

Hugh MacDiarmid and Sorley MacLean:
Modern Makars, Men of Letters

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation, *Hugh MacDiarmid and Sorley MacLean: Modern Makars, Men of Letters*, transcribes and annotates 76 letters (65 hitherto unpublished), between MacDiarmid and MacLean. Four additional letters written by MacDiarmid's second wife, Valda Grieve, to Sorley MacLean have also been included as they shed further light on the relationship which evolved between the two poets over the course of almost fifty years of friendship. These letters from Valda were archived with the unpublished correspondence from MacDiarmid which the Gaelic poet preserved. The critical introduction to the letters examines the significance of these poets' literary collaboration in relation to the Scottish Renaissance and the Gaelic Literary Revival in Scotland, both movements following Ezra Pound's Modernist maxim, "Make it new." The first chapter, "Forging a Friendship", situates the development of the men's relationship in

terms of each writer's literary career, MacDiarmid already having achieved fame through his early lyrics and with the 1926 publication of *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* when they first met. MacLean, on the other hand, was a recent university graduate, young teacher, and fledgling poet when he began to provide translations of eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century Gaelic poetry for MacDiarmid to versify in English with the odd Scots or Gaelic word. This assistance was essential to MacDiarmid's compilation of *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*, which he wished to be representative of Scotland's literary traditions in Scots, Gaelic, English, and Latin. The work resulting from MacDiarmid and MacLean's literary collaboration further reinforced MacDiarmid's credibility as a nationalist poet well versed in each of these traditions. Chapter two, "Cultural Nationalism – Politics and Poetry" discusses the significance of each writer's stance on language in relation to Scottish literature and explores their success in avoiding the ideological antagonisms which plagued the literary and language revivals in early twentieth-century Ireland. "Modern Makars" scrutinizes MacDiarmid and MacLean's renderings of several Gaelic poems in *The Golden Treasury*, particularly in relation to the implications of the term "translations". The final chapter, "Epistolary Discourse and the Legacy of the Letters" sums up the significance of MacDiarmid and MacLean's collaboration and long-standing friendship, as revealed through their letters, and addresses these writers' subsequent influence on both writing and cultural life in Scotland. The letters are followed by two appendices. Appendix A includes a transcription of Michael Davitt's interview with Sorley MacLean for the Irish journal *Innti* in

1986 wherein MacLean discusses such issues as his political views, the influences on his poetry, and his relationship with MacDiarmid. The interview is provided in its original Irish text and accompanied by a translation into English. Appendix B is a transcription of the *Times Literary Supplement's* 4 January 1936 review of MacDiarmid's translation of *The Birlinn of Clanranald* as it was originally published in *The Modern Scot*. Sorley MacLean served as the ghost writer of MacDiarmid's response to this critique of his work. This research, conducted both here in Victoria and in Edinburgh, Scotland, provides the first book-length study of the literary collaboration of these influential Scottish poets and the first critical discussion of their collected letters.

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particularly indebted to Robin Smith and Rachel Craig of the NLS, and to Sheila Noble, Tricia Boyd, and Sally Pagan of EUL for their patience and forbearance in responding to my numerous requests, especially for their efforts to assist in my search for the missing MacLean letters which Joy Hendry refers to in her essay, “The Man and His Work”. I have always believed that librarians are the unsung heroes of academia – without them, we are lost!

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Dedication

Cuimhnichibh air na daoine bh'on d'thainig sibh.

Remember the people whom you come from.

My educational journey through the process of completing this dissertation has involved diverse lessons and been filled with many blessings, the most important of which is the knowledge that, in the words of the apostle Matthew, “With God all things are possible” (19:26). Grace comes in many forms if only we may be open to receiving it; for those companions in Christ whose prayers have risen like incense from their lips to God’s ear, thank you for your faith in me – I am truly humbled.

This work is dedicated to my family, to whom my debt is immeasurable. To the memory of my grandparents, Patrick and Ruth Sinnott, James and Elizabeth Wilson, and to that of my father, William Sibbald Wilson - this is for you; thank you for an immensely rich legacy of cultural traditions, pride in “kith and kin”, and the gift of your presence in my life. I wish you could have had the opportunity to share in this work with me. To my beloved mother and sisters, Patsy, Elizabeth, and Catriona, and to cousin Gordon Young: thank you for your unconditional love, your spiritual validation, your material support, your encouragement, and your trust that this work would actually be completed.

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Chapter 1: “Forging a Friendship”

Hugh MacDiarmid¹ (11 August 1892 – 9 September 1978), born Christopher Murray Grieve, and Sorley MacLean / *Somhairle MacGill-Eain*² (26 October 1911 – 24 November 1996), were arguably the most innovative and influential poets of twentieth-century Scotland. MacDiarmid came to be regarded as “the father of the modern Scottish imagination” (Ascherson 19), for “[o]ut of his forge came an energy which spread through Scottish cultural life. There is very little written, acted, composed, surmised, or demanded in Scotland which does

¹ Hugh MacDiarmid was the most widely recognized pseudonym used by Christopher Murray Grieve [CMG]. Grieve published all of his poetry written in Scots under this pseudonym, as well as the bulk of his poetry in English. However, he also used a variety of names in his extensive correspondence published in newspapers and literary journals. Other names under which he wrote as a journalist, essayist, and polemicist include “Alister K. Laidlaw” or “A.K.L.”, “Mountboy”, “Martin Gillespie”, “Hugh M’Diarmid”, the Gàidhlig “Gillechriosd Mac a’ Ghreidhir”, “Pteleon”, “James Maclaren”, “C.M.G.”, “H. M’D.”, “Stentor”, and “Isobel Guthrie”. See Alan Bold, *MacDiarmid: Christopher Murray Grieve: A Critical Biography* (London: John Murray Ltd., 1988) 40, 129, 118, 135, 229, 246, 279. See also Duncan Glen, *Hugh MacDiarmid and the Scottish Renaissance* (Edinburgh: W. & R. Chambers Ltd., 1964) 83; 133.

² The customary English spelling of Somhairle MacGill-Eain is Sorley MacLean. Both the Gàidhlig and English spellings of his surnames varied during the poet’s lifetime. In the former case, the spelling occurs as MacGhill-Eathain for the publication of his first collection of poetry in collaboration with the poet Robert Garioch, *Seventeen Poems for Sixpence in Gaelic, Scots, and English*. In the latter case, as Ronald Black notes in *An Tuil*, “In 1977, between . . . [the publication of *Nua Bhardachd Ghaidhlig* and *Reothairt is Contraigh, Spring Tide and Neap Tide: Selected Poems 1932-72*], the poet changed the spelling of his English surname from Maclean to MacLean.” MacLean also submitted material under the name “Skyeman” to MacDiarmid’s quarterly journal, *The Voice of Scotland*, irregularly published between 1938 and 1958. He published an early poem “*An Soitheach / The Ship*” under the name *Ruari Mac-Ailein*. See Ronald Black, ed., *An Tuil: Anthology of 20th century Scottish Gaelic Verse* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1999) 767. See also Bold, *MacDiarmid* 468. See also “Sorley MacLean: Chronology,” *Sorley MacLean Online*.

not in some strand descend from the new beginning he made” (*The Scotsman* qtd. in Scott and Davis 12-13). In assessing his achievements, his biographer Alan Bold comments:

As a Scottish poet, animated by “a mystical sense / Of the high destiny of a nation” (476), he stands supreme. For linguistic ingenuity only Dunbar and Burns come near him and it must be remembered that MacDiarmid had to renew a tradition that his great predecessors took for granted. Finding Scots reduced to a parochial idiom suitable for isolated outbursts of sentimentality, he shook that language to its linguistic roots and created, in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, not only the most revolutionary work in Scots literature, but one of the most powerfully imaginative achievements in twentieth-century poetry.

(*MacDiarmid* 435)

The accolades for both men abound. No less influential, MacLean served as the catalyst for the Gaelic Literary Revival. Neal Ascherson observes, “He grew up in a time when Gaelic literature seemed to be narrowing to its end, and – through his own writing rather than through any organized movement – gave Gaelic poetry in the space of a few years an entirely new sense of its capacity and adaptability, and a world-wide range of awareness” (29-30). His activism to ensure the survival of his native language was just as vital. Following the initiative of teachers Donald Thomson and Donald Morrison (Nicholson 35), MacLean fought for the institution of the Higher Learner’s Paper in Gàidhlig

which finally came about in 1968 – an event which went a long way to ensure the survival of the Gaelic language by firmly establishing it as a viable area of study for non-Gaelic speakers within the Scottish educational system. As MacLean explained in a 1979 interview with Angus Nicholson,

That was a tremendously important thing. You see up until 1968, the only full secondary schools who were teaching any pupils except full native-speakers were the schools like Oban, the two in Glasgow, and Plockton, where I started it in 1956. And of course that has resulted – the successful agitation to get that one, and it was a hard and bitter agitation to get that Learner's paper – has doubled, trebled, quadrupled, and more, the number of people taking Gaelic in secondary schools And of course, until I went to Plockton I didn't realize how terribly important that was because you can't keep Gaelic alive as an enclave in the Western Isles or in Skye, you cannot, and I've said it, and I've made many enemies by what I said to back up Donald Thomson and Donald Morrison before this new Higher paper came in (34-35)

Most readers familiar with the development of Scottish poetry in the twentieth century are well aware of MacDiarmid and MacLean's acquaintance but know less about the genesis and development of their relationship through their literary collaboration on *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* which, as their correspondence demonstrates, engendered a friendship lasting over the course of almost half a century.

Perhaps the most familiar image of MacDiarmid and MacLean together is the vibrant painting by Sandy Moffat, *Poets' Pub*, which hangs in the National Galleries of Scotland. (See Illustration 1.) As the accompanying commentary states, "Moffat's group portrait is an imaginary vision of the major Scottish poets and writers of the second half of the twentieth century gathered around the central figure of Hugh MacDiarmid" (*Poets' Pub*). Surrounding MacDiarmid are, from left to right, Norman MacCaig, Sorley MacLean, Iain Crichton Smith, George Mackay Brown, Sidney Goodsir Smith, Edwin Morgan, and Robert Garioch – poets comprising the core of what came to be known as "the second wave" of the Scottish Literary Renaissance who variously wrote in all three of contemporary Scotland's languages: Scots, Gaelic, and English (Scott 15). "The setting is an amalgam of the interiors of their favourite drinking haunts in Edinburgh: Milne's Bar, the Abbotsford and the Café Royal" (*Poets' Pub*). Also featured are renderings of the art critic John Tonge in the background on the stairs, and in the foreground literary critic Alan Bold, MacDiarmid's biographer and the compiler and editor of his extensive public correspondence (*Poets' Pub*). Alan Riach, general editor of the *Collected Works of Hugh MacDiarmid* and co-editor of *Hugh MacDiarmid: New Selected Letters* has said of Moffat's portrait,

It is an amazing roll-call of talent, and I think that generation as a whole has still not had a comprehensive critical evaluation – [they are] a group of totally individual and wonderful poets, each with their own place in history. The . . . *Poets' Pub* is [a painting] with a real sense of place and time. There was this explosion of literary

Illustration 1: *Poets' Pub* by Alexander (Sandy) Moffat

(National Galleries of Scotland, Online collection)



talent in that generation. There is something special about all of the writers: in their own individual use of language, and of the historical moment they were in – from the experience of [World War II] and afterwards, building towards [Scotland's] eventual devolution. (“Poets’ paintings inspire new generation”)

Despite the painting’s enthusiastic reception, much controversy has resulted from its obvious failure to represent female Scottish poets of the twentieth century who were literary contemporaries of those portrayed, women such as Helen Cruickshank³, Marion Angus⁴, Violet Jacob⁵, Muriel Stuart (actually an English

³ Helen Burness Cruickshank (1886-1975), Scottish poet, feminist, Scottish nationalist. A close friend of CMG, she was responsible for arranging his move to Whalsay in the Shetland Islands in 1933, and helped to obtain financial aid for him in terms of grants and job opportunities. Her poetry was featured in the *Northern Numbers* series of the early 1920s and in *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*. See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, eds., *Hugh MacDiarmid: New Selected Letters* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2001) 538-39. See also Bold, *MacDiarmid* 283-85; 467, and Hugh MacDiarmid, ed., *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1940) 164.

⁴ Marion Angus (1866-1946), Scottish poet. Although her poems in Scots echoed the sentimentality of the Burnsian tradition whose influence dominated vernacular poetry prior to MacDiarmid’s work, Angus, like Helen Cruickshank, was also featured in the *Northern Numbers* series and in MacDiarmid’s *Golden Treasury*. CMG’s critical assessment of her work was originally published as “The New Movement in Vernacular Poetry: Lewis Spence; Marion Angus” in the *Scottish Educational Journal*. See Alan Bold, *The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984) 377n. See also MacDiarmid, *The Golden Treasury* 19-20, and Hugh MacDiarmid, “The New Movement in Vernacular Poetry: Lewis Spence; Marion Angus” in *Contemporary Scottish Studies*, ed. Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995) 196-206.

⁵ Violet Jacob (1863-1946), Scottish novelist and poet whose poetry also appeared in the *Northern Numbers* series and in *The Golden Treasury*. CMG’s critical assessment of her work was initially published as “Violet Jacob” in the *Scottish Educational Journal*. See Alan Bold, ed., *The Letters of Hugh*

woman)⁶, and Rachel Annand Taylor.⁷ Certainly the image does nothing to dispel the notion of a literary “boys’ club”; nor do Bold’s comments in his biography of MacDiarmid where he describes the antics of MacDiarmid, MacCaig, and Smith during the 1950s:

Sydney Goodsir Smith had become one of MacDiarmid’s most talented followers and one of his closest friends. He was boisterous and boozy, garrulous and gregarious, and gleefully projected a persona as the boozy bard of Auld Reekie. . . . Smith was almost a permanent fixture in the literary bars of Rose Street: Milne’s and the Abbotsford. Milne’s, downstairs at the corner of Hanover Street, was a workingmen’s pub which attracted thirsty Communists; they had their own alcove, dubbed the Little Kremlin, and they welcomed MacDiarmid to their ranks. . . . MacDiarmid,

MacDiarmid (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984) 108, and MacDiarmid, “Violet Jacob” in *Contemporary Scottish Studies* 27-35.

⁶ Muriel Stuart (1885-1967), English poet. Due to her experiments with writing poetry in Scots, her poems were featured in several anthologies of Scottish verse. CMG included her work in the *Northern Numbers* series as well as in *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*. His critical assessment of her work is expressed in the article for the *Scottish Educational Journal* entitled “Muriel Stuart”. See MacDiarmid, *The Golden Treasury* 234. See also MacDiarmid, “Muriel Stuart” in *Contemporary Scottish Studies* 155-64.

⁷ Rachel Annand Taylor (1876-1960), Scottish poet. CMG included her work in the *Northern Numbers* series as well as in *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*. His critical assessment of her work is expressed in the article for the *Scottish Educational Journal* entitled “Various Poets (ii) Rachel Annand Taylor”. See MacDiarmid, *The Golden Treasury* 15-16; 139-40. See also MacDiarmid, “Various Poets (ii) Rachel Annand Taylor” in *Contemporary Scottish Studies* 326-28.

MacCaig, and Smith were recognized as the unholy poetic trinity of Milne's The Abbotsford was a more elegant establishment than Milne's numbering lawyers and businessmen among its clientele. There too MacDiarmid, MacCaig, and Smith held forth (Bold, *MacDiarmid* 413)

Literary circles can be relatively small; both MacDiarmid and MacLean socialized within the same group of Scottish writers. Like MacDiarmid, Sorley MacLean was also a great friend of Smith's. When he moved to Edinburgh in 1939 to teach at Boroughmuir High School, MacLean resumed his friendship with Robert Garioch, whom he had known as an undergraduate and who was to collaborate with him on what became each man's first published collection of poetry, *Seventeen Poems for Sixpence* (Hendry, "The Man and His Work" 25-26).

"Garioch invited him along to weekly meetings in the Abbotsford Bar in Rose Street, where a number of poets met, including Sydney Goodsir Smith. MacLean and Smith soon became very friendly" (25). During the years after WWII when he had married and returned to teach in Edinburgh, "for a time Sorley and Renée shared a house in Craigmiller Park (immortalized in 'Under the Eildon Tree') with the Smiths" (Caird 42).

In fairness, one might respond to the critics of Moffat's portrait by arguing that rather than deliberately ignoring the accomplishments of twentieth-century female Scottish poets, it is an imagined representation of a social reality – a milieu which was largely closed to women of the time, however archaic the proscriptive demarcation of such social spaces might seem by today's standards.

As Neal Ascherson asks, then explains in his introduction to *Seven Poets*, “Why this particular seven? There are other poets of such stature in Scotland whose work and likenesses are not here. The answer must lie with the painter, Sandy Moffat. He sought them out because their work has moved him, instructed and formed him” (17). Certainly it seems erroneous to posit that simply because Moffat’s painting does not portray MacDiarmid and MacLean drinking with their female contemporaries in public, they failed to appreciate their literary talents. Helen Cruickshank was one of MacDiarmid’s oldest friends and tireless supporters. In addition to including work by her, by Jacob, by Angus, by Stuart, and by Annand Taylor in the various anthologies of Scottish literature he produced, from the *Northern Numbers* series to *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*, which featured all of them, he also discussed their work in various essays published during the 1920’s for the *Scottish Educational Journal*. MacLean, for his part, always recognized the interconnectedness of Gaelic poetry and song, and the vital role women had played in sustaining these traditions. In fact, many of the women of his family were tradition bearers themselves, most notably his paternal grandmother Màiri Matheson and his father’s sister, Peigi (Macdonald, “Some Aspects of Family and Local Background” 213-15; MacLean, Preface to *O Choille gu Bearradh/From Wood to Ridge* xi-xii; Nicholson 23-25). One of MacLean’s favourite poets and a strong influence on his work was the heroine of the Battle of the Braes during the Clearances on Skye, “Màiri Mhór nan Oran, Great Mary of the Songs”⁸ (Hendry, “The Man and His Work” 11).

⁸ Also known as Mary MacPherson (1821-98). Nurse, Gaelic Poet, Bard of the

Based on individual studies painted during the 1970s, Moffat's group portrait was completed in 1980, two years after MacDiarmid's death in 1978 (*Poets' Pub*). As such, it provides an image of both MacDiarmid and MacLean in their later years, though MacLean's passing did not occur until 1996. Although *Poets' Pub* portrays the two writers towards the end of their fifty-year-long friendship, it is a fitting testimony to the endurance of their relationship, given that it was while "[h]aving a drink in Rutherford's Bar off South Bridge [in May 1934], [that MacDiarmid] was introduced to Sorley MacLean by George Davie[, who] . . . studied classics and philosophy at Edinburgh University and [was] an ardent admirer of MacDiarmid's . . . poetry" (Bold, *Hugh MacDiarmid* 322-23).

The letters compiled here bear further witness to the growth of the long-standing friendship between these two formidable Scottish writers. This correspondence, including four letters from Valda Grieve to Sorley MacLean, spans the years from 1934 until 1979. The content ranges from mundane enquiries as to the well-being of each other's relatives and apologies for delayed responses, to discussions of literature and politics, of the challenges and setbacks each faced as a writer, and of the lack of rivalry between them. The sporadic nature of their later correspondence was likely due to the fact that after WWII differing commitments demanded their attention; in MacLean's case this involved recovering from severe injuries sustained during the war, returning to teaching, marrying Renée Cameron, and raising three daughters. For a period in

Land League Movement, and champion of crofters' rights, she had a profound influence on Sorley MacLean's poetry and politics. See Hendry, "The Man and His Work," in *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986) 11.

the 1950s, they lived in relatively close proximity when MacDiarmid had settled in Biggar and MacLean was teaching in Edinburgh (Bold, *Hugh MacDiarmid* 401-02; Hendry, "The Man and His Work" 33), and therefore they likely either saw each other in person or communicated by telephone, letters ceasing to be their principal form of contact. Writing on 16 January, 1977, MacLean acknowledges his "failure so often to write letters even to people for whom I have always had the greatest admiration and affection" (Letter 73). Instead, their correspondence shows he increasingly relied on the telephone to reach MacDiarmid. In a letter dated 21 March, 1978, MacLean expresses his frustration that MacDiarmid's line is constantly busy and he tells of unsuccessfully trying to call the poet Norman MacCaig, who had a cottage near MacDiarmid's home at Brownsbank, to learn how CMG was faring (Grieve and Junor 226):

I was in Edinburgh for a day or two on my return from Canada⁹ and I phoned again and again but could get only an engaged sound, and I failed to get Norman or Isabel in when I phoned them to hear news of you.¹⁰ (Letter 75)

⁹ Sorley and Renée MacLean attended the Canadian symposium, "The Celtic Consciousness", held in February 1978 at St. Michael's College, University of Toronto. MacLean presented the paper "Some Gaelic and non-Gaelic Influences on Myself", as well as reading some of his poetry. See John Kelly, Foreword to *The Celtic Consciousness*, ed. Robert O'Driscoll, (New York: George Braziller, 1982) x. See also Sorley MacLean, "Some Gaelic and non-Gaelic Influences on Myself," *The Celtic Consciousness*, 499-502.

¹⁰ The poet Norman MacCaig and his wife Isabel who had a cottage near Biggar, close to Brownsbank cottage where MacDiarmid lived. See Deirdre Grieve and Beth Junor, eds., *Scarcely Ever Out of My Thoughts: The Letters of Valda Trevlyn Grieve to Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)* (Edinburgh: Word Power Books, 2007) 226.

Nonetheless, the correspondence continued, if sporadically, and in a letter written just over a year before MacDiarmid's death in 1978, MacLean's frank discussion of a rumour regarding their alleged literary rivalry speaks to the longevity of their friendship, as does MacDiarmid's gracious response. Writing in January, 1977, MacLean expresses his fury with gossip circulating that he claimed to be "the greatest poet living in Europe" (Letter 73, dated 16 Jan. 1977). He addresses the rumour directly in order to dispel it: "I have said privately and publicly again and again, and I repeat it now, that in my opinion, and as far as I know, there is no poet living in the Islands called British who is in the same class as Hugh MacDiarmid; and I would be greatly astonished if it were demonstrated to me that there is in Europe" (Letter 73). Clearly, MacLean did not wish to offend MacDiarmid or to jeopardize their relationship. MacDiarmid's reply of 23 January 1977 reasserts the esteem he has for MacLean:

Many thanks for your letter. You have always been over-indulgent about my poetry and too modest about your own. There is, I think, no doubt about you and I being the two best poets in Scotland today, but it is all nonsense of course to go further than that. (Letter 74)

As MacLean noted in an interview in 1986, the relationship between MacDiarmid and himself was a healthy one which allowed for the occasional expression of frustration and for differences of opinion, yet it was a friendship underscored by a lasting sense of mutual admiration (Appendix A 334-35).

