1995, pp. 103-23.

it was possible to be innovative while at the same time being innovative in a different way from what had gone before. Heaney's comment, quoted above, is therefore a meaningful endorsement of the way in which the interwar Scottish Renaissance attempt to change the direction of Scottish literary (and ultimately political) culture, with its strong emphasis on national identity as well as international relationships and influences, has been able to modify itself over the decades to bring about the confident, diverse yet recognisably Scottish contribution to international writing we have today. And little magazines have been at the centre of that irrevocable journey, continuing into the present time with a sequence of literary and cultural magazines such as *Akros*, *Lines Review*, *Saltire Review*, *Scottish International*, *Cencrastus*, *Chapman*, and the more academic *Scottish Literary Journal* and its name-changing descendants *Scottish Studies Review* and *Scottish Literary Review* providing a forum within Scotland, and increasingly in the international context, for literary innovation and debate.