Despite the fact that the letters gathered here represent almost a half century of epistolary exchange, most of the correspondence – approximately 60 letters – is dated from 1934 to 1942, when their communication was interrupted by MacDiarmid's conscription to do war work in a Glasgow munitions factory and MacLean was sent to the North African theatre of combat where he was seriously wounded by a land mine in the Battle of El Alamein (Bold, *Hugh MacDiarmid: Christopher Murray Grieve: A Critical Biography* 379-80; Hendry 27-32; Caird 42). The letters from this period thus provide a record of MacDiarmid and MacLean's literary collaboration on *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*, first published by Macmillan of London in 1940, and demonstrate how indispensable each writer was to the other's literary development.

In his "Introduction" to *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*, MacDiarmid writes, "The making of this Anthology was originally suggested to me by my friend the Irish poet A.E. (the late Mr. G. W. Russell)"¹¹ (xxviii). This assertion is significant in that MacDiarmid explicitly acknowledges the influence of a man who was a great friend of the Irish poet W.B. Yeats and a visionary behind Ireland's Literary Renaissance. While the importance of this Irish connection will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 2, it is worth noting here that MacDiarmid's aesthetic goals for *The Golden Treasury* were ideologically rooted in a profound sense of cultural nationalism. MacDiarmid intended this collection to represent poetry in each of Scotland's languages, Scots, Gaelic,

¹¹ A.E. (George William Russell) (1867-1935), Irish poet, friend of William Butler Yeats, and editor of *The Irish Statesman*. A friend of Hugh MacDiarmid. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 163, 234, 246.

English, and Latin, so as to demonstrate “a well-established tradition of Scottish poetry in all its constituent tongues” (xiii). He explains, “The difference – or one of the main differences – between this anthology and previous anthologies of Scottish poetry – is that some little effort has been made to present an ‘all-in view’ of Scottish poetry and in particular to give some presentation to its Gaelic and Latin elements” (x). MacDiarmid continues, “Alas, the very great difficulties of making or obtaining verse translations in English or in Scots of Gaelic poems, which give any idea of the beauties of the originals, have rendered it impossible for me to give in this anthology anything like a representative selection from the poets in question” (xii-xiii). Nonetheless, in terms of what he did manage to achieve, his meeting with MacLean in 1934 was fortuitous, for in the younger poet he found a native Gaelic speaker who, through the rich repository of knowledge inherited from his family, was an authority on the Gaelic tradition. As Angus Nicholson points out,

Both sides of [MacLean’s] family provided rich sources of tradition and a view of the world through a Gaelic lens that was not at all narrow. The music, the song and the poetry, legends, the histories of clan deeds and of the Clearances were readily available from parent, uncle, aunt or grandparent. . . . The language in which all this knowledge was transmitted to the young MacLean was, of course, Gaelic. (“Questions of Prestige” 202)

Thus, MacLean could provide direction regarding the selection of poetry best representative of Scotland’s Gaelic poets, as well as translations of the poems

themselves. Largely due to MacLean's assistance, the anthology includes eleven Gaelic poems, works by such diverse poets as Iain Lom, Alexander MacDonald, Dugald Buchanan, Duncan Bàn MacIntyre, William Ross, William Livingston and Donald Sinclair,¹² all rendered in English but unfortunately published without their original Gaelic texts. In producing these translations, Sorley MacLean was indispensable; as Michel Byrne has pointed out, "[if he had] not existed MacDiarmid would have had to – and probably have tried to – invent [him]" (2).

At the time MacDiarmid was compiling *The Golden Treasury*, his lyrics in Scots contained in *Sangshaw* (1925) and *Penny Wheep* (1926), followed by the 1926 publication of his long poem, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, had already established him as the preeminent Scottish poet of his generation and helped make him a contentious intellectual presence in the ideological debates over cultural nationalism. However, events of the late twenties and early thirties took their toll on the poet. The failure in 1930 of the experimental London magazine *Vox*, of which MacDiarmid was editor,¹³ followed by an acrimonious divorce from his first wife Peggy and his subsequent loss of contact with their children, Christine and Walter, resulted in the MacDiarmid's return to Edinburgh without any viable prospects (Bold, *MacDiarmid* 239-81). In the aftermath of these difficulties in both his professional and private lives, MacDiarmid retreated

¹² Scottish Gaelic poets of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries.

¹³ *Vox* was established in London by CMG's friend and co-founder of the National Party of Scotland, Compton Mackenzie. The magazine was to be a critical journal devoted to broadcasting. By 8 February 1930 the magazine had folded. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 230-32; 239-43.

to the Shetland Island of Whalsay in 1933, with his second wife, Valda, and their young son, Michael (284-88). There, under tremendous pressure as a professional writer trying to provide for his family, he juggled numerous literary projects, working during the years of his collaboration with MacLean on no fewer than eleven books and launching a new literary journal.¹⁴ The strain of such a workload ultimately affected his health; MacDiarmid was hospitalized for nervous exhaustion in September 1935, a month after MacLean had visited with the family on Whalsay (332-36). Valda's letters to MacLean during this difficult period (Letter 23, dated 15 September 1935; Letter 25, dated [2 October] 1935), speak to the esteem in which MacLean was held by the Grieve family, for she shares the burdens of worry regarding CMG's survival while trying to keep at bay publishers who demanded submissions for which advances already had been paid.

MacLean, for his part, first encountered MacDiarmid's poetry in 1933 as an undergraduate at Edinburgh University through his friends James Caird¹⁵ and

¹⁴ These included *Stony Limits and Other Poems* (1934), *Scottish Scene, or the Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn* (1934), *At the Sign of the Thistle* (1934), *Five Bits of Miller* (1934), *Selected Poems* (1934), *Scottish Eccentrics* (1936), *Scotland and the Question of a Popular Front Against Fascism and War* (1938), *Direadh I* (1938), *The Islands of Scotland* (1939), "Cornish Heroic Song for Valda Trevlyn" in *Criterion* (1939), *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* (1940), and *Lucky Poet* (1946).

¹⁵ James Bowman Caird (1913-90), critic of Scottish literature, educator, friend of both Sorley MacLean, whom he met as an undergraduate at Edinburgh University, and of Hugh MacDiarmid. Caird and George Elder Davie introduced MacLean to MacDiarmid's poetry in 1933 and later to the poet himself in May 1934. Caird published criticism on Neil Gunn, Fionn Mac Colla (Tom MacDonald), and Hugh MacDiarmid. See Dorian Grieve, Owen Dudley Edwards,

George Davie¹⁶ (Hendry, “The Man and His Work” 16). When MacLean began to collaborate on *The Golden Treasury*, he was a young as yet unpublished poet and teacher, newly graduated with First Class Honours in English, and completing a year’s teacher training at Moray House in Edinburgh (Nicholson, “An Interview” 27; Black 765). Soon afterwards he progressed to a position at Portree Secondary School on Skye (765). As MacLean stated later in life,

Now Hugh MacDiarmid, of course, had before . . . ’33 or ’34 (it was in ’34 I first met him) expressed a great interest in Gaelic poetry, in *Cenchrastus* especially he had expressed a great admiration for Alexander MacDonald. . . . He had sensed something in [him], this tremendous energy, this verve in Alexander MacDonald, and I recognized that he was right in that. When I met him in 1934 I agreed to help him (I was a student at Moray House then) in translating MacDonald’s “Birlinn” and Macintyre’s “Ben Dorain” and a few other Gaelic poems, but especially the “Birlinn”.

(Nicholson, “An Interview” 27)

and Alan Riach, eds., *Hugh MacDiarmid: New Selected Letters* (Manchester: Carcanet 2001) 537.

¹⁶ George Davie (1912-2007), student of classics and philosophy at Edinburgh University, Scottish academic, friend to both Sorley MacLean and Hugh MacDiarmid. Davie published an important study of Scottish educational philosophy, *The Democratic Intellect*, in 1961. See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 112. See also Robert R. Calder, “George Davie – Obituary” in *The Independent*, Online Edition, 29 March 2007.

During the first six months or so of MacDiarmid and MacLean's correspondence, there is a marked deference on the latter's part, a sense of awe at finding himself working with an established poet whom he greatly admired, and an almost obsequiously apologetic desire to please. In a letter dated July 27th, 1934, MacLean states,

I have been working at [those Gaelic translations which you asked me to do for you] more or less since I came home at the end of June and as I am thinking that my speed is not what it should be I would like to know first when you wish them. I am enjoying the work very much and I find it extremely profitable to myself in every way. . . . You may be assured that I will be greatly delighted to do anything I can towards helping your work. (Letter 1)

Yet as Joy Hendry warns, one must use caution in interpreting the nature of MacDiarmid's influence on the younger writer, for although "[b]oth poets were technical innovators in their use of language and poetic form. It is mistaken . . . to see MacLean in any sense as following in MacDiarmid's footsteps, remarkable though it is that at more or less the same time two Scottish poets should provoke similar changes in the poetry of Scotland's two minority languages" ("The Man and His Work" 16). By the time the two poets first met in 1934, MacLean had already written a number of the poems which would later appear in *Dàin do Eimhir* (16).

As their correspondence progresses, the salutations quickly shed their formality and an air of confidence asserts itself, particularly in terms of MacLean's advice to MacDiarmid regarding the selection of Gaelic poetry for the anthology. MacLean also begins to discuss his own literary output and the challenges he faces as a poet who makes his living through teaching (Letter 39, dated 21 September 1936; Letter 40, dated 20 December 1936). Still other letters skirt the issue of MacLean's failed love affairs, which seem to have been very influential on his writing, particularly in the sense that MacLean found himself unable to write for extended periods of time due to his emotional upheaval (Letter 47, dated 8 November 1937; Letter 48, dated 27 Feb. 1938; Letter 50, dated 28 April 1938; Letter 54, dated 10 January 1940). MacDiarmid's response is that of a kind mentor who has also struggled through challenges in his personal life. He offers moral support regarding MacLean's emotional difficulties and creative stagnation, and provides positive affirmation of the younger poet's talent when MacLean first discusses his work and later dedicates poetry to him in his first published collection, *Seventeen Poems for Sixpence* (Letter 49, dated 28 Mar. 1938; Letter 52, dated 9 May 1938; Letter 55, dated 11 Feb. 1940). In spite of MacLean's frustration, at times, with MacDiarmid's tendency to pontificate regarding the Gaelic tradition (Byrne 5), their friendship remains constant rather than devolving into rivalries over contemporary developments in Scottish literature such as the exchanges waged publicly in print between MacDiarmid and Edwin Muir¹⁷ in the late thirties, and between

¹⁷ Edwin Muir (1887 - 1959), Scottish poet, novelist, translator and critic. Initially

MacDiarmid and Ian Hamilton Finlay¹⁸ in the 1960's, the significance of which is addressed at greater length in Chapter 2. The easy familiarity and mutual respect are still evident in the correspondence of the 1970s when MacDiarmid and MacLean discuss anecdotes regarding the conflict between Conor Cruise O'Brien¹⁹ and Seán MacBride²⁰ during the Celtic Studies Symposium at St. Michael's College, University of Toronto, which both poets were invited to but only MacLean could attend.

Ultimately, as Hendry observes, "It is not surprising that the two men were strongly drawn to each other considering the similarity of their positions. Each

during the 1920s, Muir supported MacDiarmid's experiments with poetry in Scots and viewed the results as an important and revitalizing element in Scottish poetry. However, by the late 1930s, following Muir's dismissal of Scots as a literary language in his book *Scott and Scotland* published in 1936, they clashed over the use of Scots as a literary medium. MacDiarmid's response was to attack Muir directly in the Introduction to *The Golden Treasury*, published in 1940, and a protracted public skirmish ensued which was conducted in the Scottish press. See Alan Bold, ed., *The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984) xvii-xviii.

¹⁸ Ian Hamilton Finlay (1925-2006), Scottish poet, sculptor, and visual artist. Initially a close friend of CMG, who served as best man at Finlay's second wedding, Finlay aligned himself with a group of younger anti-renaissance poets during the early 1960s and proceeded to conduct a bitter public flyting with MacDiarmid in the Scottish Press. See Bold, *LHM* 595n. See also Duncan Glen, *Hugh MacDiarmid and the Scottish Renaissance* (Edinburgh; London: W. & R. Chambers, Ltd., 1964) 218-20, and "Ian Hamilton Finlay – Obituary" in *The Daily Telegraph* 28 March 2006: 22.

¹⁹ Conor Cruise O'Brien (1917-), Irish writer, politician, and academic. See "O'Brien, Conor Cruise", *The Concise Oxford Companion to Irish Literature*, online edition.

²⁰ Seán MacBride (1904-88), international politician and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1974. Son of Irish revolutionaries Maud Gonne MacBride and Major John MacBride. See "Seán MacBride (1904-88)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edition.

held the other's work in high regard, and because they were working in different traditions, there could be no question of rivalry between them" (16). Such similarities were not merely coincidental. It is often said that the subjects of colonial administrations are born into politics. The same can be argued for many of the people of Scotland, Ireland, and Wales under the Union of Great Britain and Ireland, with its historically Anglocentric cultural and political hegemony. For MacDiarmid and MacLean, issues of race and class resulted in similar aesthetic goals and political outlooks. Both poets were desperately concerned with the revitalization or, indeed in MacLean's case, the mere survival of the languages and literary traditions they championed. Thus, each contended with the function of the poet as social commentator, walking the "tight rope to cross the abyss of silence" (MacLean, Preface to *O Choille gu Bearradh/From Wood to Ridge* xvi), the fine line between art and politics, poetry and propaganda.

Chapter 2: “Cultural Nationalism – Politics and Poetry”

“Poetry is human existence come to life.”

(MacDiarmid, *In Memoriam James Joyce* in
The Complete Poems: Vol. II 757)

Any discussion of cultural nationalism raises difficult questions. What criteria establish national identity: race, birthplace, political citizenship, language? Is it possible to articulate such an identity in a way which is non-essentialist, non-exclusivist, neither Fascist nor proto-Fascist? If there is a cultural basis for an independent Scottish nation, wherein does it lie? Such issues are further complicated when, in terms of literary studies, notions of canonicity are brought to bear on disparate traditions. What constitutes “Scottish” literature? What is it to be a “Scottish” writer as opposed to an “English” one? Do such notions inherently imply a monolithic national culture, or can they encompass one which is pluralistic? While many of the answers to such questions have varied over the course of the twentieth century, and have been given a new impetus since the reopening of the new Scottish Parliament in 1999, it is clear that in the case of MacDiarmid and MacLean, one crucial way of defining Scottish cultural identity was through its languages – Scots, Gaelic, Latin, and English – and their respective literary traditions.

Yet for the literary critic additional questions arise. From a theoretical perspective, to what extent are the discourses of Post-colonialism and

nationalism useful in analyzing the impetus towards independence in Scotland, arguably a “stateless nation” throughout most of the twentieth century?

(O’Rourke 3). In *Devolving English Literature*, Robert Crawford assesses the degree to which current critical perspectives have successfully addressed Scotland’s situation, what Christopher Whyte refers to as the “question about Scottishness” – specifically as regards a “nationalist ideology” (*Modern Scottish Poetry* 12, 6-7). Having examined this question from the varying perspectives of post-colonialist, post-structuralist, Feminist, and Marxist theories, Crawford finds that,

[w]hile some of the leading literary theorists have written on issues of cultural difference . . . they tend to concentrate on cases where the differences are most striking. . . . Even when teasing apart the strands of that “English Literature” whose unity is an illusion, the tendency is to concentrate on groups most obviously typified as “other” than the white English male. . . . Far less attention has been paid to less immediately visible cultural differences within “English Literature”, or, if that attention has been paid, all too often it has been confined to academic ghettos – Scottish Literature specialists, or those especially interested in Anglo-Welsh writing.

(3)

Crawford challenges this elision of “the way in which [Scottish] writers . . . question or negotiate with Anglocentricity in their writings” (6), by further arguing that it is precisely this dialectical exchange which warrants critical attention.

Because of Scotland’s geographical proximity to England, and because Scotland, while it maintains separate legal, educational, and religious institutions, lacks [full] political independence, Scottish writing in English . . . is particularly vulnerable to being subsumed within the English literary tradition with which it was frequently, but not exclusively, engaged. Scotland, therefore, becomes a, if not *the*, test case when considering whether or not we have devolved our view of “English Literature” in order to take full account of the various different cultural traditions which are so easily lumped together under that label. (8)

Determined to find answers to “questions of the literary significance of cultural nationalism” (4), Crawford allows that contemporary historians have progressed further in probing such issues “than have commentators on literature” (4).²¹ In seeking to explain the similarity of MacDiarmid’s and MacLean’s aesthetic goals and the profound impact of both writers on intellectual and artistic expression in twentieth-century Scotland – issues which are vital to any critical assessment of

²¹ Published as this current work was being written, Scott Lyall’s 2006 study entitled *Hugh MacDiarmid’s Poetry and Politics of Place: Imagining a Scottish Republic* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), redresses this deficit in regard to the literary criticism of Hugh MacDiarmid’s work by emphasizing the geo-political influence of the politics of location on MacDiarmid’s nationalism. Lyall demonstrates why, from an ideological standpoint, MacDiarmid refused to accept that nationalism and internationalism were irreconcilable.

their work yet whose detailed analysis is admittedly beyond the scope of this introduction to their correspondence - we have followed Crawford's lead by turning to current historical commentary on nationalism.

Much recent historical writing shares a commonly negative view of nationalism as a static ideology with roots in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, one predicated on the "invention" of artificial traditions in order to sustain the notion of a historically distinctive identity, of difference.²² It is thus typically characterized as a movement which, as demonstrated by events in the first half of the twentieth century, "ended in the abyss of the Third Reich" (4). Yet how is it in our post-modernist, post-structuralist milieu that such attempts to articulate cultural specificity, to reconstruct "a useable past" (5), are viewed as uniformly unchanging movements whose political impact is always and everywhere the same? Surely this view occludes the historical experience of modern Scotland, if not that of Ireland, by ignoring the fact that in certain

²² This attitude is particularly apparent in such works as E.J. Hobsbawm's *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*; in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*; and in Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism*. Although avowedly "strongly anti-nationalist" (x), Christopher Harvie's most recent edition of *Scotland and Nationalism: Scottish Society and Politics 1707 to the Present* is helpful in terms of disentangling the various positions and agendas held by the political parties in twentieth-century Scotland, especially with regard to their attitudes towards nationalism. More recent studies articulating an alternate view of nationalism include Anthony D. Smith's *National Identity*, Murray G. H. Pittock's *Inventing and Resisting Britain: Cultural Identities in Britain and Ireland, 1685-1789*, and his *Celtic Identity and the British Image*, Eleanor Bell's *Questioning Scotland: Literature, Nationalism, Postmodernism*, Eleanor Bell and Gavin Miller, eds., *Scotland in Theory: Reflections on Culture and Literature*, Margery Palmer McCulloch's *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland 1918-1939*, and Mitchell Young, Eric Zuelow, and Andreas Strum's *Nationalism in a Global Era: the Persistence of Nations*.

circumstances, nationalism may, in fact, result in positive outcomes which are creative and regenerative. As Anthony Smith notes,

We could, equally, catalogue the benign effects of nationalism: its defense of minority cultures; its rescue of “lost” histories and literatures; its inspiration for cultural renaissances; its resolution of “identity crisis”; its legitimation of community and social solidarity; its inspiration to resist tyranny; its ideal of popular sovereignty and collective mobilization; even the motivation of self-sustaining economic growth. Each of these effects could, with as much plausibility, be attributed to nationalist ideologies as the baneful consequences listed by critics. (18)

A case in point is the Irish Republic which, particularly in the economic sector, has attained, as an independent member of the European Union, a degree of leverage “that simple reliance on England would never have allowed” (Miller 2).

Benedict Anderson, in *Imagined Communities*, recognizes the positive potential of nationalism, demonstrating, as Crawford points out, that “rather than something to be eschewed, the invention or construction of traditions is a key activity in a healthy culture, one whose view of itself and of its own development is constantly altering and under review” (14). Crawford further comments that “Scotland and Scottish culture, like all nations and cultures, require continual acts of re-imagining which alter and develop their natures” (15). However, Scotland still demonstrates the particularity of historical experience, failing to fit neatly into

even Anderson's theoretical framework, for he situates the rise of nationalism in the modern period, at the historical juncture between the demise of European monarchies, the advent of mass print communication, and the increase in literacy among the masses (Anderson 36-46). Yet in Scotland's case, if we may equate the goals of sovereignty with those of nationalism, the tradition of imagining a Scottish identity is a historical reality rather than modernist fabrication. In fact, Scotland was one of the very earliest European nations to achieve a unified nation state under a single monarchy. This had happened in the beginning of the ninth century roughly at the same time as in England. One need only read a portion of *The Declaration of Arbroath*, written in 1320 during the Scottish Wars of Independence, to recognize that the idea of a specific Scottish identity is longstanding and predates the modern period. One of the earliest documents in Western Europe to set forth notions of national freedom and independence, specifically using the terms "*gens nostra*", "our nation"²³ ("*The Declaration of Arbroath* in the Original Latin" 1; "*The Declaration of Arbroath* - English Translation" 1), it reads, "For, as long as but a hundred of us remain alive, never will we on any condition be brought under English rule. It is in truth not for glory,

²³ The term "nation" is defined in the *OED* as "1. A people or group of peoples; a political state. 1.a. A large aggregate of communities and individuals united by factors such as common descent, language, culture, history or occupation of the same territory, so as to form a distinct people. Now also: such a people forming a political state; a political state. (In early use also in *pl.*: a country.)"

Although there is a separate "post-classical" Latin word, "*nationes*", the *OED* traces the etymology of the word "nations" to the early fourteenth century, attributing its first recorded usage to "*Richard Coer de Lyon*" and reading "We schul ous venge fonde . . . Of the freyns . . . that haue despised our naciouns." Not surprisingly, the term also occurs in the writings of the medieval Scottish poets, Barbour and Dunbar. See "Nation".

nor riches, nor honours that we are fighting, but for freedom – for that alone, which no honest man gives up but with life itself” (2).

Clearly, current theoretical frameworks continue to grapple with the task of assessing notions of both Scottish and Irish cultural nationalism and their expression, a situation which is complicated by the fact that both countries have been “perpetrator[s] as well as victim[s] of global British imperialism” (Crawford 13). Yet while “there remains a great need for empirically grounded work to help free Scottish writing from the Anglocentric tones of conventional literary history and of newer approaches” (10), some Scottish critics have tired of the nationalist perspective, justifiably suggesting it is a mistake to privilege it as the dominant critical lens through which to examine Scottish poetry (Whyte, *Modern Scottish Poetry* 1-33). Certainly, it should not be the *only* critical focus in discussing Scotland’s literary traditions, but it remains one which is immensely significant in terms of the development of Scottish literature throughout most of the twentieth century. For as Duncan MacLean observes in “Poets’ Parliament”,

What influence will the [new] Scottish Parliament have on Scottish Writing? Very little. The influence will be the other way around. After all, hasn’t Scottish writing been one of the major causes in bringing the Scottish Parliament into existence? When the politicians were faffing about, infighting, backhanding etc. from 1979 to 1998 and basically doing bugger all to provide some kind of self-determination for the people of Scotland, it was the writers (not alone amongst the artists, but possibly leading the front) who

articulated a sense of Scottish identity, of Scottish values, of Scottish concerns. They weren't necessarily leading the people in doing all this: they just shared the population's taking-for granted of Scotland's right for more self-determination, and wrote with that assumption in mind. And gradually the politicians started to catch up. There's been a parliament of novels for years. This parliament of politicians is years behind. (74)

Fortunately, despite the lack of a fully formulated critical apparatus for examining the historical development of nationalism in the Scottish and Irish contexts and its attendant/concomitant cultural expression, some critical approaches offer tools which assist an examination of these phenomena. While Crawford feels it is overly simplistic, particularly in the case of Scotland, to merely read its experience and Ireland's as the earliest examples of the response to English expansion and later British colonialism (13), there have been marked similarities in both countries' expression of cultural nationalism. For as Terry Eagleton points out:

However fundamentally indifferent colonialism may be to the nature of the peoples it does down, the fact remains that a particular people is in effect done down *as such*. And it is this fact that the truth of nationalism illuminates. . . . [T]o attempt to bypass the specificity of one's identity in the name of freedom will always be perilously abstract, even once one has recognized that such an identity is as much a construct of the oppressor as one's "authentic"

sense of oneself. Any emancipatory politics must begin with the specific, then, but must in the same gesture leave it behind. For the freedom in question is not the freedom to “be Irish [or Scottish or]” . . . whatever that might mean, but simply the freedom now enjoyed by certain other groups to determine their identity as they wish. Ironically, then, a politics of difference or specificity is in the first place in the cause of sameness and universal identity – the right of the group victimized in its particularity to be on equal terms with others as far as their self-determination is concerned. . . . In a further dialectical twist, however, this truth must be left behind as soon as seized; for the only point of enjoying such universal abstract equality is to discover and live one’s own particular difference. (30)

Indeed, such paradoxes regarding identity are relevant to the discussion of MacDiarmid’s and MacLean’s letters, for the epistolary mode is itself an act of fiction, a creative reimagining. As Janet Gurkin Altman points out, letters have the “potential to create narrative, figurative, and other types of meaning” (4). She continues, “the letter’s multivalency – as a linguistic phenomenon, as a real-life form, as an instrument of amorous or philosophical communication” (5), makes it “an instrument for creating the illusion of reality” (6). Thus, the letters not only serve as agents of the narrative of MacDiarmid and MacLean’s friendship, their epistolarity enables a creative space in which both poets give expression to their respective notions of the Scottish writer and of national identity, thereby

demonstrating the potential flexibility of such concepts. Thus, their correspondence “furnishes a fine generic instance, on a microcosmic scale, of the mutuality and the debate among persons who share a persuasion that they constitute a ‘nation’” (Miller 1). Their friendship “offers itself as a dialectical epitome of the ‘synthetic’ nation” (Miller 1). This preoccupation with the inherent implications of cultural nationalism was not without precedent.

In Ireland, as the impetus towards political self-determination came to a head in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and subsequently in Scotland, there was a flourishing of the arts, particularly in terms of literary and language revivals. To use an Althusserian paradigm, in negotiating their engagement with a dominant Anglocentric culture, these movements became rival ideological apparatuses for cultural nationalism. The aesthetic goals of Ireland’s literary and language revivals developed into competing ideologies, whereby they struggled as much with each other as in response to English cultural imperialism. Thus, in an attempt to understand the significance of MacDiarmid’s and MacLean’s choices regarding the linguistic medium of their poetry, it is worthwhile to examine, if briefly, how this competitive dynamic influenced the Irish Literary Renaissance and the concurrent Irish language revival spearheaded by the Gaelic League, specifically in terms of each movement’s articulation of a cultural identity.

In 1917, the Irish poet William Butler Yeats observed in “*Anima Hominis*”, “We make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry” (492). This is a provocative comment from a poet whose

greatest poems included “September 1913”, “Easter 1916”, “The Second Coming”, “Meditations in Time of Civil War”, and “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen”, for it examines the intersection between politics and poetry, what it means to be a political poet. The founder of the Irish Literary Renaissance, which began in the late nineteenth century and was profoundly influenced by the cultural nationalism of Thomas Davis’s Young Ireland movement, by Fenianism, and by the Parnellite drive for “Home Rule”, Yeats was, for most of his early career, preoccupied with the relationship between art and politics. As F.S.L. Lyons has pointed out, Yeats’ literary movement faced several challenges: “whether there could or should be an Irish literature in English”; “whether through poetry, drama and the arts, it was still possible to fashion a cultural identity for Ireland separate from that of England”, one which gave expression to the plurality of cultures comprising Irish society; and “whether or not [artists] should be free to write what [they] pleased without the compulsion of having to subordinate [their] work to a cause, however elevated that cause might be” (64). Although “[i]n 1888 he collaborated with Douglas Hyde in an anthology of the poetry of Young Ireland” (37-38), Yeats eventually dismissed such writing as “good propaganda but bad literature” (39). Instead, while willing to appropriate elements from Irish language sources of folklore and mythology, Yeats specifically championed an Irish literature written in English, concluding that the criteria for a national literature should be artistic rather than nationalistic (*Explorations* 156).

Yet his actions would have significant ramifications, particularly in terms of their impact on literature written in the Irish language. In contrast to Yeats’s

position, Douglas Hyde – a fully bilingual Irish speaker who was to become a key figure in the revival of the Irish language through his involvement with the Gaelic League (51, 62-63) – argued that although “it was not . . . his aim to make Irish the language of everyday speech and communication, . . . it might at least be possible . . . to prevent it from dying out” (Lyons 36). Like the other champions of the Irish language movement, he followed Thomas Davis’s lead in equating language revival with the national identity (32), believing “that the soul of a nation resides in its language. To lose your native tongue and learn that of an alien, is the worst badge of conquest – it is the chain on the soul” (Davis qtd. in Lyons 32). Thus, while Hyde and the Gaelic League promoted the “de-Anglicization” of Ireland (39), Yeats fought for the “de-Davisization” of Ireland (39). Clearly, “the argument between Yeats and his opponents went deeper than a conflict between art and propaganda. It concerned also the question of language as the symbol of cultural difference” (39). As Lyons points out, Yeats’ aesthetic goals determined his response. “Yeats had virtually no Irish. But even had he managed to learn it, this would not have affected his ambition, which was to create a literature that would not be merely local, but would have a European impact; it would, therefore, inevitably be a literature in English” (39). While a thorough analysis of the effects of this ambition exceeds the parameters of the current discussion, it had resounding political consequences as regards the struggle for cultural dominance.²⁴

²⁴ A helpful discussion of these cultural tensions is offered in Declan Kiberd’s *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995).

Within six years of Yeats's 1917 publication of "*Anima Hominis*", Christopher Murray Grieve found himself grappling with similar issues in a Scottish context. Although Scots was the language spoken at home and in his community of Langholm (Bold, *MacDiarmid* 27-28), his exposure to literature through the Scottish educational system was predominantly Anglocentric (36). Yet it was through the influence of United Free Church minister T.S. Cairncross and of Scottish teachers F.G. Scott and William Burt that he began to search for his own poetic voice (30-33; 38-39). A voracious reader and autodidact, Grieve enhanced his literary education by reading an extensive range of literature (29-30; 34). From the time he abandoned teacher training at Edinburgh's Broughton School to work as a journalist, until he served with the Medical Corps in WWI, he favoured the Georgian school of English poetry and was particularly impressed with the perception of Rupert Brooke's poetry as the "voice" of patriotic England (76-77). However, through his subscription and contribution to the journal *New Age*, he was increasingly drawn to such critics and poets as Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot (69-70; 76-78; 80-81; 146-47). The period from the early years of WWI through to his demobilization was intellectually intense, the time during which he formulated his ideas for a literary movement in Scotland (101-02), one which would make of Scottish literature something "new". Like Yeats, he envisioned a distinctive national poetry which was more than capable of addressing contemporary cosmopolitan issues in novel ways. During the years 1920-22, Grieve compiled three anthologies, a series entitled *Northern Numbers*, each of which bears witness to his attempt to establish his credibility as both critic and

poet (101, 106-08, 118, 143). In the first volume of the series he assembled a group of new Scottish poets although, with the exception of John Buchan²⁵ and Violet Jacob²⁶ who experimented with writing poetry in Scots (106-07), all wrote in English. Thus, in terms of the language and subject matter of their poetry, initially Grieve's movement was arguably responding to Anglocentric cultural imperialism in a characteristically "North British" fashion, a practice in keeping with most of the writers of the eighteenth-century Scottish Enlightenment. As a result, the tone of these anthologies – intended as "a Scottish equivalent of *Georgian Poetry*"²⁷ -- is markedly different from that which emerged during the late 30's in *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* (101; 106-07), for they chart the literary metamorphosis of Christopher Murray Grieve, writing in English, into Hugh MacDiarmid, renowned for his poetry in Scots. However, as Alan Bold points out, "Grieve's alter ego made his début as a writer of English dialogue, not Scots verse. He was probably initially created to swell the chorus of contributors

²⁵ John Buchan, Lord Tweedsmuir of Elsfield (1875-1940), Scottish novelist, critic and editor. Friend of Hugh MacDiarmid's whose poetry was published in the *Northern Numbers* series of the 1920s. See Trevor Royle, *The Mainstream Companion to Scottish Literature* (Edinburgh; London: Mainstream Publishing, 1993) 47. See also Bold, *MacDiarmid* 106-07.

²⁶ Scottish poet. See footnote 5.

²⁷ CMG's first editorial project was the anthology of poetry entitled *Northern Numbers*, which appeared in late autumn of 1920 under the publisher's imprint of T.N. Foulis of Edinburgh. In his foreword to the work, Grieve acknowledged the influence of Edward Marsh's *Georgian Poetry* series, which was used to showcase the talents of such young English poets as Rupert Brooke. *Northern Numbers* featured the work of established Scottish poets like John Buchan, Neil Munro, Donald Mackenzie, Violet Jacob, T.S. Cairncross, and Roderick Watson Kerr. The only fledgling poets included in the anthology were Christopher Grieve and his brother Andrew. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 106-07.

to the *Scottish Chapbook*, to add one more modernistic voice to the journal's progressive theme" (135).

At first, Grieve's attitude towards poetry written in Scots was similar to that of Yeats regarding the notion of a national literature written in Irish (116-17). Influenced by the ideas of C. Gregory Smith's *Scottish Literature*, published in 1919, Grieve despised the Burnsian sentimentality of late nineteenth-century Kailyard poetry and, for a time, was the leading spokesperson for the attack on poetry written in Scots (122-23; 170-71). Eventually, it was the poetic experiments in Scots of nationalist writer Lewis Spence which won Grieve over by demonstrating the artistic range the language was capable of achieving when handled with creative talent and insight (124-29). Thus, practice contravened theory. The result was a *volte face* in Grieve's aesthetics, the birth in 1922 of his Scots literary persona, Hugh MacDiarmid, and the launch of the Scottish Literary Renaissance. This was a vital year for Modernism, one which also saw the publication of James Joyce's *Ulysses* and T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, works whose complex heteroglossic polyphony would contrast strikingly with the demotic appeal of MacDiarmid's verse written in "Synthetic Scots". To articulate the aesthetic goals of this new movement, Grieve coined the phrase "'Not Traditions – Precedents'" (133), which graced the cover of the literary journal *Scottish Chapbook*, a magazine "devoted to critical essays and 'experimental poetics'" which he edited (131-33). As Alan Bold notes, the first edition published in August 1922 outlined Grieve's vision for Scottish literature (133):

Prominently placed at the beginning of the magazine was a statement of the *Chapbook* programme, which sums up Grieve's objectives at the time. He itemized his aims as follows: to support the campaign of the Vernacular Circle of the London Burns Club for the revival of the Doric; to help create a Scots National Theatre; to follow the *Northern Numbers* movement in contemporary Scottish poetry; to encourage the work of contemporary Scottish writers in English, Gaelic and Braid Scots; to develop a distinctively Scottish school of criticism; to relate Scottish literature to European developments (133)

By the mid 1920s MacDiarmid had produced two volumes of short lyrics in Scots which were soon followed, in 1926, by the publication of his brilliant modernist long poem, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*. For MacDiarmid,

His cultural nationalism . . . confirmed what he had instinctively felt for some time, that in writing in English and thus reacting to the literature of the country he resented, he was submitting to an alien language – he repeatedly said, 'English . . . is not my native language.' Theoretically the notion of English as a foreign language may have been spurious since it was what Grieve spoke and wrote fluently. However, in practice, the concept motivated MacDiarmid. (151)

MacDiarmid referred to the new language he wrote in as “Synthetic Scots”, an amalgamation of various dialects rather than the language spoken by his family and within his community as he grew up. As Alan Bold has observed,

MacDiarmid could prove his soul was Scots only by abandoning his inhibitions and allowing himself to be possessed by the Scots language. Theoretically he had proposed Synthetic Scots as a fusion of all Scotland’s linguistic resources – the oral rhythms of the various dialects, the lexical density of dictionary Scots, the lyrical qualities of literary Scots – and felt that a Synthetic Scots was apposite to a poem intent on synthesis. Yet *A Drunk Man* is not dependent on theory. It is an inspirational work allowing MacDiarmid to translate the facts of his life into a linguistic fabric rich in detail and design. (221)

Thus, “*A Drunk Man* revealed that a Scot could contribute to international literature by writing in Scots” (342). Although his detractors labeled him as a dictionary dredger (Glen, *Hugh MacDiarmid and the Scottish Renaissance* 77), the success of his early lyrics published in *Sangshaw* (1925) and *Pennywheep* (1926), followed by that of *A Drunk Man* validated his revised stance on the creative potential of Scots as a medium for Scottish poetry. As Duncan Glen observes, MacDiarmid “brought together the Scots language, with its parochial and out-worn traditions, and the *avant garde* ideas of European literature, and began the creation of a new Scottish literature” (*Hugh MacDiarmid* 81). In fact,

serious opposition to his advocacy of writing in Scots did not emerge until the mid-1930's.

In what would amount to perhaps the most memorable demonstration of ideological antagonism arising from the Scottish Literary Renaissance, by 1936 two distinct factions had emerged with opposing views as to the efficacy of literature written in the vernacular. The touchstone for this conflict was Edwin Muir's book, *Scott and Scotland: The Predicament of the Scottish Writer*. As Duncan Glen notes, "Muir had been a personal friend of MacDiarmid since the early 'twenties and he had praised him as an important critic and poet" (*Hugh MacDiarmid* 143). Writing of MacDiarmid's accomplishments, Muir had commented "MacDiarmid, it seems to me, is the one deliberate and eminent innovator in Scottish literature" (qtd. in Glen, *Hugh MacDiarmid* 94). Indeed, just a year prior to the appearance of *Scott and Scotland* in 1936, their mutual friend the editor and publisher James Whyte had included MacDiarmid's translation of "The *Birlinn* of Clanranald" in his magazine *The Modern Scot* and subsequently produced a limited edition booklet of it (Bold, *MacDiarmid* ; Glen, *Hugh MacDiarmid* 137). Ultimately, the dispute arose from the fact that Muir, ostensibly committed to writing a volume endorsing the use of Scots entitled *Scott and Scotland* for MacDiarmid's series *Meanings for Scotland*,²⁸ had abruptly reversed his position on the viability of Scots as a literary language

²⁸ Despite MacDiarmid's sojourn in hospital following his collapse from nervous exhaustion in September 1935, the first issue of his quarterly journal *The Voice of Scotland* appeared in the same month. MacDiarmid altered the series title from *Meanings for Scotland* and publication went ahead as planned. This issue featured Eric Linklater's *The Lion and the Unicorn* and Neil Gunn's *Whiskey and Scotland*. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 337.

(Bold, *Hugh MacDiarmid* 158-59; 164; 331; 337). What MacDiarmid believed would be a critical discussion of Sir Walter Scott's use of the vernacular in effect undermined the basic premises CMG had outlined for the Scottish Literary Renaissance. As Duncan Glen observes, "Muir [essentially] advised the Scottish writer to forget Scots and to write in English" (141). Thus, Muir argued,

a Scottish writer who wishes to achieve some approximation to completeness has no choice except to absorb the English tradition, and that if he thoroughly does so his work belongs not merely to Scottish literature but to English literature as well. On the other hand, if he wishes to add to an indigenous Scottish literature, and roots himself deliberately in Scotland, he will find there, no matter how long he may search, neither an organic community to round off his conceptions, nor a major literary tradition to support him, nor even a faith among the people themselves that a Scottish literature is possible or desirable, nor any opportunity, finally, of making a livelihood by his work . . . it cannot be solved by writing poems in Scots, or by looking forward to some hypothetical Scotland in the future. (Muir qtd. in Glen, *Hugh MacDiarmid* 141)

To add insult to injury, Muir further stated "that MacDiarmid had 'left Scottish verse very much where it was before'" (Bold, *MacDiarmid* 340). Naturally, MacDiarmid perceived this as a personal betrayal and bitter public debates regarding the appropriate linguistic medium for Scottish writers ensued (340-43), MacDiarmid's comments in the introduction to *The Golden Treasury* comprising

his most extended indictment of Muir's views (vii-xxxvii).²⁹ Writing on September 21st, 1936, MacLean expressed his support for MacDiarmid: "I was very interested to hear of your break with the Whyte crowd."³⁰ I of course knew what your real attitude to them had been for a long time. I only hope that it will not be a serious inconvenience to you in the way of getting things published" (Letter 39). Later, in a letter written just months before *The Golden Treasury* was published, MacLean summarized his attitude to the treatment MacDiarmid had received in Scotland:

Nowadays I am more and more worried and ashamed of the way Scotland has treated yourself whom, I at least, recognise as one of the great European poets of all time. I find that all the people whose opinions I value are now certain that this century has seen two major poets in the British Islands, yourself and Yeats, and they are all agreed that in lyric intensity your poetry is far above Yeats's. It is amazing to find how many subscribe to that view without doing anything about it in public.

(Letter 54, dated 10 Jan. 1940)

²⁹ For further details of MacDiarmid's and Muir's "flyting", see the editors' comments in the introduction to *The Raucle Tongue – Vol. III* xviii-xix.

³⁰ In June of 1936, *The Outlook*, of which Whyte was literary editor, published an extract of Edwin Muir's book *Scott and Scotland*. Although Muir's book was nominally a discussion of the writer Sir Walter Scott, it served as a vehicle for Muir's attack on the viability of Scots as a literary language and his dismissal of MacDiarmid's poetic achievements in the vernacular. Henceforth, MacDiarmid perceived both Whyte and Muir as adversaries, believing that they "were responsible for preventing the publication of *Red Scotland*." See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 340-42.

Such literary faction fighting would resurface in the 1960's, when MacDiarmid once again found himself at odds with another friend, the experimental poet Ian Hamilton Finlay, over poetry written in the vernacular. This time, the controversy was triggered by the publication of the anthology *Honour'd Shade*, edited by MacDiarmid's friend Norman MacCaig.³¹ As Duncan Glen explains, "The publication of *Honour'd Shade* aroused . . . those who believ[ed] that there [was] an editorial bias towards poetry in [the vernacular] and that the 'Rose Street' poets led by MacDiarmid, Smith, and MacCaig [were] a literary establishment obstructing the recognition of the younger poets outside the group" (*Hugh MacDiarmid* 219). Tracing the history of the conflict, Glen continues,

In February 1960 seven of these poets – Ian Hamilton Finlay, W. Price Turner, Tom Wright, Stewart Conn, Shaun Fitzsimmon, Anne Turner, and Tom Buchan recorded their poems on a tape entitled *Dishonour'd Shade: seven non-Abbottsford Poets*. This controversy was spasmodically revived in the next two years. In January 1962 Tom Wright – alongside a similar article by Hugh Rae – attacked the "attitudes and dogmas of the older poets" and in particular their nationalism and insistence on the importance of Lallans and suggested that since the "Lallans boys" held most of the editorial and critical posts the inevitable result was that the younger poets "found a massive road block in their way." (219)

³¹ Norman MacCaig (14 Nov. 1920-23 Jan. 1996), Scottish poet and friend of MacDiarmid and MacLean.

Despite the fact that MacDiarmid could be a “merciless opponent” (Lindsay qtd. in Glen, *Hugh MacDiarmid* 221), the correspondence between him and MacLean illustrates that “far from obstructing their development there has been no one more kind and generous towards young and unknown writers than C.M. Grieve” (Glen, *Hugh MacDairmid* 220). As Duncan Glen concludes: “Public tributes to [his mentorship] are numerous as are poems addressed or inscribed to him and books dedicated to him. Indeed, he could more easily be shown to have been over-generous with praise and encouragement as reference to many of his reviews of and introductions to many books reveals” (220). In the final analysis, these public flytings brought home the necessity of a pluralistic vision of Scottish literature, one which, it may be argued MacDiarmid cultivated by working with Gaelic, with “Synthetic Scots”, and with “Synthetic English”, the medium of much of his later poetry.

Throughout the twenties and thirties, MacDiarmid had become increasingly familiar with Scottish Gaelic literature in translation. During his childhood he had vacationed with Gaelic-speaking relatives of his mother’s north of Inverness (Bold, *MacDiarmid* 26), and in later life he came to express regret that he was unable to write poetry in Gaelic (Bold, *MacDiarmid* 10; MacLean, “MacDiarmid 1933-1944” 18). In fact, what was to prove a life-long fascination with Gaelic culture even influenced his choice of the literary alias, Hugh MacDiarmid. In his biography *Lucky Poet*, he wrote, “It was an immediate realization of this ultimate [Celtic] reach of the implications of my experiment which made me adopt, when I began writing Scots poetry, the Gaelic pseudonym

of Hugh MacDiarmid” (6). By the late 1920s, “MacDiarmid had come to the conclusion that the Gaelic Idea was the modern answer to the quasi-genocidal destruction of Gaelic culture in Scotland. Scotland was, he believed, a quintessentially Gaelic nation that had been battered into submission but could be resurrected” (Bold, *MacDiarmid* 248). He was to develop this theme in his long poem published in 1930, *To Circumjack Cencrastus*. MacDiarmid’s stance was that

In Scotland, . . . the arrogance of English imperialism had, when applied to education, relegated Gaelic and dialect writers to a limbo and he proposed three conditions to ensure the advance of the Scottish Renaissance Movement: a rising tide of Scottish national consciousness; a reconcentration, in schools and universities, on native Scottish literature; and the bridging of the gulf between Gaelic and Scots. (258-59)

Given his choice to link Scottish identity with language, he came to view Gaelic as the “Ur” language of Scotland (MacDiarmid qtd. in Byrne 3), a tradition older and even more firmly established than that of Scots. However, by the time MacDiarmid and MacLean began their collaboration on *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*, the literary medium of MacDiarmid’s poetry was undergoing a significant shift to what he would later refer to as “Synthetic English” (Bold, *MacDiarmid* 149; 293-94; 305; 307). Although an in-depth discussion of MacDiarmid’s shift to writing in “Synthetic English” lies beyond the range of this introduction to his and MacLean’s correspondence, it is worth noting that once

again his linguistic experimentation was driven by a pluralist aesthetic. He sought to create a polyphony of languages in which “the whole range of intellectual thought [could] be written” (MacDiarmid qtd. in Glen, *Hugh MacDiarmid* 175), in order to produce “an epic poetry fully alive to the twentieth century – a learned poetry of ‘fact and science’” (MacDiarmid qtd. in Glen, *Hugh MacDiarmid* 175). Although MacDiarmid acknowledged the limitations of the vernacular in terms of achieving these ends, he never entirely abandoned Scots as a linguistic vehicle for his poetry. As he subsequently explained in an interview published in *Studies in Scottish Literature*, “Scots is an impossible medium for any poems on scientific and modern subjects that I have been writing; you couldn’t write ‘On a Raised Beach’ in Scots at all, but you couldn’t write it in English either” (Scott 19). Thus, from MacDiarmid’s perspective “Synthetic English” offered a means to “extend the scope and influence of [his] poetry” in order to “communicate the complexities” of the modern world (Glen, *Hugh MacDiarmid* 146-47). However, this change of literary language did not mean MacDiarmid was less active as a nationalist, either politically or culturally. Indeed, in defending his use of English, MacDiarmid might well have borrowed a line from the poet Douglas Dunn: “I speak that language, / But not its nationality; . . .” (Dunn qtd. in Whyte, *Modern Scottish Poetry* 21). Clearly, he had come to recognize that in the Scottish context, viewing only one of the country’s languages as a signifier of political engagement and cultural nationalism was an oversimplification.

In responding to Yeats' dilemma over the fine line between art and propaganda, MacDiarmid's reply might be taken from his poem entitled "Poetry and Propaganda" which concludes, "In short, any utterance that is not pure / Propaganda is impure propaganda for sure" (MacDiarmid, "Poetry and Propaganda" in *The Complete Poems: Vol. I* 558). However, in an interview for *Radio Telefis Eirann* just months before his death, he conceded that "There's nothing more difficult than to write political poetry and avoid mere propaganda. Very very difficult indeed. . . . [P]olitics and poetry are indissociable in my mind. I'm writing the poetry of the whole man" (MacDiarmid qtd. in Ó hUanacháin 595). Clearly, MacDiarmid did not shy away from the notion that he was a political poet: "Poetry", he observed, "is experience come to life" (MacDiarmid, *The Complete Poems: Vol. II* 757). His goal was to revitalize Scotland's sense of self throughout the public sphere, both culturally and politically. Poetry offered him a vital means of social commentary. It provided the opportunity to articulate "a nationalism at once realist and idealist, seeing Scotland as she was and setting out to remake her in the image of several, complementary ideas of what she ought to be" (Maxwell 202). In this, he was assuming an important function which characterized bardic poets within the Gaelic tradition, a role which "assign[ed] to him a political as well as an aesthetic voice" (Dooley 460). Through this "responsiveness to political reality" (461), the dialectical exchange between art and politics, his poetry could form "a segment in a continuum of discourse" (462). As Stephen Maxwell explains, this connection was the foundation of MacDiarmid's nationalism:

his was a nationalism which, forswearing the conventional categories of nationality, envisioned Scotland variously as a field of heroic intellectual effort, as an inexhaustible source of all the data required to feed the artist's imagination, as a starting point for the people of Scotland in their search for the synthesis of science and art in a "poetry of facts". Above all it was an exhortatory nationalism which challenged the people of Scotland to take the van in the urgent work of cultural recovery facing the West. (210)

Though MacDiarmid's perception of "political and cultural activity as agents of change" remained constant (219), his views on nationalism, like his views on language, would change.

During the first half of the 1920s, MacDiarmid's nationalism had devolved into a public support for Fascism which culminated in the publication of two articles: "a 'Plea for a Scottish Fascism' and 'Programme for a Scottish Fascism' which ran over two issues [of the *Scottish Nation*], 15 and 19 June [1923]" (Bold, *MacDiarmid* 144). In many ways, WWI had been fought in defense of the rights of small nations. Believing that Fascism mainly found support among the unemployed post-war veterans, MacDiarmid felt that "the discontent of the out-of-work could be used to forge a militant movement" (144-45). However, as Bold points out, "[this] appeal for a Scottish Fascism was another gesture of contempt for English parliamentary democracy; devolution, he thought, was useless whereas a strong Scottish nationalist government could impose its ideals on those with vested interests in the status quo by initiating . . . an agrarian policy on

the Mussolini model" (145). By the 1930s, the poet's position on Fascism had changed. Ultimately, "[a] narrow Scottish nationalism, indifferent to culture and strong on bourgeois values, was anathema to MacDiarmid" (338), and as the Italian Fascist movement became increasingly right-wing, MacDiarmid came to see the Social Credit economic policies of Major C.H. Douglas as "the alternative to Fascism and the complement and corrective of Communism" (Bold, *MacDiarmid* 154; MacDiarmid qtd. in Bold 315; MacLean, "MacDiarmid 1933-1944" 19-20).

Proud of his working class roots, MacDiarmid joined the Communist party in 1934, and before the decade was out, he would gain notoriety by being ejected from both the Communist Party of Great Britain and the National Party of Scotland, which he had co-founded in 1928 (Bold, *MacDiarmid* 280; 318-19; 343-44; Grieve, Edwards, and Riach xxxv-vi). Ultimately, his political stance might best be described as that of a republican socialist. On the literary front "an intellectual dynamo with a passion for seeing Scotland in the intellectual forefront of Europe and not just a poor intellectual pensioner of England" (MacLean, "MacDiarmid 1933-1944" 21), not only had he revitalized contemporary Scottish writing, he was fashioning himself as arbiter of Scottish aesthetics and as a people's poet (Glen, *Hugh MacDiarmid* 237). The titles of many of the works MacDiarmid published during these years, particularly the journal *Voice of Scotland*, reflect a sense of cultural messianism similar to that articulated by Yeats in relation to Irish literature.

MacLean, for his part, was a self-avowed political poet (Nicholson, “An Interview” 28-31; MacLean, “MacDiarmid 1933-1944” 19-20). He innately understood that “[t]he Gaelic poetic posits a central role for the poet in society” (Dooley 460), “the bardic image of the poem as relevance, as attention to the vital signs of the collectivity, of speech channeled into committed statements of praise or blame, incitement or curse, of speech as real exchange” (462). In an interview with Joy Hendry published in the literary magazine *Chapman* in 1991, MacLean responds directly to Yeats’s maxim:

I would say that my poetry is not propagandist so much as confessional. My quarrel is fundamentally with myself, not with the outside world. A lot of things were intensified and accelerated by the likelihood of war in the thirties. It wasn’t so much the war I was afraid of, but of Europe being taken over by German fascism, German Nazism, and being a kind of pessimist, I fully expected that as things were going, it was likely that there would be a thousand years of Nazi domination, which was racist too, you know. And that worked in with my Scottish nationalism because the Nazis regarded the English as more Teutonic than the Scots. And that affected me very much. And, as you know – or perhaps you don’t know – I asked Edinburgh Corporation to release me [from work at Boroughmuir High School] on the second day of the war.

(Hendry, “An Interview” 3).

MacLean shared MacDiarmid's socialist leanings, coming from a family of activists who had been involved in resisting the clearances on the Isle of Skye, particularly through the Battle of the Braes (Nicholson, "An Interview" 28). Like MacDiarmid, he revered the working class heroes of socialism, men like James Connolly³² one of the leaders of Ireland's Easter Rising in 1916 and a former worker in the Glasgow shipyards (Bold, *MacDiarmid* 80), and John MacLean,³³ the Scottish socialist and martyr who championed the rights of labourers during the Glasgow rent strike of 1915 (Bold, *MacDiarmid*: 18-19; Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, eds. 153). As Joy Hendry states,

MacLean's belief in political systems may [have been] inhibited by profound skepticism, but his pride in his ancestry, and in the struggles on behalf of the crofting community by the "big men" of Braes, [was] quite without reservation. Equally "native" to MacLean as a Scot, as a Gael, as a poet concerned with the culture of his

³² James Connolly (1868-1916),, socialist, labour leader, and one of the organizers of Ireland's Easter Rising of 1916. Connolly's political integrity and self-sacrifice inspired Scottish socialist John MacLean, one of the heroes of Red Clydeside venerated by both Hugh MacDiarmid and Sorley MacLean. See "Connolly, James", *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. See also Bold, *MacDiarmid* 80.

³³ John Maclean (1879-1923), a Scottish socialist and labour leader who advocated a Scottish Workers' Republic. MacDiarmid viewed Maclean as the greatest leader of working-class Scotland. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 318-19. See also John McHugh, "Maclean, John (1879–1923)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online ed., May 2006 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/article/37721>>, accessed 29 Dec 2007.

country, [was] Scottish Nationalism, which MacLean supported alongside his socialism. ("The Man and His Work" 19)

Indeed, MacLean was to comment on the significance of his and MacDiarmid's shared working class roots in a 1942 letter to Douglas Young:³⁴ "Why do I immediately sense a sort of political kinship with people as different as Muir and Grieve, but not with you, Davie, Deorsa etc. I think it is a class question. Neither you, nor Davie³⁵ nor Deorsa³⁶ nor Robert MacIntyre³⁷ are really of my 'class' and hence I have never immediately felt that intimate feeling of closeness politically with you" (Hendry, "The Man and His Work" 32-33). During their literary collaboration in the 1930s, MacLean was educating himself as a Marxist.

Compelled by a fear of Fascism, he contemplated joining the International

³⁴ Douglas Young (1913-73), Scottish poet, dramatist, translator and publisher; friend to both Sorley MacLean and Hugh MacDiarmid. Young was custodian of MacLean's literary papers during WWII, and was instrumental in the publication of MacLean's *Dàin do Eimhir agus Dàin Eile*. He also translated a selection of poetry by Sorley MacLean and George Campbell Hay from Gaelic into Scots. See Royle 333-34. See also Hendry, "The Man and His Work" 32, and Derick S. Thomson, "Young, Douglas Cuthbert Colquhoun (1913–1973)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, Sept 2004; online ed., Oct 2006 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/view/article/40382>>, accessed 29 Dec 2007.

³⁵ MacLean's friend George Elder Davie, from his undergraduate days at Edinburgh University.

³⁶ George Campbell Hay / Deòrsa Mac Iain Deòrsa (1915-84), Gaelic poet and contemporary of Sorley MacLean. See Black, *An Tuil* 773-77.

³⁷ Robert Douglas McIntyre (1913-1998), Chairman of the Scottish National Party (SNP) 1948-1956, and SNP President from 1958-1980. He was the SNP's first MP, elected in the Motherwell riding in 1945. See Christopher Whyte, ed., *Somhairle MacGill-Eain/Sorley MacLean: Dàin do Eimhir* (Glasgow: The Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2002) 162.

Brigade in the Spanish Civil War and later volunteered to serve in the Signals Corp of the British Army during WWII (20-32), fighting for what he believed, in essence, was merely the lesser of two evils (Hendry, "The Man and His Work" 27; MacLean, "MacDiarmid 1933-1944" 19-20). MacLean believed it would be easier for Socialism to spread if the British and Allied Forces won the war, for under the Germans, he felt there would be no hope whatsoever for Scotland (Hendry, "The Man and His Work" 23). Ultimately, his faith in the Soviet republic continued until 1944 (27), when an argument with Sydney Goodsir Smith over the Soviets' treatment of the Polish people "convinced MacLean of the need to turn against" the communists (28).³⁸ MacLean's greatest poetry would emerge through his "quarrel with [himself]" over his failure to participate in the Spanish Civil War and later through his involvement in the North African theatre of combat. The result was *Dàin do Eimhir* and works like "*Gaoir na h-Eòrpa*" and "*Glac a' Bhàis*" which won him a place among the Desert Oasis poets of the Second World War.

Through their correspondence as they worked together on *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*, MacDiarmid's respect for MacLean's knowledge and

³⁸ Most likely the events which outraged Smith were the actions of Soviet partisan groups which attacked "Polish partisans, sympathizers and civilians." When the Soviet-backed Polish First Army re-entered Poland from Soviet territory in 1944, it failed to assist the *Armia Krajowa* or Polish Home Army with the Warsaw Uprising to bring an end to the German occupation of Poland. In effect, by 1944 the Soviets had replaced the Germans as Poland's occupying force, establishing an alternate "puppet government" to the exiled Polish government in London. See Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland* 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982). See also Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe: A Short History of Poland* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984).

creative ability is evident. MacDiarmid admired MacLean's profound commitment to the Gaelic language and its traditions. MacLean was "*Fíor-Ghael*", pure Gael – a true highlander. By the age of twenty, he had discovered that he wrote best in his native language, recognizing "that the verse [he] wrote in English . . . was rather dry . . . [and realizing] that [his] Gaelic stuff was better" (MacLean qtd. in Nicholson, "An Interview" 25; Hendry, "The Man and His Work" 13; Appendix A 323). Obsessed with the potential annihilation of Gaelic culture (Hendry, "The Man and His Work" 25), he was willing to sacrifice fame and recognition by writing for a smaller audience than he would have reached by writing in English. He chose Gaelic as the medium for his poetry in order to demonstrate that it expressed a distinctive world view, worthy of preservation and more than capable of expressing itself alongside other contemporary European literatures (14). As MacLean's literary talents developed during the 1930's and into the 1940's, MacDiarmid came to realize that the younger poet was able to achieve in Gaelic what he himself would have liked to have been capable of. In August 1934, mere months after they first met, MacDiarmid had written to MacLean in search of a "really good living [Gaelic] writer" for inclusion in *The Golden Treasury* (Letter 2). It is fitting that this poet would turn out to be MacLean himself. As it was, during a period when MacDiarmid was frequently engaged in polemics, MacLean's assistance with *The Golden Treasury* reinforced the image of MacDiarmid as a nationalist poet *extraordinaire*: one well-versed not just in Scots and English, but also in the Gaelic tradition.

Instead of insisting on a national literary tradition written in a single language, MacDiarmid's vision for Scottish literature was pluralistic, thereby enabling Scottish writers to articulate both specificity and universalism. Therein lay MacDiarmid's ability to circumvent, at least to a degree, the ideological antagonisms which had plagued the Irish Literary Renaissance and the Irish language revival movement. While MacDiarmid's and MacLean's respective poetry in Scots and Gaelic can be read as linguistic expressions of cultural resistance, they managed to strike a balance between the potentially competitive goals of literary renaissance, linguistic revitalization, and language preservation. Clearly, both men envisioned a Scottish identity which was the confluence of disparate traditions. Thus, rather than equating MacDiarmid's literary shift from Scots to English with the end of his fascination with the problematic "question about Scottishness" (Whyte, *Modern Scottish Poetry* 23), it may alternatively be seen as representative of the poet's attempt to situate himself as a cosmopolitan modernist in a broader international context within the expansive framework of a pan-Celtic nationalism. One need look no further than his reflections on "World Language" as part of *In Memoriam James Joyce*, begun in the 1930s but not published until 1955, to appreciate the significance of the scope of his artistic vision (Bold, *MacDiarmid* 306; 467). In his 2006 study *Hugh MacDiarmid's Poetry and Politics of Place: Imagining a Scottish Republic*, Scott Lyall argues that rather than being dismissed as antithetical, the apparent contradictions in MacDiarmid's ideology are effectively inter-related:

His nationalism and socialism should not be thought of as separate, clashing political entities; rather, in MacDiarmid's political imagination, they find a symbiotic union in a Scottish Republicanism that develops from his concerted engagement with Scotland, especially those places most important to his poetry

(16)

Lyall continues, "That the nation, once fully realised on its own terms, is central to the international community is a concept peopling MacDiarmid's political landscape, a place where, however marginal national particularity seems to be, the universal is the particular" (19). Here, the seemingly contradictory thrust of MacDiarmid's polemics is re-conceptualized as a positive, regenerative force. Perhaps only MacDiarmid could conceive of such a Caledonian antisyzygy as "cosmopolitan nationalist", but one thing is clear: recourse to the Gaelic tradition, to what he described as "the essential . . . Gaelic sources of [Scotland's] national beginnings" (xii), was vital to such a concept. To be a truly "national" poet, MacDiarmid had to demonstrate his ability to work in each of Scotland's literary traditions: Scots, English, Latin and Gaelic. To this end, Sorley MacLean was indispensable. His assistance with the translations of Gaelic poetry for *The Golden Treasury* helped to validate MacDiarmid's stance as "a great national poet of Scotland" (Bold, *MacDiarmid* 22), "the self-appointed saviour of Scottish culture in the twentieth century" (119).

Chapter 3 – “Modern *Makars*”

Why sud I then, with dull forheid and vain,
 With rude ingine and barren emptive brain,
 With bad harsh speech and lewit barbour tongue,
 Presume to write whare thy sweet bell is rung,
 Or counterfeit sa precious wordis dear?

And natheless with support and correctioun
 For natural love and friendful affectioun,
 Whilkis I bear to thy warkis and indite,
 Although, God wat, therein I knaw full lyte,
 And that thy facund sentence mycht be sung
 In our language as weill as [Gaidhlig] tongue;
 (Douglas, “The Difficulties of Translation” 331-32)

These comments regarding “The Difficulties of Translation” form part of the preface to the *makar* Sir Gavin Douglas’s early sixteenth-century translation

of Virgil's *Aeneid*, "the first complete account of a classical text in Britain" (Watson, ed., *The Poetry of Scotland* 108), as it was published in *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*, edited by Hugh MacDiarmid. In their justification of the translation Douglas has undertaken, his remarks could easily apply to MacDiarmid's desire to "English" Scottish poetry originally written in Gaelic and Latin for his anthology.³⁹ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term "*makar*" as "a person who fashions, constructs, prepares for use, or manufactures something; a manufacturer . . . a person who composes a book, draws up a document, . . . a person who brings about or produces a condition, effect, state of mind, etc; a creator or producer, . . . a poet" ("*Makar*, *n.*; *Maker*, *n.*"): to wit, a "*makar*" or manufacturer of meaning. For those familiar with the history of Scottish literature, it is the epithet applied to the great poets of the Scottish Renaissance during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Robert Henryson (1425?-1505?), William Dunbar (1460-1520?), Sir Gavin Douglas (1475?-1522), and Sir David Lindsay (1490-1555) (Watson, ed. *The Poetry of Scotland* 41; 78; 108; 146), men whose literary medium ranged from vernacular Scots to aureate (Latinized) English and whose poetry embraced a variety of forms, from Henryson's concisereply to Chaucer's long poem *Troilus and Criseyde*, entitled *The Testament of Cresseid*, to satires and flytings, vision

³⁹ In Letter 57, dated 13 May 1940, CMG actually uses the term "Englishing." The *OED* defines the verb "to English" as follows: "a. To translate into English (a book, passage, etc.); to give the English equivalent for (a word or phrase); . . . to make English, to anglicize. . . . To adopt (a word) into the English language; to give it an English character or form. To subject to English influence." For the verbal noun "Englishing", the *OED* gives the additional definition of "An English rendering or version." The first recorded instance of the verb's usage is the late fourteenth century.

poems, and translations of such classical epics as Virgil's *Aeneid*. Because of its more obvious connection with the verb "to make", somehow "*makar*" implies a greater range of creative flexibility than the English term "poet", for it articulates a more comprehensive sense of a poet's functions, one which includes tasks such as creator, versifier, interpreter, redactor, re-"makar" and translator. Thus, it is an apt description of both Hugh MacDiarmid and Sorley MacLean, especially regarding their literary collaboration on *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*. Their task of providing a representative selection of Gaelic poetry from the eighteenth century to the twentieth century for inclusion in the anthology involved, through the use of diverse strategies, an attempt to recapture the beauty and strength of the originals in a different linguistic medium. Perhaps the most interesting narrative revealed through the exchange of letters following these introductory chapters is the detailed picture which emerges of MacDiarmid and MacLean's collaborative process. Before addressing the issues which arise around their practice of "anthologizing" and their respective acts of "translating," it is worthwhile to examine what the anthology and the correspondence disclose.

The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry contains the work of seven Gaelic poets: eleven poems rendered in English but unfortunately published without their original Gaelic texts. The selection of works chosen for inclusion in the anthology is comprised of the following: "The Day of Inverlochy" and "To Mackinnon of Strath" by *Iain Lom* (John MacDonald, Bard of Keppoch 1620-1716) (MacDiarmid, ed., *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* 32-35; 97-99); the "*Birlinn Chlann-Raghnail*" by Alexander MacDonald (*Alasdair MacMhaighstir*

Alasdair 1700-1770) (65-85); “*Omnia Vanitas*” and a segment of “The Day of Judgement” by Dugald Buchanan (*Dùghall Bochanan* 1716-1768) (113-14 ; 304-05); “The Praise of Ben Dorain” and “Last Leave of the Hills” by Duncan Bàn Macintyre (*Donnchadh Bàn Mac-an-t-Saoir* 1724-1808) (43-58; 231-33); “Another Song” by *Uilleam Ros* (William Ross 1762-1790) (155-56); “Ireland Weeping” and “Message to the Bard” by William Livingstone (*Uilleam MacDhun-léibhe* 1808-1870) (63-65; 327-31); and “The Path of the Old Spells” by Donald Sinclair (*Dòmhnall Mac Na Ceàrdaich* 1896-1932) (18-19).⁴⁰ Each of the poems in question is listed as a “translation from the Gaelic” in the Index of Authors and Titles of Poems (405-15). As the letters between MacDiarmid and MacLean clearly demonstrate, both writers were arguably co-creators in this refashioning/reworking/re-making of the poems.

In his introduction to the anthology, MacDiarmid acknowledges his collaborator by stating: “I have been able (with the assistance in regard to Gaelic of Mr. Somhairle Maclean . . .), to include translations of some of our principal Scottish Gaelic poems – like Alasdair MacMhaighstir Alasdair’s ‘Birlinn of Clanranald’ and Duncan Ban Macintyre’s ‘Praise of Ben Dorain’” (MacDiarmid, *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* x). Yet the true nature of the poets’ collaboration remains ambiguous in the anthology, for a footnote on the initial page of each of these long eighteenth-century poems rendered into English reads “Translated from the Gaelic by Hugh MacDiarmid” (65; 43). (See

⁴⁰ In *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* MacDiarmid alternates between using the Gaelic names of the poets and the Anglicized forms of their names. Thus, the name provided here after the titles of the poems included in the anthology is the version which MacDiarmid adopted when publishing their work.

Illustration 2.) Until the publication of Alan Bold's *MacDiarmid: Christopher Murray Grieve: A Critical Biography* in 1988, scholars (both native Gaelic speakers and non-Gaelic speakers alike), a *MacDiarmid: Christopher Murray Grieve: A Critical Biography* accepted this assertion at face value, assuming that MacDiarmid had a strong command of the Gaelic language (Glen, *Hugh MacDiarmid* 150; 153). Bold's biography debunked this myth, stating that MacDiarmid worked "from literal line-by-line translations supplied by Sorley MacLean" (330). To his advantage, MacDiarmid had found, in MacLean, "an admirer who was not only intelligent but was also a native Gaelic speaker and an authority on Gaelic poetry" (323). Their letters reveal what a valuable resource MacLean was, the majority of them being exchanged during the period from 1934 to 1941, when they worked together on the anthology, awaited its publication, and subsequently shared their views regarding its critical reception.

Through the letters, MacLean's vital assistance in the provision of translations of poems from Gaelic into English is evident. Although he had just finished his teacher training, taken up his first teaching assignment in Portree, and had yet to publish a collection of his own verse (Hendry, "The Man and His Work" 16-18), MacLean provided MacDiarmid with advice as to which poets best represented the Gaelic tradition and embarked on a project, extending over the course of six years, to produce English translations of major poems by numerous

Illustration 2: The "Praise of Ben Dorain" - "Translated from the Gaelic by Hugh MacDiarmid" (MacDiarmid, ed. *The Golden Treasury* 43).

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XXIII

THE PRAISE OF BEN DORAIN ¹

URLAR

OVER mountains, pride
Of place to Ben Dorain !
I've nowhere espied
A finer to reign.
In her moorbacks wide
Hosts of shy deer bide ;
While light comes pouring
Diamond-wise from her side.

Grassy glades are there
With boughs light-springing,
Where the wild herds fare
(Of these my singing !),
Like lightning flinging
Their heels on the air
Should the wind be bringing
Any hint to beware.

Swift is each spirited one
Clad in a fine fitting
Skin that shines like the sun
Of its glory unwitting.
Like a banner when they run
Of flame-red is their flitting.
A clever deed would be done
A shot in these small bellies getting.

¹ Translated from the Gaelic by Hugh MacDiarmid.

poets, many of whose work ultimately was not included in *The Golden Treasury*.⁴¹ Their correspondence indicates the process which evolved around their collaboration. MacDiarmid would ask about the relative merit of certain poets and follow MacLean's advice as to their suitability for inclusion in the anthology, as demonstrated in a letter to MacLean dated late May/early June 1935:

I am immensely grateful to you for all your help and will be extremely glad if you will post off to me all you have ready right away. I am particularly anxious that the Gaelic side should be thoroughly well represented, but those poems you name – Macintyre's "Ben Dorain", MacDonald's "*Moladh Moraig*", MacCodrum's "Mavis of Clan Donald", and MacDonald's "*Birlinn*" – seem to me an excellent start to that end. I should certainly like the others you mention by MacDonald, Rob Donn, Roderick Morrison, and Ross. And above all I am anxious to have Livingstone⁴² represented by a characteristic piece, also Donald Sinclair. . . .

⁴¹ The correspondence shows that in addition to the poems published in the anthology, MacLean also translated works by Rob Donn, Roderick Morrison, John MacCodrum, Angus Campbell, Calum MacFarlane, and John MacFadyen. See Letter 1, dated 27 July 1934; Letter 2, dated 9 Aug. 1934; Letter 18, dated 13 June 1935; and Letter 52, dated 24 [Aug.] 1938.

⁴² Both CMG and MacLean variously spell the anglicized version of *MacDhùn-léibhe*'s surname as Livingstone or Livingston.

Have you seen Watson's book *Mary of the Songs*?⁴³ Is there anything there we could use? Also is there anything you know of by a really good living writer? I don't want to give the impression if I can help it that good Gaelic poetry is a thing of the past and that we have no one today worthily carrying on the great tradition. I wonder if there is anything we could use in young *Aonghas Caimbeul*⁴⁴ for example?

(Letter 2)

MacLean answered MacDiarmid's questions, advised him as to which poets represented the Gaelic tradition most effectively, and frequently suggested alternatives. In a letter dated 13 June 1935, he responds to MacDiarmid's inquiry regarding the poetry of *Aonghus Caimbeul*:

P.S. I have not met Campbell, but at any rate I am not very sanguine about his stuff. The poem I sent you was the only good one among those you sent me and I really think that a translation of it[,] even in prose[,] might make it seem better than it is. The form of it is really poor and undistinguished and conventional, although the thought is better; the rest of those you sent me have no distinction at all. I am afraid that Campbell is not of much

⁴³ *Gaelic Songs of Mary Macleod*, trans. J. Carmichael Watson (London and Glasgow: Blackie & Son, 1934).

⁴⁴ *Aonghus Caimbeul* / Angus Campbell (1908-49), also known by the nick-name "Am Bocsair" (the boxer), to distinguish him from his elder brother, also named Aonghus Caimbeul but nicknamed "Am Puilean" (no specific meaning in Gaelic). See Black, *An Tuil* 757; 762-63.

consequence, but perhaps he has better stuff than the rest of the poems you sent me. (Letter 18)

If a poem was deemed appropriate, MacLean would subsequently provide what he later referred to as prose translations in English (Appendix A 334). Writing to MacDiarmid in early August, 1934, the method he describes clearly involves the most literal rendering possible: “My translations are line and line and where possible, word by word. I have tried to give the exact meaning of the word; this I am afraid does not convey the colour and associations of the word very well” (Letter 3). As is evident in the letters where he comments at length on MacDiarmid’s translations of the “*Birlinn*” and of “Praise of Ben Dorain”, MacLean also taught MacDiarmid about the history, metrics, forms and idioms of Gaelic poetry through extensive notes and annotations which accompanied each translation (Letter 13, dated 15 April 1935; Letter 18, dated 13 June 1935; Appendix A 334). MacDiarmid’s task was then to versify the translations by MacLean, attempting to capture the metre and word music of the originals using a mixture of Scots and English, with the odd Gaelic expression thrown in for good measure. (See Illustration 3.) Commenting on his rendering of MacDonald’s “*Birlinn*” MacDiarmid states,

I have completed the translation of the “*Birlinn*” and am extremely pleased with it; you may not be so satisfied – but it is at least very close to your translation and at the same time a thoroughly good poem in the English (which were the two considerations I was striving after), while, also, I have been able to give such faint

suggestions of the original structure and the assonance and other technical devices as are practicable in that antipathetic tongue.

(Letter 5, dated 31 August 1934)

Early in their literary collaboration, MacLean advises MacDiarmid to return the newly versified English renditions of the poems prior to publishing them, so that they may be vetted by the Gaelic poet. His request is tactful, indicating that this is in the interest of eliminating his own errors rather than simply revising those of MacDiarmid. MacLean writes, "I should however be glad if you could send me copies of your other translations before publication so that I could correct such mistakes of my own which show in your translation" (Letter 13, dated 15 April [1935]; Letter 46, dated 8 Nov. 1937). In several letters MacDiarmid subsequently assures the younger poet that he will indeed do this (Letter 14, attributed to April 1935; Letter 16, dated late May/early June 1935; Letter 46, dated 8 November 1937). Writing in late May/early June 1935, he states: "I am sending you as promised a proof of the 'Ben Dorain' as it will appear in the next *Modern Scot*. Will you please read it over and return it to me within the next week or so with any corrections or comments that occur to you?" (Letter 16). However, the correspondence between the poets discloses that the only two poems MacDiarmid submitted to MacLean for final approval were the "*Birlinn*" and "Praise of Ben Dorain" (Letter 5, dated 31 August 1934; Letter 18, dated 13 June 1935). The result is that of the eleven poems published in *The Golden Treasury*, all but four – "*Birlinn Chlann-Raghnaill*", "Praise of Ben Dorain",

and the two by Dugald Buchanan, “*Omnia Vanitas*” and the segment from “The Day of Judgement” – appear in prose form, though often the lines of prose are grouped into small, verse-like paragraphs. For example, the first two “verses” of the published version of Duncan Bàn Macintyre’s “Last Leave of the Hills” read as follows:

I was yesterday in Ben Dorain and in her precincts

I was not at a loss. I saw the glens and the moun-

tains that I knew. That was the joyous sight, to

be walking on the mountains, when the sun was

rising and the deer were bellowing.

Joyous was the haughty herd, when they moved

noisily, and the hinds on the fountain-green.

Handsome were the speckled fawns there, the does

and the red bucks, the black cocks and the red.

It was the sweetest music ever heard when their

noise was heard in the morning twilight.

(MacDairmid, ed. *The Golden Treasury* 231)

Unfortunately, the seven unversified renditions of the Gaelic poems included in the anthology neither do justice to the originals, nor fulfill their potential as poetry in English. (See Illustration 4.)

The reasons for MacDiarmid's lack of consistency in vetting the poems with MacLean are unknown and we can only speculate on them. Likely as the submission deadline approached and the galleys finally went to print, MacDiarmid did not have the time to rework all of the poems due to the many literary projects with which he was concurrently involved. In addition to his journalism, these included *Scotland and the Question of a Popular Front Against Fascism and War* (1938), *Direadh I* (1938), *The Islands of Scotland* (1939), "Cornish Heroic Song for Valda Trevlyn" in *Criterion* (1939), and *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* (1940). When MacLean finally received a copy of the anthology, he subsequently expressed his dissatisfaction that MacDiarmid had published his collaborator's rough prose parsing of the majority of the Gaelic poems included in *The Golden Treasury*. In a letter to Douglas Young, MacLean states, "I wish he had not represented Gaelic by the very few very bad prose translations [of mine] which were merely to give him an idea for versifying" (qtd. in Byrne 5). Interestingly, the footnotes accompanying these unpolished versions of the poems in question simply state, "Translated from the Gaelic", rather than specifically attributing translation to MacDiarmid (MacDiarmid, ed. *The Golden Treasury* 18, 32, 63, 97, 155, 231, 327). (See Illustration 5.) Given MacDiarmid's acknowledgement of MacLean's assistance in the introduction to the anthology (x), the onus for the poor quality of the remaining translations

Illustration 4: MacLean's Prose translation of "The Path of Old Spells", by Donald Sinclair, as published by MacDiarmid in *The Golden Treasury*. (MacDiarmid, ed., *The Golden Treasury* 18-19)

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XI

THE PATH OF THE OLD SPELLS

(Translated from the Gaelic)

RICH the peace of the elements tonight on the Land-of-Joy, and the repose of the musics of the calms winds round the Isles of Love, and active is each wing in the stayless service of fate, while the path of the old spells increases its westerling remoteness yet. Rich the body of the hills with the memory of old days. Happy the face of the seas rapt in a dream of the days that are gone, the peace upon it amassing a greater lustre with each hour that goes past. O days of my love, your pride, your nobleness, your love so steadfast! O white days of love with your pure, kindly ways! O times of joy with your laughter, your cheer, your music! Full of knowledge and guidance, O world of grace, why have you gone and left only the memory of the high noon of your glories? Is it a wonder that desire and expectation go over after you, longing for the secrets that filled your lap with esteem? Is it a wonder that the music of the elements sings of the fame of your sway, and that the curved lash of each eye is moist under the darkening of jewels? O days that departed with the time-store of the wisdom of my people, why did your desire light on every ear of most worthy virtue? Is it a wonder that the western firmament is tonight in splendour, and that your abodes in the far-distance are lit with an everlasting light?

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Is it a wonder that the bareness of every floor speaks of the fullness of your story? Is it a wonder that hills have the words of the twilight in their mouths? Is it a wonder that the harp of the songs is silent under the covering of the cloud, and that the song-voice of the bards is without spell, without excellence of art? It is no wonder that the churchyard of my people by the sea is dumb. It is no wonder that the breast of the tombs is in swelling abundance with the worth of what is gone. O world, it is a woe that there will not return one hour that has withered, and that my desire, however lasting, will not light on one message from the sleep of the dead.

Donald Sinclair.

XII

ALAS! POOR QUEEN

SHE was skilled in music and the dance
And the old arts of love
And the court of the poisoned rose
And the perfumed glove,
And gave her beautiful hand
To the pale Dauphin
A triple crown to win—
And she loved little dogs
And parrots
And red-legged partridges
And the golden fishes of the Duc de Guise
And a pigeon with a blue ruff
She had from Monsieur d'Elbœuf.

Illustration 5: "Last Leave of the Hills" by Duncan Bàn MacIntyre "Translated from the Gaelic." (MacDairmid, ed., *The Golden Treasury* 231-33)

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LXXXVI

LAST LEAVE OF THE HILLS

(Cead Deireannach nan Beann)

(Translated from the Gaelic)

I was yesterday in Ben Dorain and in her precincts
I was not at a loss. I saw the glens and the moun-
tains that I knew. That was the joyous sight, to
be walking on the mountains, when the sun was
rising and the deer were bellowing.

Joyous was the haughty herd, when they moved
noisily, and the hinds on the fountain-green.
Handsome were the speckled fawns there, the does
and the red bucks, the black cocks and the red.
It was the sweetest music ever heard when their
noise was heard in the morning twilight.

Keenly would I go to the hunting in the moun-
tain-passes, going out to ascend the rugged places,
and late did I come home. The pure clean water
and the atmosphere that are on the tops of the high
mountains, they helped me to grow, and gave me
health and wholesomeness.

I got a part of my rearing on sheilings that I
knew, with sport and mirth and music, sharing in
the warm kindness of maidens. It were a case
contrary to nature if that lasted there now. It was
necessary to leave them when the time came.

would, by default, fall on MacLean. This was the only issue regarding their collaboration which annoyed MacLean, for clearly he felt that MacDiarmid's lack of editorial consistency compromised the integrity of the published translations. Otherwise, MacLean was more than content to accept acknowledgement of ostensibly having played a secondary role regarding the reworking of the poems, and he continued to serve as MacDiarmid's expert advisor regarding all things pertaining to the Gaelic language and culture.

Having established the process involved in MacDiarmid and MacLean's work together on the anthology, one notes that several critical questions arise regarding the result of their literary collaboration. What does the practice of translating poetry involve in this case? What is the impact of providing only English versions of poems originally written in other languages? What is lost in translation? Is the English rendering in effect the creation of an entirely new poem? What is the impact of such a practice on subsequent writing in the original language? While any attempt to answer such questions warrants a study in its own right, at the very least these concerns raise problematic issues pertaining to the practice of "anthologizing", and to notions of "authorship", "authority", "originality", "representation", and "translation". All of these matters are significant with respect to the relative efficacy of the strategies incorporated by these modern "*makars*" in their reworking of Gaelic poetry into English.

Anthologizing is a selective practice. As Roderick Watson states in his introduction to *The Poetry of Scotland: Gaelic, Scots and English*:

We cannot escape our human tendency to see or to seek patterns in the world around us, and it is not possible to exercise choice without invoking some kind of agenda. The only agenda-free anthology of Scottish poetry would be a project worthy of Borges's notion of the universal library, for it would contain every poem ever written in Scotland, or by a Scot. Every selection entails omission, and each omission will have a reader to plead its case. And such acts of choice, revaluation and downright disagreement are to be welcomed, for they are what keeps us and our culture alive. But the question must still be asked as to whose choice is being exercised, and to what end? In other words, what are anthologies for? (xxxi)

MacDiarmid's response to such a question is articulated in his introduction to *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*: "The difference – or one of the main differences between this anthology and all previous anthologies of Scottish poetry – is that some little effort has been made to present an 'all-in view' of Scottish poetry and in particular to give some little representation to its Gaelic and Latin elements" (x). This desire to represent "a well-established tradition of Scottish poetry in all its constituent tongues" is, however, complicated by the fact that all of the poems in the anthology are given in English, without the original versions of their texts (xiii). Whether this was the result of MacDiarmid's editorial choices, or merely a matter of wartime economic expediency on the part of the publisher, the ramifications are the same: the target audience is, first and

foremost, an English-speaking readership, and English renderings of poems originally written in other languages thereby become the privileged versions of these works to which the anthology's readership is exposed.

Nonetheless, it may be argued that MacDiarmid compensated for his own limitations by using as assistant translators Scottish scholars who possessed the linguistic knowledge he lacked: MacLean, a native speaker of Gaelic, for the original Gaelic texts, and George Elder Davie, a classics expert, "in regard to the Latin" (MacDiarmid, Introduction to *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* x).⁴⁵ Certainly, MacDiarmid's cultural nationalism and his desire to illustrate that the Scottish poetic tradition was something disparate from that of England were significant aspects of his aesthetic agenda in compiling *The Golden Treasury*, as they influenced his interest in including the work of specific poets like William Livingston. Writing to MacLean on 23 January 1935, MacDiarmid states:

I'll send you MSS of some of Campbell's and of Sinclair's [poetry] in a day or two; in the meantime I am sending Livingston's poems, and will be very glad indeed if you can let me have as soon as possible translations of a couple of typical poems of his (or of good passages from his longer poems) – particularly poems or passages which are markedly political and bring out to the full the quality of his nationalism and his Anglophobia. (Letter 8)

⁴⁵ Davie, a classics scholar and philosopher, was one of two undergraduate friends from Edinburgh University who introduced MacLean to MacDiarmid in 1934. See footnote 13.

Yet despite MacDiarmid's cultural aims, in many ways, the anthology as published is at cross-purposes with the goals expressed in his introduction to the work. In the absence of simply providing, untranslated, the original Gaelic or Latin texts, regardless of the implications this might have had for many readers, its lack of bilingual, *en-face* versions of the poems translated from Gaelic and Latin raises serious questions regarding the issue of "representation" and the practice of "translation".

This is not to suggest that MacDiarmid was unaware of the complexities related to translation. He had after all more than a little experience as a translator. As Duncan Glen points out, "In 1930 an anonymous translation of the novel *The Handmaid of the Lord* by Ramon Maria de Tenreiro appeared and is now known to have been translated by MacDiarmid" (*Hugh MacDiarmid* 99). Writing to MacLean in April 1935, MacDiarmid discusses the potential of their continued collaboration to produce a bilingual Scottish Gaelic Anthology:

The last [translations] you sent are all good and though they are in some ways hard nuts to crack so far as rendering them into English is concerned I think I'll manage most of them as soon as I can apply an undivided mind to the task. But do please send me any more you can, as soon as possible. If I can't manage them – or all of them – for [*The Golden Treasury*], at least they'll come in for other purposes. If we can keep going at it we might before the end of July or August accumulate a sufficient number of representative poems to put together a Scottish Gaelic Anthology – printing the

Gaelic texts and the verse translations on opposite pages, and equipping the volume with an introductory essay and adequate notes. I think I could find a publisher without difficulty willing to issue that next Spring, which would give us time to do the job thoroughly and have each of the essential poets represented by at least one piece. (Letter 14)

Sadly, due to MacDiarmid's illness later that autumn following MacLean's visit with him on Whalsay in August 1935, the project he envisioned never came to fruition (Bold, *Hugh MacDiarmid: Christopher Murray Grieve: A Critical Biography* 332-36). Some years later, writing on May 13th, 1940 regarding a proposed selection of six Scottish poets to be published by the Hogarth Press, MacDiarmid acknowledges the inadequacy of English translations in terms of evoking the aural quality, power and creative innovation of MacLean's Gaelic poetry, even if MacLean, himself, is to be the translator. MacDiarmid writes,

For this purpose unfortunately Gaelic originals cannot be given; but I would be very glad indeed if you could stretch a point on this occasion and let me represent you by the English of "*Ban-ghaidheal*", and if you could send me similar Englishings of two or more of what you consider your best shorter poems (or short passages that can stand alone from your long poem).⁴⁶ I will make

⁴⁶ Here CMG is referring to MacLean's shorter lyrics, as they appeared in *Seventeen Poems for Sixpence, in Gaelic Scots and English* and to his long poem, "The Cuillin", which was never completed. See *Somhairle Mac Ghill-*

the necessary explanation regarding the injustice this does to your work – and to Hay's.⁴⁷ (Letter 57)

MacLean's response to MacDiarmid acknowledges what is lost in translation:

Whatever is deficient in my verse it has in Gaelic a rhythm and auditory sensuousness that pleases myself. This, of course, cannot be translated. I do not strive after imagery. Usually a lyric comes to me quite spontaneously as whole and then I don't blot a line. . . . I shall not be unduly perturbed if you do not accept any of my pieces for [Six Poets' Selections]. If you think any part of "The Cuillin" will do you can use it provided you tell me beforehand as a good deal of it is libelous and I can't afford a libel action.

(Letter 58, dated 25 May 1940)

Unfortunately, the Six Poets' Selections was another literary project which was never completed.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, clearly the nature of the tasks involved in "translation" differed for MacDiarmid and MacLean. In MacDiarmid's case, he

Ethain and Robert Garioch, *Seventeen Poems for Sixpence, in Gaelic Scots and English* (Edinburgh: The Chalmers Press, 1940).

⁴⁷ A Gaelic poet and friend of MacLean whose work was also to be represented in the Six Poets' Selections. See Byrne 1-9. See also Letter 57, dated 13 May 1940 as well as footnote 27.

⁴⁸ In a postscript to CMG's letter to MacLean dated 3 Dec. 1940 he states: "Methuens still have the Six Poets Selections under consideration. No decision yet" (Letter 61). Ultimately this work was not published by the Hogarth Press or by Methuen. Certainly, it is not mentioned in Alan Bold's bibliography of works written, compiled, or edited by MacDiarmid. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 466-69.

was concerned with prosody and semantics, refashioning the English prose texts provided by MacLean in an attempt to replicate the rhythm and rhyme schemes of the originals. As indicated in his letter to MacLean of 31 Aug. 1934, his aim was to produce translations which closely approximated MacLean's prose versions yet were "thoroughly good poem[s] in the English" (Letter 5). Writing to MacLean for assistance in translating unidentified material for the scholar Sir Arthur Geddes, MacDiarmid asks that MacLean "1/ 'vet' the translations 2/ give [him] the exact notation for the poems – i.e. metres etc. 3/ give [him] a poetical notation which would be an effective transposition of the tunes" (Letter 34, dated 30 May 1936). Ultimately, their collaborative process compels us to question what the practice of "translating" actually entails. As Roderick Watson observes, "'Translation' is a contentious process, and each generation will have different priorities in what it understands the translator's proper task to be" (*The Poetry of Scotland* xxxvi).

In *Modern Scottish Poetry* Christopher Whyte astutely points out "when we read language as poetry, words 'mean' in a different way" (27). Thus, he asserts, "language read as poetry . . . upsets, or redresses, the balance of language in 'ordinary use', in every-day conversation or for the exchange of information . . ." (24). In other words, the use of poetic diction and form is, in and of itself, a type of translation. Taken in this sense, MacDiarmid's versifications of MacLean's translations, his "Englising" of the two longest Gaelic poems in the anthology (Letter 57, dated 13 May 1940), entitle him to claim the status of translator, for he captures the rhythms and the word music inherent in Gaelic poetry, what

MacLean repeatedly refers to as the “sensuous quality” of the originals (Letter 13, dated 15 Apr. 1935). Discussing MacDiarmid’s translation of the “*Birlinn Chlann-Raghnaill*” in a letter dated 15 April 1935, MacLean states:

Subsequent readings and close comparison with the original have fully confirmed my first impression of your translation of “The *Birlinn*.” . . . I have not lost my initial surprise at the wonderfully good translation you have done. You have kept remarkably close to the original in actual meaning, and I admit that considering the exceedingly technical nature of much of the poem, . . . the task was a very difficult one. I know no verse translation of a Gaelic poem so close to the original in actual meaning as yours and certainly yours has other merits which make comparison with it of any other verse translation of a Scottish Gaelic poem that I know quite impertinent. . . . It preserves the movement, rhythm, resonance, colour and sensuous quality of the original wonderfully. The spirit, rhythm, sensuous quality, the whole quality of MacDonald is splendidly attained (Letter 13)

Duncan Bàn Macintyre’s “Praise of Ben Dorain”, however, proved to be a greater challenge. In May 1935 MacLean commented, “I am looking forward very much to see the ‘Ben Dorain’ translation; it must have been an exceedingly difficult task as the very syntax of the thing is so remote from anything in English; indeed, it is difficult enough to put into Gaelic prose” (Letter 15, dated 2 May 1935).

MacDiarmid later conceded that “translating” “‘Ben Dorain’ [was] a very very

much more difficult proposition" (Letter 5, dated 31 August 1934), and stated "I am not quite so satisfied with certain bits of my rendering yet, tho' on the whole I think it is a good version" (Letter 8, dated 23 January 1935). In the end, MacLean felt that MacDiarmid was less successful in capturing the original qualities of Macintyre's poem than he had been in reworking the "*Birlinn*" by MacDonald. Nonetheless, his criticism was positive:

I think the translation wonderfully good, although not in the whole so good as that of the "*Birlinn*". You have got the general spirit of the thing wonderfully well and you have brought out very well the internal description of physical things in which "Ben Dorain" is so remarkable. What makes the translation not so good as that of the "*Birlinn*", I think, is the fact that it is I suppose quite impossible to suggest the rhythm and metre of "Ben Dorain" as well as you suggested that of the "*Birlinn*".

(Letter 18, dated 13 June 1935)

For his part, MacLean's role as translator involved producing annotated versions of the Gaelic poems in English prose, thereby altering both the linguistic medium and the genre of the material he worked with. He summarized this process in an interview with Irish poet Michael Davitt for the literary journal *Innti* in 1986: "[MacDiarmid] asked me to make literal translations of "Ben Dorain" by Duncan Bàn Macintyre and "*Moladh Móraig* / In Praise of Morag" and "The *Birlinn*" by Alasdair [Mac Mhaighstire Alasdair, a Jacobite poet of the 18th

century], along with extensive notes on the metre and the colour of the words, and so on” (Appendix A 334). However, as previously discussed, MacLean’s understanding was also that he would vet MacDiarmid’s work prior to its publication. Thus, as a native speaker of the language and a tradition-bearer in his own right, MacLean could assess the degree to which MacDiarmid’s task in making something “new” of the poems in question compromised the integrity of the original texts. In fact, the *Times Literary Supplement* of 4 January 1936 criticized some of MacDiarmid’s prefatory comments on Gaelic metres for the “*Birlinn Chlann-Raghnaill*” as initially published in *The Modern Scot* in early 1935 (Bold, *Hugh MacDiarmid* 330).⁴⁹ The anonymous reviewer stated,

The space that is given to the metres would have been much better used to describe the rigging and appearance of the galley that is the subject of the poem, since this type of vessel is not likely to be familiar to the modern reader any more than the classical Gaelic metres are to Mr. MacDiarmid. (Rev. of *The Birlinn* 17)

In response, the poet turned to MacLean to provide a rebuttal. MacLean replied:

With regard to the reviewer’s remarks he is in the same box as the rest of the Gaelic scholars. As I have pointed out, the treatment of the Gaelic metrical question, especially of stress in syllabic poetry, is hopelessly inadequate and especially so in the case of poetry of the transition period such as MacDonald’s is. Pages 1-4 of my

⁴⁹ For the full text of the *TLS* review, see Appendix B.

remarks are indisputable I think. . . . I [believe] that I have covered your retreat in page 5 quite well. You can, of course, use those remarks of mine on the reviewer's letter in any way you choose. . . . I think you can make out of [them] a pretty imposing reply. I can't think who your reviewer is. Its piddling pedantry is quite typical of Gaelic scholarship on the whole. Of course if he has been fair in other respects you can modify my words esp. any abuse as you like, but take care that you get everything important I said in. I am prepared to argue my main contentions further with any man on earth.

(Letter 9, dated 8 Feb. 1935)

Despite MacLean's authority regarding his extensive knowledge of the Gaelic tradition and his ability to speak to the quality of MacDiarmid's translations, the implications of this practice of "authorization" are also problematic. In vetting, amending, and validating MacDiarmid's translations, MacLean was, in many ways, lending the same authority to the English versions of the poems as would arise through self-translation. In "Finding the Poem - Modern Gaelic Verse and the Contact Zone", a paper which explores the implications of various approaches to the translation of Gaelic poetry, Corinna Krause asks,

What then is the relationship between the two language versions? Considering that with contemporary Gaelic poetry the English "doppelganger", as it is referred to by Wilson McLeod . . . , does not only demand physical space in poetry collections but moreover

asserts its presence during the very process of creative writing, we might even want to ask “Where do we find the poem?” (2)

Krause observes that even with “English self-translations of Gaelic authors” (2), there are instances of what she refers to as “translation loss”, particularly in terms of a lack of correspondence with the source text due to such features as “explication, generalization, or compensation which are a common occurrence in any translation process” (2-3). Ultimately, the original text is also compromised through a diminution of the rich connotative references of original idiom, what she describes as “the vast semantic range” of the original language (6), and through lapses in “coherence” and “poetic tension” (3-4).

This is precisely the case with MacDiarmid’s reworking of “Praise of Ben Dorain”, for ultimately he was unable to capture both cadence and connotation, the structural and associative nuances of the poem’s metre which are based on and derived from the *Píobrach* in the original (MacLean qtd. in Appendix A 334). The result is a “foreignisation” which fails to demonstrate “the poetic wealth of the original” (Krause 4). Krause elaborates on the dangers of translation: “[W]ith MacLean’s poetry we witness the tendency amongst readers and critics to take the [authorized or] self-translated text as definite point of interpretation. . . . [However,] [d]ependency on English as conclusive point of reference does not merely occupy the word level but also enters the very sphere of imagery” (5). Additional complications arise, for she argues that bilingual publications can present as many difficulties as ones which are monolingual but published in a language differing from that of the original text, “since any potential meaning as it

lingers in the Gaelic text . . . is positively invited to unfold within the realm of English due to the authoritative nature of the [authorized or] self-translated text and the illusion of one-to-one equivalence created by the bilingual *en-face* edition” (6). Krause further explains, “Given that languages differ greatly in their sonic make up and that the author/translator makes choices according to semantic as much as sound qualities of every word, we have to acknowledge that here we are in the presence of difference rather than equivalence between the two language versions” (7). Thus, even bilingual publications are, in many ways, deficient, for “[t]he combination of self-translation and bilingual *en-face* edition . . . provides a highly rigid format for Gaelic as literature and language, leaving little space for flexibility for the original with the interpretative engagement on the reader’s part occurring through English rather than Gaelic” (10). What is needed, Krause concludes, are “translation and publication practices which resist the illusion of one-to-one equivalence, such as non-translation, collaborative translation with clear reference to the translation process or indeed multiple translation” (11). Just such an approach is proposed by MacDiarmid in a letter dated 4 December 1962, where he invites MacLean to participate in a collaborative translation project initiated by Irish poet Pearse Hutchinson⁵⁰ through providing a Gaelic translation as one of “twelve or so versions [of the poem “*Assaig de Càntic*”] by Catalan poet Salvador Espriu (Letter 70).⁵¹

⁵⁰ Pearse Hutchinson (*b.* 1927), Irish poet, broadcaster, and translator. See “Pearsa Hutchinson”, *The Concise Oxford Companion to Irish Literature*.

⁵¹ “Salvador Espriu, *Obra Poetica* (Barcelona: S Alberti, 1963).” See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 378.

MacDiarmid states, “I hope you will make a Scottish Gaelic rendering. Short and lucid tho’ the poem is, translating from a language one doesn’t know is a very chancy and questionable business, but as a help I enclose three other versions . . .” (Letter 70, dated 4 Dec. 1962).

Interestingly, MacLean’s practice in terms of the translation of his own poetry differed from the process he used with MacDiarmid for *The Golden Treasury. Seventeen Poems for Sixpence, in Gaelic Scots and English*, the first collection of his work jointly published with that of the poet Robert Garioch in 1940, the same year in which *The Golden Treasury* appeared, features seven of MacLean’s poems printed only in Gaelic. These include “*Tri Slighean*”, “*An Cuilthion*”, “*Dan do Eimhir, xxix*”, “*Ant-Eilean*”, “*Dain do Eimhir, iv*”, “*Dain do Eimhir, xiv*”, and “*A’Chorra-ghrithreach*” (MacGhill-Eathain and Garioch 8, 9, 15, 16, 22, 23, 26). Garioch provided a translation in Scots of MacLean’s eighth poem, “*Dain do Eimhir, iii*”, which appears on the right-hand page opposite the original (24, 25). In addition to allowing another poet to translate his work, MacLean privileged the Gaelic originals of his poems in the early self-translations of his work. His correspondence with the poet Douglas Young, who later published MacLean’s *Dàin Do Eimhir agus Dàin Eile* in 1943,⁵² reveals the approach he adopted with self-translation. Through reading their letters, Krause discovered that MacLean “crafted his translations as highly literal reflections of his original poetry and never as poetry in its own right, with the original poems of paramount importance and lyrical authority” (4). Thus he managed to

⁵² See footnote 25.

circumvent, in part, what Christopher Whyte refers to as “a kind of slippage [in bilingual translations] by which it becomes unclear which texts are the focus of discussion, the Gaelic originals or the author’s versions” (Introduction to *Dàin do Eimhir* / Poems to Eimhir 39). Another difference Whyte reveals with MacLean’s collection, *Dàin Do Eimhir agus Dàin Eile*, is that “the English versions in the 1943 volume were a collaborative effort [on the part of Douglas Young, John MacKechnie,⁵³ and W.D. MacColl],⁵⁴ even if the principal contribution was MacLean’s” (38). Perhaps the greatest challenge facing MacLean in terms of any translation of his work into English is best articulated by Whyte, whose innovative 2002 edition of MacLean’s *Dàin do Eimhir*, though a bilingual edition, privileges the Gaelic texts of the poems by inverting the traditional practice of such publications through printing the original versions on the recto or right hand pages, with the English versions on the verso or left hand side. He states:

Poetic translation of any kind involves selection among a range of possible resonances and at least a degree of interpretation. When it is the poet himself who does this, the danger is that he may be held to have produced the definitive interpretation of his text, whereas in fact the choice of a word or shade of meaning may well have been a question of elegance and

⁵³ John MacKechnie (1897-1977), Glasgow Minister and Reader in Celtic at the University of Aberdeen. Author of *Catalogue of Gaelic Manuscripts* published by G.K. Hall in 1973. See Whyte, *Dàin do Eimhir* 171.

⁵⁴ W.D. “Dugald” MacColl (no dates available), Gaelic revivalist and friend of both CMG and MacLean. See Whyte, *Dàin do Eimhir* 196-97.

naturalness of expression in the target language, and therefore irrelevant to the original poem.

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And the idea that the poet can offer an authoritative rendering, a sanctioned and therefore exclusive interpretation of the original, is inimical to the very notion of translation, which rests on multifariousness and the possibility, indeed the necessity of constant repetition, re-translation.

(Introduction to *Dàin do Eimhir* / Poems to Eimhir 40-41)

Given that *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* appeared as a monolingual edition when it was published by Macmillan of London in 1940, the complex issues which arise through the practice of “translation” might explain, at least in part, the far more favourable critical reception the anthology received from the English press than in the Scottish papers. As Alan Bold observes in his biography of MacDiarmid, the *Times Literary Supplement* of 15 February 1941 “noted [his] combative introduction [in responding to Edwin Muir’s attack on the literary use of Scots in *Scott and Scotland*]” (*MacDiarmid* 462, note 78).⁵⁵

⁵⁵ In June of 1936, *The Outlook*, of which James Whyte was then editor, published an extract of Edwin Muir’s book *Scott and Scotland*. Although Muir’s work was supposedly a discussion of Scottish writer Sir Walter Scott, in effect it “amounted to an attack on Scots as a literary language.” Henceforth, MacDiarmid perceived both Whyte and Muir as adversaries, believing that they had used their influence to prevent Routledge’s publication of CMG’s book *Red Scotland*. Ultimately, the latter was never published. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 340-42.

However, it also “praised the scope of the anthology and the quality of the Latin and Gaelic translations; and concluded that ‘this new Golden Treasury is a very heartening, as well as a very pleasing volume’” (*TLS* qtd. in Bold, *MacDiarmid* 462, note 78). In a letter to MacLean dated 2 April 1941, MacDiarmid writes:

As to the *Golden Treasury* I enclose a copy of the *Times Lit. Supp.* review in case you haven’t seen it, because it is the best the volume has evoked and because as you will see it pays special attention to the Gaelic translations. In contrast to this generous recognition of and welcome for the differences of the Scottish tradition and the possibilities of Scots and Gaelic in the English papers, the Scottish papers’ reviews were not only very short and quite inadequate, failing to recognise the importance of the book, quite hostile to any such developments, and in most cases went out of their way to condemn me personally while taking good care not to join issue in any genuine debate on the contentions I put forward.

(Letter 63)

By this time, MacLean had enlisted with the British Army and was stationed with the Signals Corp in Catterick Camp, Yorkshire, prior to embarkation for combat in the North African desert (Hendry, “The Man and His Work” 29). Responding to MacDiarmid on 15 June 1941, MacLean conceded “[t]hat the *Times Lit* review of *The Golden Treasury* was pretty good in many ways. I did not see any references in the Scottish Press but of course I never see any of the Scottish

papers” (Letter 64). Ultimately, he had a single cavil with the anthology: “With it I have one quarrel[:] namely that you did not include nearly enough of yourself and perhaps of Souter”⁵⁶ (Letter 62, dated 8 March 1941).

As their correspondence reveals, MacDiarmid and MacLean’s collaboration on *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* not only served to authenticate MacDiarmid’s stance as a “people’s poet” well versed in Scottish poetry in each of its linguistic mediums (Glen, *Hugh MacDiarmid* 237), it afforded both the opportunity to explore the difficulties of translating verse written in one language to another. Thus, they were able to assess, first-hand, the impact and implications of an “English-only” edition of Scottish poetry which aspired to be a comprehensive collection. The result was a reassessment of their practices as modern *makars* in terms of other literary projects involving “translation”.

⁵⁶ William Soutar (1898-1943), Scottish poet, socialist, and nationalist. See Watson, *The Poetry of Scotland* 582.

Chapter 4 – “Epistolary Discourse and the Legacy of the Letters”

“My Ambition”

Ah, this is my ambition indeed:

To rise up among all the insipid, unsalted, rabbity, endlessly

hopping people

And sing a great song of our *Alba bheadarrach*⁵⁷

-- An exuberant, fustigating, truculent, polysyllabic

Generous, eccentric, and incomparably learned song

And so bring fresh laurels to deck the brows

Of *Alba bheadarrach* is *Alba-nuadhaichte*, *ath-leasaichte*, is

ath-bheothaichte.⁵⁸

(MacDiarmid, “My Ambition” in *The Revolutionary Art of the*

Future: Rediscovered Poems 15)

⁵⁷ *Alba bheadarrach*: Scottish Gaelic for “beloved Scotland.”

⁵⁸ In *The Revolutionary Art of the Future: Rediscovered Poems*, the editors provide the following translations for the Gaelic words in MacDiarmid’s poem: “*is*: Scottish Gaelic for ‘and’; *ath-nuadhaichte*: Scottish Gaelic for ‘newborn’; *ath-leasaichte*: Scottish Gaelic for ‘newly improved’; *ath-bheothaichte*: Scottish Gaelic for ‘newly come to life.’ See MacDiarmid, *The Revolutionary Art of the Future: Rediscovered Poems*, ed. John Manson, Dorian Grieve, and Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 2003) 15. However, Ann Dooley observes that “the force of the prefix ‘*ath*’ is rather that of English ‘re’ than ‘newly’”. She also asks, “Is there an ‘*ath*’ missing from *Alba-nuadhaichte*? If not, then I suggest “Alba made new” as an appropriate translation, given that we are dealing in past participial adjectives here”. See Ann Dooley, “Report.”

Although Hugh MacDiarmid wrote “My Ambition” on 25 October 1938 at the height of his collaboration on *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* with Sorley MacLean (*The Revolutionary Art* 77), it remained undiscovered for over six decades, buried in the repository of his papers among some three hundred other unpublished poems written throughout his lifetime. Fortunately, Scottish scholar John Manson happened upon them in the archives of the National Library of Scotland in 2001 (xiv-xv), and this expression of MacDiarmid’s cultural aims was among the many works to which the reading public were finally granted published access in 2003. While the poem’s brevity is uncharacteristic of much of what MacDiarmid was writing by the 1930’s, “My Ambition” succinctly summarizes both the poet’s aesthetic vision and the leading role he envisaged himself playing as catalyst to Scotland’s cultural and political renaissance. Of note is MacDiarmid’s use of Gaelic in the poem, a clear signifier of the confidence in his familiarity with Scotland’s Gaelic tradition that had arisen through his work with MacLean. Arguably, MacLean was no less adept at “bring[ing] fresh laurels to deck the brows / Of *Alba bheadarrach is Alba-nuadhaichte*” through his revitalization of modern Gaelic literature (15). As their correspondence demonstrates, in many ways their hopes for Scotland’s cultural and political rebirth were similar. In effect, MacDiarmid’s and MacLean’s respective bodies of work bear witness to the power of words, the ability of discourse to bring the idealized to life, to concretize the imaginary with far-reaching implications for their cultures and their nation. Both writers were

essayists, poets, literary critics, and prolific correspondents, though the bulk of MacLean's writing is less extensive than that of MacDiarmid, given that the former devoted most of his time to making a living as a school teacher and principal, and to advocating for changes to the Scottish Education Act that would improve accessibility to and accreditation for the study of Gaelic, while the latter was a full-time writer. What, then, do the letters which follow add to existing critical commentary on the profound influence of both poets on Scottish arts and letters in the twentieth century?

MacDiarmid and MacLean's correspondence effectively provides us with a microcosm of the Scottish nation in which each poet explores both individual and shared perspectives on *Alba-nuadhaichte*, the newborn Scotland to which "My Ambition" alludes. Yet in addition to assessing the content of the letters themselves, it is worthwhile to examine the impact of these writers' use of the epistolary form, for as Janet Gurkin Altman points out, "epistolary writing, as distinguished from simple first-person writing [such as memoir, diary, autobiography, and rhetoric], refracts events through not one but two prisms – that of reader as well as that of writer" (91). This is significant in that MacDiarmid and MacLean's correspondence results in a discursive space which is characterized by its pluralistic hybridity. In this sense, their friendship is one which allows for the expression of different perspectives in the service of a common goal: the cultural and political rebirth of their nation. This republic of letters, although a democratically contested space, is one which harnesses the positive dynamic of difference of opinion rather than simply being mired in

ideological antagonism. In this instance, dissent does not result in fracture, in part because of the benign reciprocity which is inherent in their epistolary exchange, a discursive transaction Altman attributes to the “epistolary pact – the call for response from a specific reader within the correspondent’s world” (89). There is a deep bond between the writers which weathers differing attitudes to important issues such as MacDiarmid’s entrenched Anglophobia, his changing perspective on Fascism, his views on Scotland’s role in World War II, and his pontification, at times, on behalf of the Gaelic tradition. Unlike MacDiarmid’s friendship with Edwin Muir which could not survive their disagreements over the literary use of Scots, a conflict ignited through Muir’s inflammatory remarks in *Scott and Scotland: The Predicament of the Scottish Writer*, the relationship between MacDiarmid and MacLean endured for half a century despite MacLean’s eventual disillusionment and skepticism regarding the integrity and political efficacy of Stalinist Communism during and after the Second World War.

In her seminal study, *Epistolarity: Approaches to a Form*, Janet Gurkin Altman effectively argues that rather than simply being a narrative device which was widely used in eighteenth-century novels to convey the “illusion of reality and authenticity . . . in response to . . . the public’s distrust of fiction” (6), epistolarity constitutes a genre in its own right due to the “literary structures particular to the letter or the letter form” (4; 10). Among the characteristics Altman attributes to epistolary discourse are two significant literary presences: the subjective agency of the first-person writer and that of the second-person addressee, who also takes an active role as agent in the narrative which evolves through their

exchange of letters. Thus, there is reciprocity, a “complicity of the *I* and *you*” which makes of the letter a reversible medium in which both the act of writing and the acts of reading, decoding, and responding are integral parts of the dialogical exchange (120). Altman further identifies a degree of “temporal polyvalence” in which the present tense serves as a central anchor for events (117-18):

Epistolary discourse is a discourse marked by hiatuses of all sorts: time lags between event and recording, between message transmission and reception; spatial separation between writer and addressee; blank spaces and lacunae in the manuscript. Yet it is also a language of gap closing, of writing to the moment, of speaking to the addressee as if he [*sic*] were present. (140)

Clearly, such insights are valid not only in terms of the epistolary novel; they are equally applicable to the real-life exchange of correspondence. For our purposes, the result is a creative space shaped and influenced by both writers, one which enables, among other things, the exploration of their respective stances regarding Scottish literature.

In most instances when a writer’s letters are published, the reading public are privy to only one side of the epistolary exchange. That is not the case here. The compilation of correspondence which follows these introductory chapters is exceptional in that by featuring both MacDiarmid’s and MacLean’s discursive contributions, it points to the significance of both what is written and what is read. The result is, in effect, more than just a supplement to existing autobiographical

and biographical writings by and about each poet. What emerges is a co-authored form of epistolary narrative which, due to the fragmentary nature of such an exchange, demands the reader's active engagement with the text, inviting a deconstructive approach to its interpretation by revealing as much through what the letters elide as through what they disclose about MacDiarmid and MacLean's friendship. In effect, the ensuing discourse becomes a function of the anticipated reader, for in addition to articulating an awareness of the recipient's potential response, one which may result in a more considered formulation of content than the immediacy of the speaker's actual presence might allow, the roles of writer and reader are interchangeable. Furthermore, although "[d]iscontinuity is built into the very blank space that makes of each letter a footprint rather than a path" (Altman 169), a "compensatory continuity" results from the structural intervention of the external editor who assembles both sides of the exchange, thereby becoming yet another author in the production of meaning arising from MacDiarmid and MacLean's correspondence (169). Thus, due to the inherent demand for reader response both within the epistolary exchange and from the external reader/reading public, the text achieves a degree of autonomy, continually evolving through the accretion of authorship which the narrative agency of each successive readership entails. Finally, in an era when email exchange has largely superseded the "tangible, documentary nature of the [traditional] letter" as a means of communication between sender and recipient (54), we most obviously benefit from the letters "as a privileged physical trace of temporal experience" (102), the documentation of the historical

narrative of these writers' literary collaboration. How then, do form and function shape the content of this interesting exchange?

Most immediately, the correspondence reveals yet another facet of each writer's skill as a translator. In effect, the letters serve as both the means and the medium of translation, for in addition to their discussions regarding the selection and translation of a range of Gaelic poetry for inclusion in *The Golden Treasury*, MacDiarmid and MacLean metonymically mediate their physical separation by translating absence into presence. Altman describes this epistolary intercession as follows:

As an instrument of communication between sender and receiver, the letter straddles the gulf between presence and absence; the two persons who "meet" through the letter are neither totally separated nor totally united. The letter lies halfway between the possibility of total communication and the risk of no communication at all. (43)

Thus, the tension which arises through the letter's attempt "to replace the spoken word or physical presence" bears a remarkable resemblance to that which characterizes the shift from original speech/text to redaction or translation (14). Ultimately, "Epistolary language, which is the language of absence, makes present by make-believe" (140). This illusory quality, "[the use of] language to present a seemingly unmediated transcription of internal and external reality" (194), also serves a metaphoric function in that the correspondence between

MacDiarmid and MacLean becomes a microcosm of their idealized versions of the Scottish nation, a discursive space which offers the opportunity for each writer to explore what it is to be a Scottish poet. What, then, can be said of the world we are privileged to enter?

Through the letters, a striated, multi-layered account emerges. While establishing the parameters of MacDiarmid and MacLean's friendship, the correspondence results in the intersection of the domestic and the mundane, the artistic and cultural, and, of course, the ideological and political. This multivalency arises from the letter's synonymous functions "as linguistic phenomenon, as a real life form, as an instrument of [amicable] or philosophical communication" (5). In effect, MacDiarmid and MacLean's letters clearly indicate the older poet's influence "by association" on the modernization of Gaelic literature. While much critical assessment of MacDiarmid's work has focused on his revitalization of Scots as a literary language and on his success in "taking Scotland back into the mainstream of European literature" (Glen, *Hugh MacDiarmid* 174), far less has been said about his connection to the Gaelic literary revival, many of whose writers, like Sorley MacLean and George Campbell Hay, were among the poets who came to be viewed as "the second wave" of the modern Scottish Renaissance in the 1940's (Scott 15). MacDiarmid expressed a fascination with Scotland's Gaelic language and culture throughout his career, the result being a corpus of roughly some fifty articles, essays, and poems related to the Gaelic tradition. Equally as well read in terms of critical studies of Irish language and literature, he recognized the regenerative creative

impulse that the Gaelic traditions of Ireland and Scotland could stimulate in their respective countries. Although at times his advocacy exasperated even native Gaels like MacLean (Byrne 3), MacDiarmid's literary legacy in this sphere may perhaps best be described as "influence by association", largely comprising his mentorship of young Gaelic writers. The letters between MacDiarmid and MacLean reveal that indirectly, through his validation of and support for the diverse talents of MacLean and other young poets like Hay and Douglas Young, MacDiarmid also had an effect on the development of modern Scottish Gaelic poetry.

The majority of MacDiarmid and MacLean's correspondence dates from the years 1934 to 1942, the period of their literary collaboration on *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*, through to MacDiarmid's conscription to work in a Glasgow munitions factory and MacLean's mobilization in the Armoured Division Signals Corps of the British Army. For the most part, these letters initially portray a private domesticity, with both writers working in relative isolation from such metropolitan centres as Edinburgh and London: MacDiarmid writing first from Whalsay and then from Glasgow; and MacLean from Raasay, Skye, Mull, and later from the Catterick Camp in Yorkshire and the North African desert. As Scott Lyall points out in *Hugh MacDiarmid's Poetry and Politics of Place: Imagining a Scottish Republic*, this writing from the margins is significant, for it results in a comprehensive and cosmopolitan vision of Scotland's cultural and political potential:

It is by living and working in these peripheral places that MacDiarmid developed a political strategy through which to resist the symbiotic assault of anglicisation and capitalism, and so suggest a radically nationalist Scotland.

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His vision of the moral bankruptcy of metropolitan centres, compounded by Edinburgh's "terrible inability to speak out" as a world capital, doesn't lessen the impact of the internationalism central to the poet's political image of Scotland. . . . If Scotland is to carry on contemporaneously shaping the world in the same impressive measure as in the past, the nation must . . . find a different political idea, a tradition of radical Scottish Republicanism that combines the universalism of the Enlightenment with a liberating refusal to hush a distinctly local voice.

(MacDiarmid qtd. in Lyall 12-13)

Through their letters, we are privy to the demands of MacDiarmid's daunting work load as he attempts to provide for his family while simultaneously coping with the rigours of daily living, and to MacLean's challenges as a resident teacher/supervisor at the Elgin Hostel on Skye, where male pupils from outlying areas live during the school term. Later, during his tenure in Tobermory on the island of Mull, MacLean writes of his social isolation and longs for the intellectual companionship he enjoyed with Jock Stewart and other socialist friends in

Portree on Skye (Letter 50, dated 28 April 1938). Both men speak of their respective health, the obstacles to their work, and the claims of family relationships. Early on in their correspondence, their letters contain polite enquiries/overtures regarding each other's well being and the weather; the content of their discussions only moves beyond the mundane and superficial when they discuss literature, exchanging suggestions for Gaelic material to be included in *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* which MacDiarmid is editing.

As the narrative of their friendship evolves, both MacDiarmid and MacLean assume a variety of roles in their alternate capacities as writers and readers. Here the epistolary function of the letters comes into play, for the content of their correspondence clearly indicates that each writer is influenced by a consideration of how he will be read. As Altman observes: "To write a letter is to map one's coordinates – temporal, spatial, emotional, intellectual – in order to tell someone else where one is located at a particular time and how far one has traveled since the last writing" (119). Yet content is further influenced by an awareness of the reader as listener and responder, resulting in what Altman refers to as "the subjectivization of [epistolary narrative] in the reader" (87). Due to the letter's equivocal ability to serve simultaneously as portrait or mask, "[n]ot only what [is written] but how [it is written] is shaped [to some extent] by [the] addressee" (90), for "[i]n no other genre do readers figure so prominently within the world of the narrative and in the generation of the text" (88). Thus, the letters convey self-consciousness on the part of both MacDiarmid and MacLean of the image each is attempting to portray; their correspondence is, in effect, an agent

for the construction of specific personas, the most important of which are their respective interpretations of the role of the Scottish poet.

For MacDiarmid, this discursive stance is that of the established poet, well versed in the literatures of European modernism, who demonstrates an extensive knowledge of Scottish literature in general, including a familiarity with the Scottish Gaelic tradition. Yet he is not too proud to learn from MacLean, and he continues to defer to the native speaker's knowledge of Gaelic throughout their long friendship. Initially, MacDiarmid fails to recognize that MacLean is the contemporary voice he is seeking to represent the Gaelic tradition in his anthology, *The Golden Treasury*. However, towards the end of their collaboration, when MacLean has co-authored and published his poetry in *Seventeen Poems for Sixpence* with Robert Garioch, MacDiarmid is touched by MacLean's dedication of "An Cuilithionn / The Cuillin" to him and acknowledges the younger writer as a significant new voice in Scottish poetry (MacDiarmid, *The Golden Treasury* 352). In a letter dated 13 May 1940, MacDiarmid asks MacLean for permission to represent him through an English rendering of "Bàn-ghaidheal" and remarks that "*Dàin do Eimhir III*" is "an exceedingly beautiful and moving poem" (Letter 57). This appreciation of MacLean's literary talents remained steadfast, despite the fact that the Gaelic poet's work did not reach a broad audience and gain widespread recognition until the 1970s and through the publication of his collected works, *O Choille gu Bearradh: Dàin Chruinnichte / From Wood to Ridge: Collected Poems*, in 1989. From then on, Gaeldom in

particular, and the world in general came to recognize the unique talent which MacDiarmid had first recognized in the late 1930's.

Similarly, MacLean's admiration for MacDiarmid's achievements was unwavering. Early in the relationship he is deferential to the older poet, his letters conveying a sense of disbelief that he is engaged in a literary project with a writer of MacDiarmid's stature. However, MacLean's confidence asserts itself as he offers suggestions regarding poems for inclusion in *The Golden Treasury*. He does not hesitate to steer MacDiarmid away from poets whose work is of questionable quality and even goes so far as to offer himself as a "ghost critic" and respondent to the Gaelic scholars whose comments in the *Times Literary Supplement* of 4 January 1936 questioned MacDiarmid's remarks prefacing his translation of Alexander MacDonald's *The Birlinn of Clanranald*. Eventually, MacLean is able to share his own work with MacDiarmid, who responds favourably. Though their views on the poetry of W.B. Yeats and Dylan Thomas differ, they share a mutual dislike for the "MacSpaundy" group of MacNeice, Spender, Auden, and Day Lewis, an antipathy largely due to the English poets' "public-school" Communism. For his part, MacLean understands the rift which develops between MacDiarmid and Edwin Muir's literary circle, and the Gaelic poet despairs over Scotland's stubborn refusal to recognize the scope of MacDiarmid's achievement. In a letter dated 10 January 1940 MacLean writes:

Nowadays I am more and more worried and ashamed of the way Scotland has treated yourself whom, I at least, recognise as one of the great European poets of all time. . . . It is amazing to

find how many subscribe to that view without doing anything about it in public. (Letter 54)

Although Joy Hendry has recommended caution in interpreting the nature of MacDiarmid's "influence" on MacLean ("The Man and His Work" 15-16), Duncan Glen argues that in "Sorley MacLean, George Campbell Hay, and Douglas Young – scholar, poet, nationalist, and socialist – were 'Bit sparks i the tail o [MacDiarmid's] comet'" (*Hugh MacDiarmid* 154).

More recently, Michael Byrne has elaborated on this analogy in his paper entitled "Tails o the Comet? MacLean, Hay, Young and MacDiarmid's Renaissance," in which he refers to MacLean and Hay as "two rising stars of Gaelic poetry and MacDiarmid's Renaissance" (2). Summarizing MacDiarmid's pluralistic vision of Scottish culture, Byrne states that,

MacDiarmid had been waging his long *kulturkampf* against the Anglocentrism and parochialism of Scottish culture since the 1920s. . . . In the course of the late twenties and early thirties, MacDiarmid's preoccupation with the role of Gaelic in his cultural revolution grew more and more pronounced. . . . It wasn't merely that "the profitable affiliations of Scots lie, not with English, but with Gaelic," but that Scots culture was "really a subsidiary development of . . . ancient Gaelic culture," "represent[ing] the Celts' compromise with circumstance." In the introduction to his *Golden Treasury* of 1940 MacDiarmid would restate that the Renaissance aim of

recharging the Scots language was “only a stage in the breakaway from English, preliminary to the great task of recapturing and developing [Scotland’s] great Gaelic heritage.”

(MacDiarmid qtd. in Byrne 2)

While Byrne quite rightly observes that these views on MacDiarmid’s part were “clearly the latest in a long line of alien appropriations of the [Gaelic] language and culture” (3), he further comments that “it is striking the extent to which MacDiarmid’s notions chimed with MacLean and Hay’s own concerns. What we can see repeatedly is MacDiarmid flagging up very real issues in Gaelic culture, with a partially informed understanding which then gains substance as he establishes his friendships with MacLean and Hay” (4). Ultimately, “it was MacLean who enabled MacDiarmid to substantiate his promotion of Gaelic poetry by providing him with detailed translations of the work of [*Alasdair MacMhaigstir Alasdair, Donnchadh Bàn Mac-an-t-Saoir*, and other poets]” for *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* (4-5). For his part, Hay’s “poetic manifesto published in 1939 – in MacDiarmid’s own quarterly *The Voice of Scotland*” echoed the older poet’s call for “a return to the discipline of [the bardic tradition]” (5). As a multi-linguist who produced translations of poetry “from Greek, Welsh, Irish, and (in the Forties) from French, Italian and Arabic” (6), Hay, as Byrne points out, also “fulfilled the internationalist role” MacDiarmid envisioned for Scotland’s poets (6). However, as “Tails o the Comet?” argues, “it is impossible to discuss the relationships between MacDiarmid, MacLean and Hay in the late Thirties and into the Forties without highlighting the role of

Douglas Young as intermediary, friend and propagandist” (6). Clearly, Young was a crucial link in this chain of influence, for as Byrne’s study of Young’s letters has revealed,

A gifted scholar and polyglot, a genial man of immense integrity and strong political commitment, and himself a poet, [Douglas Young] cemented the relationships between Hugh MacDiarmid and Sorley MacLean, introduced Hay and MacDiarmid to each other’s work, was instrumental in bringing MacLean and Hay together, played an important part in the publication of both Gaels’ work and also promoted their poetry through his own Scots versions. (6)

Young served as Sorley MacLean’s literary trustee during the Gaelic poet’s military service in WWII, and it was through Young’s efforts that MacLean’s *Dàin do Eimhir* would be published (Whyte, ed., *Dàin do Eimhir, By Somhairle MacGill-Eain / Sorley MacLean* 1-6; 37-41; Hendry, “The Man and His Work” 32). MacDiarmid’s vision of the vital necessity of preserving and continuing Scotland’s Gaelic tradition, his articulation of a Scottish identity which was pluralistic and accorded the Gaelic language and culture a place of honour rather than viewing them with dismissive contempt, found expression through the work of these younger writers.

Even towards the end of MacDiarmid’s life, by which time MacLean had garnered numerous accolades of his own, the issue of rivalry is discussed in their correspondence, but the poets’ mutual regard underscores the stability of their

friendship. In response to MacLean's comments that "[He has] said privately and publicly again and again . . . [that] there is no poet living in the Islands called British who is in the same class as Hugh MacDiarmid; and [he] would be greatly astonished if it were demonstrated . . . that there is in Europe" (Letter 17, dated 16 Jan. 1977), MacDiarmid replies, "You have always been over-indulgent about my poetry and too modest about your own. There is, I think, no doubt about you and I being the two best poets in Scotland today, but it is all nonsense of course to go further than that" (Letter 74, 23 Jan. 1977). Ultimately, while MacDiarmid assumed the role of the nation's poet through his advocacy of a pluralistic literary tradition encompassing work in all of Scotland's languages, MacLean's was the voice of Gaeldom. His letters attest to his ties with both family and community, to pride of place, history, and tradition. And it is he who serves as communal host, granting MacDiarmid access to the richness of that cultural repository and to the warmth of kith and kin when MacDiarmid and his friend W.D. MacColl finally visit Raasay and Skye while researching *The Islands of Scotland* in September 1937. Perhaps one of the most touching testaments to MacLean's regard for MacDiarmid appears in a letter from the North African desert written on 23 February 1942. MacLean writes:

I am now in Egypt in a tank division and my movements are such that I can take very few books along with me but I have as yet managed to cling to the *Drunk Man* and MacMillan's *Selections* and on the strength of those two I manage to persuade any intelligent

Scots I fall in with, that there is living in Scotland a greater [poet]
than Burns. (Letter 65)

In a moving elegy for MacDiarmid, “Lament for the *Makar*”, published in the *Times Educational Supplement for Scotland* on 15 September 1978, MacLean summarized his impressions of his friend and fellow poet: “[H]e combined a supreme poetic sensibility, and astonishing intellectual energy, with a social and political activism rare in the intellectual, and still rarer in the artist. . . . MacDiarmid’s courage was immense. I found his generosity very great” (2).

In his letter to MacLean dated 23 January 1977, MacDiarmid states: “There is no question, I think, but that you’d have had much greater international recognition if you’d written in a language accessible to a greater readership” (Letter 74). MacDiarmid’s comments raise the vital issue of the impact of MacLean’s deliberate use of Gaelic as the language of his poetry in terms of the Gaelic poet’s exposure and recognition. Joy Hendry delineates the implications of this choice:

In part, at least, it was a political decision for Sorley MacLean to write in Gaelic, his first language. . . . It was a political decision in that he gave the most positive support he could to his native language, culture, traditions and way of life, all of which was and is still under threat from the powerful political and economic forces of our capitalist society. MacLean’s purity of motive in this choice is underlined by the fact that he knew well that only a

handful of people would ever be capable of fully understanding his work in the original, and that he was much less likely ever to see his work in print than any writer of comparable work in English.

(“The Man and His Work” 14-15)

Yet to MacLean, the merits of writing in his mother tongue far outweighed the disadvantages. In the introduction to his collected poems, *O Choille gu Bearradh / From Wood to Ridge*, he observed “I think that, on the whole, the Scottish Gael is more fascinated by sound in poetry than by visual form or colour” (xi). He continues,

I often wonder if I loved Gaelic so much because it was my first language, and I had heard so much fine song in it from a very early age, but it does have great qualities. First of all, it is essentially a mid-European language, with some Nordic and some Mediterranean qualities, hence a wide range of sound. Also, it is immensely flexible metrically and in syntax, especially in its capacity for indicating positions and degrees of emphasis

In 1931 or 1932, I forget which, I wrote a poem called “The Heron”: the English, of course, is only a translation. I thought it better than any of my English stuff, and because of that – but also for patriotic reasons – I stopped writing verse in English and destroyed all the English stuff I could lay hands on. (xiii-xiv)

Ultimately, MacLean's linguistic mastery resulted in the inimitable quality of his poetry, something which MacDiarmid recognized and acknowledged (Letter 74, 23 January 1977). This, in turn, won MacLean cult status amongst Irish Gaels, but others who were not native speakers of the language also were attracted by the auditory qualities of his verse. As Seamus Heaney has written, "I knew Sorley MacLean by reputation before I felt his authority. . . . But then, in the early seventies, two things occurred which made the spark jump: I read Iain Crichton Smith's translations, *Poems to Eimhir*, and I heard MacLean himself read his own poems in the original Gaelic" ("Introduction" 1). Heaney elaborates:

[When] I heard the voice of the man himself speaking the poems in Gaelic[,] . . . this had the force of revelation: the mesmeric, heightened tone; the weathered voice coming in close from a far place; the swarm of the vowels; the surrender to the otherness of the poem; above all the sense of bardic dignity that was entirely without self-parade but was instead the effect of a proud self-abnegation, as much a submission as a claim to heritage. All this constituted a second discovery, this time of the true climate of his linguistic world. (2)

At home in Scotland, MacLean's poetry inspired a new generation of Gaelic scholars, writers, and critics. There, as in Ireland, "[t]he audience for MacLean's poetry goes far beyond the restricted body of readers who have access to it in the original language" (Whyte, *Dàin do Eimhir* 41), many of whom have learned Gaelic to access his writing in its original context (Nicolson, "An

Interview with Sorley MacLean” 36; Whyte, ed., 41). Discussing the future of Gaelic poetry with Angus Nicholson in 1979, MacLean noted,

It is terribly difficult for one to say – for me, or I think for anybody else – to make any kind of prediction, but it would appear to me that Gaelic poetry if it has to keep any vitality must look to its own roots and not be just like transcriptions from, say, fashionable English poetry or fashionable poetry of any other kind. I think it must go back as well as forward (“An Interview” 34)

In fact, Ronald Black’s 2002 compilation of the work of 100 Scottish Gaelic poets, *An Tuil: Anthology of Twentieth-Century Scottish Gaelic Verse*, illustrates just such continuity. Its contents serve as a validation of MacLean’s efforts to ensure the survival of the Gaelic tradition, attesting to the healthy state of Gaelic writing in merely one genre: poetry. The status of Gaelic fiction is equally vital, as demonstrated by the award-winning novels of *Aonghus Pàdraig Caimbeul* and *Martainn Mac an t-Saoir*.⁵⁹ There is no question that both MacDiarmid and MacLean would have been delighted with such developments.

Although their letters convey a vivid portrait of MacDiarmid and MacLean’s relationship, a deconstructive critical approach further demonstrates that what is omitted from their correspondence clearly demarcates the boundaries of their

⁵⁹ *Caimbeul’s* 2003 novel *An Oidche Mus do Sheol Sinn / The Night Before We Sailed* was nominated for the Saltire Book of the Year Award in 2004 and appearing on the *The List Magazine’s* 100 Best Scottish Books. *Mac an t-Saoir’s* novel *Ath-Aithne* won the Saltire First Book Award in 2003. See “National Library of Scotland”. See also “Ùr-Sgeul”.

friendship. While they easily discuss the well-being of family members, their intimacy is circumscribed by a reluctance to elaborate on the intimate details of their personal relationships. This reticence may be attributed as much to the unspoken taboos of the day, the social avoidance of such revelations, as to the desire to maintain an image that was unassailable. While these friends explain the intervals of silence which fragment their epistolary exchange, they avoid in-depth discussion of the reasons for these hiatuses. MacDiarmid hesitates to reveal the toll that life in Whalsay is taking on his family in any detail except to say that Valda's nerves are bad and that she needs a break (Letter 27, dated 25 Nov. 1935; Letter 33, dated 22 May 1936). Similarly, the closest MacLean comes to discussing the impact of the various love affairs which served as a catalyst for many of the poems eventually to be published as *Dàin do Eimhir agus Dàin Eile*, is to apologize for a period of literary stagnation and the ensuing break in his correspondence with MacDiarmid (Letter 48, dated 27 Feb. 1948). It is MacDiarmid who intuitively reads between the lines of MacLean's letter, kindly responding with the voice of experience:

I am very sorry you find things so uncongenial in Tobermory and about these periods of lassitude or loss of will or whatever it is – probably just a question of your age, a love (or need of love) matter. I hope things will even out for you; and fancy they may do so via writing – especially poetry. (Letter 52, dated 9 May 1958).

Such omissions raise interesting questions as to the potential influence of gender on epistolary content, issues which warrant more examination than is possible in

the present introduction to MacDiarmid and MacLean's correspondence.

However, it is worth noting the distinction between the tone and content of Valda Grieve's four letters to MacLean with those of her husband's letters to the younger Gaelic poet. While the two brief notes sent after MacDiarmid's death in 1978 simply contain birthday greetings and an announcement of the forthcoming publication of MacDiarmid's collected poems edited by his son, Michael Grieve, and by their mutual friend W. R. Aitken, Valda's two letters composed shortly after MacLean's visit to the Grieve family in Whalsay in August 1935 are more revealing. Writing to MacLean during MacDiarmid's recuperation from nervous exhaustion in Gilgal Hospital, Perth, Valda does not hesitate to share her anxiety over MacDiarmid's health, their financial circumstances and the backlog of his work. She candidly mentions her efforts to placate publishers awaiting completed manuscripts for which advances have been paid. On 15 September 1935 she writes from Whalsay:

Dear MacLean,

I should have written you before – but have been so dreadfully worried – and busy – Christopher collapsed the day after you left and went down to the Dr. Orr's – on the following Tuesday night. Orr gave me no hope so I wired F.G. Scott⁶⁰ to meet us in Aberdeen and immediately got Christopher down. God! What a

⁶⁰ Francis George Scott (1880-1958), Scottish composer, former teacher and close friend of Hugh MacDiarmid.

journey. I'll never forget it. He is now in a nursing home⁶¹ and the Drs. give him a 30% chance of recovery – they say it's "complete nervous exhaustion" – poor fellow – he's down to just 8 sts. I did not think he was so emaciated – did you?

I've been back a fortnight and have been kept busy soothing irate publishers.⁶² Please!

Last week the news was fairly satisfactory. They had made various tests etc. and could find nothing organically wrong – also that he'd picked up a bit improving the last three or four days – the previous week he'd been very ill – but I suppose he will be up and down – one can really expect nothing else – but it is so worrying.

Michael still talks about you and calls you "my big man."

He's still a little devil. (Letter 23)

Valda's comments here, and in Letter 25 of 2 October 1935, provide a much clearer picture than CMG's letters of the invaluable administrative assistance she provided her husband. As such, the image which emerges of her, the epistolary persona she constructs, exudes an efficiency and pragmatism which serve as the bulwark of MacDiarmid's domestic world. Ultimately, she is more forthcoming regarding their family life than MacDiarmid is. One wonders whether this

⁶¹ With the help of F.G. Scott, MacDiarmid was admitted to Gilgal Nursing Home, part of the Murray Royal Hospital in Perth on 17 August 1935, where he was treated for nervous exhaustion. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 333-34.

⁶² Probably Valda is referring to the extensive changes required for two works MacDiarmid had submitted to Routledge earlier that year. These were *Scottish Eccentrics*, and *What Lenin Has Meant to Me*, later renamed *Red Scotland*. This latter work was never published. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 331-32; 339.

frankness is due to the fact that she is not competitively situated as another writer in their discursive exchange, because she has no literary reputation to uphold, or whether her openness arises through the ease with which she articulates her experience as wife and mother. Yet the same “voice” with which she addresses MacLean is the one used in her personal correspondence with her husband. Recently compiled in *Scarcely Ever Out of My Thoughts: The Letters of Valda Trevlyn Grieve to Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*, Valda’s correspondence with CMG clearly reveals that her forthright nature is not merely a facet of her private persona; it also characterizes her public image. As her daughter-in-law, Deirdre Grieve, explains in her foreword to these letters,

If you were to meet the Valda whose observations and directions pepper these pages you would be struck by the assessing gaze, the already confrontational manner, the rich contralto voice and the assuredness of her spoken remarks in contrast to those she put on paper. . . . Very soon, depending on her mood or her first impressions of you, you would be beguiled by her warmth or alarmed by her hostility, probably both. Both these facets of her personality come through in [her] letters (Grieve, Deirdre vi)

The issue of gender’s impact on epistolary content aside, ultimately, our understanding of the significance of the discursive masks donned by MacDiarmid and MacLean is enhanced by examining the multiple uses the letters serve as intermediaries in their relationship.

Through their simultaneous function as a means of sharing confidences, of seeking advice, of providing instruction, of discussing cultural and political issues, the letters illuminate not only the routine domesticity of MacDiarmid's and MacLean's private lives, they also reflect, on another level, the domesticity of the Scottish nation. In effect, their relationship serves as "a dialectical epitome of the 'synthetic' nation" (Miller 1). Within this discursive space they share their views towards other writers and literary movements in Scotland and beyond, and they discuss nationalism, socialism and Marxism against the historical background of the Spanish Civil War and the rise of Fascism in Germany, Italy, and Spain. As correspondents, each plays the role of confidant, mentor, tutor, advisor, and steadfast champion of the other's work. The affinity between MacDiarmid and MacLean is apparent throughout their correspondence. However, "MacLean's view on the influence of Hugh MacDiarmid was complex" ("Literary Associates – Hugh MacDiarmid (1892-1978)" 3):

In a letter to Douglas Young in 1941, [MacLean] stated: "I immediately recognized the lyrics of *Sangschaw* and *Penny Wheep* as supreme. . . . There is nothing on earth like the greatest of these lyrics". He referred to MacDiarmid's early [poems] as having a "tremendous influence on me", but at the same time he wrote, "I wouldn't say that these lyrics of Hugh MacDiarmid influenced my own poetry much though they had a kind of catalytic influence" (MacLean qtd. in "Literary Associates – Hugh MacDiarmid (1892-1978)" 3)

MacLean elaborated on this somewhat contradictory assessment of the impact MacDiarmid had on his creative development. “[O]f all poetry, and I mean all poetry that I know, [MacDiarmid’s lyrics] are the most inimitable and the most difficult to follow in practice and imitate, but they . . . confirmed my belief in the supremacy of the lyric and the lyrical nature of poetry” (MacLean qtd. in Hendry, “The Man and His Work” 15). Clearly, despite Joy Hendry’s argument to the contrary, the fact that they were working in two disparate linguistic mediums did not preclude MacDiarmid’s influence on MacLean’s poetic development, for MacDiarmid’s early work in Scots established a benchmark for the younger poet in terms of the potential of the lyric form, especially as regards MacLean’s aspirations for his own writing. As Hendry herself notes, “Such was MacLean’s admiration of [MacDiarmid’s] early lyrics for their ‘under-the-skin awareness and auditory magic . . . which [MacLean considered] as quite unrivalled and unapproached in the British Isles [at that time]’, that he almost stopped writing himself, feeling that the nearest to the ‘unattainable summit of the lyric’ had been achieved” (MacLean qtd. in Hendry, “The Man and His Work” 15; Letter 54, 10 Jan. 1940; Letter 58, 25 May 1940).

Fortunately, for posterity’s sake, MacLean was inspired rather than deterred by MacDiarmid’s accomplishments, for in his own poetry he “restored to Gaelic [verse] the scope and amplitude of a mature, adult voice” (MacInnes, “Language, Metre and Diction in the Poetry of Sorley MacLean” 137). Indeed, as John MacInnes points out,

A large part of Somhairle MacGill-Eain's greatness as a poet lies in his restorative work: this can properly be celebrated as a triumph of regeneration. His poetry is intensely Gaelic even when it is so different from anything else in Gaelic; his art, even at its most personal, draws upon so much of the inherited wealth of immemorial generations. What is perhaps more difficult to convey to a non-Gaelic reader is that this sense of the restoration of our heritage to its proper place plays a fundamental part in our assessment of his poetry. (137)

During the early years of their correspondence, MacDiarmid wrote to MacLean on two separate occasions bemoaning the lack of "any young Gaelic poet with a big intellectual background" (Letter 2, 9 August 1934; Letter 19, 21 June 1935). Ultimately, MacLean embodied the potential MacDiarmid foresaw by demonstrating that "good Gaelic poetry [was not] a thing of the past . . . [and by] worthily carrying on the great tradition" (Letter 2, 9 August 1934). In addition to his creative innovation, through a steadfast refusal to accept "the decline of Gaelic as irrevocable" (Nicholson, "Questions of Prestige" 202), MacLean's energies were directed towards the preservation of the language. In particular, he lobbied for educational reform. Following the examples of Scottish teachers Donald Thomson and Donald Morrison (Nicholson, "An Interview with Sorley MacLean" 35), MacLean fought for the institution of a Higher Learner's paper in Gaelic, which amounted to recognition on the part of the Scottish educational system that non-Native Gaelic speakers might be able to acquire the language

and resulted in the provision of the means for them to do so. As Nicholson explains, through “Problems of Gaelic Education”, the paper MacLean presented to the Gaelic Society of Inverness in 1966, “he sought to shame into action those who were in a stronger position than he to influence the attitudes of government” (“Questions of Prestige” 207). Nicholson continues,

[T]he paper was not simply a torrent of excoriation against those ‘socially ambitious . . . Gaels on the make’ who had ‘almost without exception acted as if Gaelic were surely dying, and the sooner dead the better’. It provided a serious analysis of the state of Gaelic in education at the time, seeing it clearly in the context of its history. (“Questions of Prestige” 207)

Ultimately, MacLean “played an active part in effecting a change which would be beneficial not only to the vitality of his own language and culture but potentially to the cultural life of Scotland as a whole” (210). In this sense, he achieved for Gaelic what MacDiarmid had envisioned for Scottish education in general: a redress of the “neglect of Scottish history and literature in the schools and universities” (Glen, *Hugh MacDiarmid* 234).

Despite the fact that there is the tacit understanding between MacDiarmid and MacLean that their “correspondence is essentially a private affair” (Altman 48), underlying their awareness of each other as “specifically delineated reader[s]”, there is also a sensitivity to the potential of an external, public readership (90). As Altman observes, “As a tangible document, even when

intended for a single addressee, the letter is always subject to circulation among a larger group of readers” (109). This is attested to by the survival of multiple copies of MacDiarmid’s letters to MacLean, despite MacDiarmid’s assertion to his biographer Alan Bold that he never duplicated his letters (Bold, ed. *Letters* x). MacLean’s retention and cataloguing of the letters he had received from MacDiarmid also speak to his consideration of their value to posterity as literary historical artifacts. Yet another clue that both poets were aware that their correspondence might be eventually be viewed by the reading public is MacDiarmid’s deliberate erasure of portions of his response to the rumour of his rivalry with MacLean by blacking out parts of the text with a marker pen (Letter 74, dated 23 Jan. 1977).⁶³ Thus, this “movement from private to public reading” (106), from an awareness of an internal reader to that of an external readership, turns MacDiarmid and MacLean’s epistolary narrative into an engaging documentary of literary history which conveys through its mediation of past and present, the sense that we are participating in events as they unfold.

The epistolary exchange which follows permits an intimate glimpse of the artistic and intellectual perspectives of two of the foremost poets in Scottish literature of any period. MacDiarmid and MacLean’s correspondence enriches

⁶³ The letter in question was written on lined foolscap paper. Midway through the letter, 1 ½ lines which begin a new paragraph have been crossed out in thick black marker, rendering them completely illegible. Then the letter continues on an unnumbered page for several lines, the next full page being numbered as page 2. This would seem to indicate that these comments were edited and later reinserted into the letter by MacDiarmid rather than by MacLean.

us with much more than the narrative of their friendship and literary collaboration.

As Janet Gurkin Altman points out,

the epistolary form models the complex dynamics involved in writing and reading; in its preoccupation with the myriad mediatory aspects involved in communication, in the way that it wrestles with the problem of making narrative out of discourse, in its attempts to resolve mimetic and artistic impulses, epistolary literature exposes the conflicting impulses that generate all literature. (212)

Thus, as readers we are able to experience the dynamism of MacDiarmid's and MacLean's respective creativity, a catalytic force which revitalized the cultural and intellectual life of contemporary Scotland. And so, to the letters

A Note on the Sources

Initially, this project began in the summer of 2005 with the discovery of thirty-five letters from Hugh MacDiarmid (Christopher Murray Grieve, 1892-1978) [CMG] to Sorley MacLean (*Somhairle MacGill-Eain*, 1911-96) in the MacLean manuscript collection at the National Library of Scotland. Of these letters, only sixteen have previously been published: three in Alan Bold's 1984 volume entitled *The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid*, and another thirteen in Dorian Grieve, Owen Dudley Edwards, and Alan Riach's 2001 compilation, *Hugh MacDiarmid: New Selected Letters*. However, while this newly augmented correspondence shed light on the literary collaboration between MacDiarmid and MacLean for *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* during the 1930's, it represented only MacDiarmid's side of their communication.

Fortunately, the recollection of several foot-note references to letters in the 1986 study of MacLean's work, *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays*, edited by Raymond J. Ross and Joy Hendry, led me to MacLean's half of the correspondence: some forty-three letters held in the Special Collections of Edinburgh University Library. These had previously been referenced by such scholars as Joy Hendry, Raymond Ross, Michel Byrne and, most recently and extensively, Christopher Whyte; however, they had not been transcribed in their entirety or annotated. Thus, assembled here for the first time are eighty-one letters – close to fifty years' correspondence which illustrates in greater depth the relationship between these seminal twentieth-century Scottish poets.

The source for the letters written by Hugh MacDiarmid [CMG] and his wife, Valda Grieve, to Sorley MacLean is the National Library of Scotland's MS 29533. The letters, some thirty-five in total, accompanied by MacLean's notes regarding their chronology, comprise folios 1-63 of this collection. The four letters (two undated) from Valda Grieve have been included in this dissertation as they contribute to the correspondence between MacDiarmid and MacLean by further illustrating the high regard in which the Grieve family held MacLean, both as a writer and as a personal friend.

The forty-three unpublished letters from MacLean to MacDiarmid are held in Edinburgh University Library's MS 2954.13, ff 1-90. They span a period of some forty-five years, from 27 July 1934 to 23 July 1978, representing the other half of the correspondence between these two important twentieth-century Scottish poets who led the main developments in Scots, English, and Gaelic poetry. Thus, in their entirety, the letters serve as a dialectical illustration of MacLean and MacDiarmid's relationship, one which gives a clear sense of the nature of both their literary collaboration and their friendship.

According to his notes accompanying the correspondence from MacDiarmid in the National Library of Scotland's MSS 29533, MacLean was aware of only eight letters in his keeping prior to the autumn of 1984: the three published by Bold in 1984 during MacLean's lifetime, three later published by Grieve, Edwards, and Riach in 2001, and two unpublished letters. MacLean's chronological list of these is headed by the comment "The 8 letters already got" (MacLean, MS 29533 62r). However, he discovered an additional twenty-three

letters on 2 September 1984 (MacLean, MS 29533 62r-63v). Certainly MacLean may have provided copies of the three letters published by Bold, as the two men corresponded regarding the details of these letters on 18 October 1982 and again on 6 June 1983 (Bold, *The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid* 610; 259).

However, one wonders why the other five letters MacLean clearly knew of while Bold was compiling his work remained unpublished.¹ Their content is far from controversial, and three of them were exchanged during the period the two poets were collaborating on *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*. With expedient clarification, the editorial comments in the introduction to *Hugh MacDiarmid: New Selected Letters* (2001) explain the distinction between the material originally published by Alan Bold and this most recent volume of letters, thereby demarcating the public correspondence from that which is more private:

The letters we have collected here are published for the first time. They were not available to the late Alan Bold, editor of *The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid* (1984), to whom our debt is incalculable. . . . [T]he store of family correspondence was not available to Bold for use in the *Letters* and little could be seen from the then sealed archives. Valda's death [in 1989] remove[d] an obvious discretionary barrier against premature release.

¹ The five letters MacLean knew of which were not published in Bold's compilation were [undated] 1935, 9 August 1934, 17 August 1936, 4 December 1962, and 27 March 1978. Duplicates of the letters of 9 August 1934, 4 December 1962, and 27 March 1978 were later published in Dorian Grieve, Owen Dudley Edwards, and Alan Riach, eds., *Hugh MacDiarmid: New Selected Letters* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2001) 79-80; 377-78; 523-24.

CMG's letters are thus divided between Bold's volume (largely the public man's correspondence) and our own, whose primary theme is charged and suffused by the hopes, fears, comedies, tragedies, weeping and laughter of his family life. For the first time the world is given the Christopher Murray Grieve who lived behind Hugh MacDiarmid. (Grieve, Edwards, and Riach ix)

During his lifetime MacDiarmid asserted that only the original versions of his correspondence existed, explicitly stating "I have never kept copies of any of my letters'" (qtd. in Bold, *Letters* x). Yet given the discovery of the original letters MacLean received, plus those located among MacDiarmid's correspondence in the National Library of Scotland's MSS 27148-60, clearly there are duplicates. This assumption is substantiated by a notation from MacDiarmid – ever a man of contrary assertions – which appears at the top of a letter written to his former wife, Peggy, shortly after his return to Whalsay following his hospitalization in September 1935 (Grieve, Edwards, and Riach 105). The inscription reads: "[Noted in CMG's hand: 'Copy of letter written 12/10/35 and posted 14/10/35']" (105). In their footnote to this annotation, the editors of *Hugh MacDiarmid: New Selected Letters* elaborate further:

All of the letters to Peggy and William McElroy included here and the undated letter of 1938 to CMG's daughter, Christine, came to the National Library of Scotland from CMG's own papers. They may be copies, drafts, letters returned undelivered by the Post Office or that were simply never sent. We have no independent

means of determining whether any of these letters was, in fact, sent. (Grieve, Edwards, and Riach 106)

Ultimately, the sources compiled here demonstrate that, in MacDiarmid's case at least, more than one version of certain letters exists.

The correspondence between MacDiarmid and MacLean is assembled here (as far as is possible given the lack of dates in certain instances), with the intention of re-inserting the letters into their original context, so that readers may study and enjoy both sides of their protracted epistolary exchange. For the sake of continuity and completeness, the sixteen letters contained in *The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid* and in *Hugh MacDiarmid: New Selected Letters* have been transcribed as they appear in their published form, accompanied by the excellent annotations already provided and citing the page references on which they appear in the respective works. The occasional foot-note has been added to clarify additional references within these letters. Naturally, as this is a compilation of both published and unpublished correspondence, the actual numbering of the foot-notes differs. Additionally, a foot-note explanation of any discrepancies between the MacLean MSS originals and the published versions has been included for each previously published letter.

The provenance of each letter has been indicated in brackets after the number and addressee name given at the beginning of each piece of correspondence. Where a letter has previously been published, both the location of the original and that of its published version have been listed.

Source Abbreviations

- SML Edinburgh University Library's MS 2954.13 containing original copies of Sorley MacLean's letters to Hugh MacDiarmid.
- LHM Bold, Alan, ed. *The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984.
- GL National Library of Scotland's MacLean MS 29533 containing Sorley MacLean's original copies of the letters he received from Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid) and his wife, Valda.
- NSL Grieve, Dorian, Owen Dudley Edwards, and Alan Riach, eds. *Hugh MacDiarmid: New Selected Letters*. Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2001.

A Note on the Text and Transcription

In the interests of uniformity and continuity, and to aid cross-reference, I have followed the example of Grieve, Edwards, and Riach's *Hugh MacDiarmid: New Selected Letters* in their standardizing of the format of each letter (including those previously published by Alan Bold), particularly the format of the address from which it was written and the manner in which the letter was dated. As the editors of this most recent publication of MacDiarmid's correspondence state,

CMG often dated months by number and separated the numbers of the days, months and years at various times by dashes, obliques, or dots. Our standard is to give the month in full and the full date, to the right of the page. Where letters have no date, we have tried to establish [their chronology] and we have given such dates in square brackets. (Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, eds. xxxi)

Sorley MacLean similarly varied the manner in which he dated his letters, so the same format as that used for MacDiarmid's correspondence has been applied throughout. Where partial dates have been provided naming a day of the week and a date but no month, the year of each letter in question has been ascribed through consultation with calendars for the common years from 1934 to 1940. When letters are completely undated, their chronology has been established, as far as is possible, from the internal evidence of their contents.

The spelling and punctuation of the MacDiarmid originals have been maintained, except where they have been amended in his previously published letters. Such changes are indicated by the previous editors' use of square

brackets. For the sake of clarity, punctuation has occasionally been added to the MacLean letters by the current editor. Again, such amendments are indicated by the use of square brackets.

Illustration 6: Letter from Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid) to
Sorley MacLean, dated 31 August 1934 (GL MS 29533, f 2r; NSL)

12 Eltherton Road
London. N.5.
31/8/34

My dear Maclean.

It is too bad my being so long
in acknowledging your translations; but I have been
absolutely up to the eyes. They are just the very
thing I wanted and so far as I have found
everything seems clear enough. I have completed
the translation of the *Bible* and am extremely
pleased with it; you may not be so satisfied - but it is
at least very close to your translation and at the
same time a thoroughly good poem in the English (which
was the two considerations I was striving after); while,
also, I have been able to give such faint suggestions of
the original structure and the atmosphere and other
technical details as are practicable in that
antipathetic tongue. I will send you a copy as
soon as I can get one typed. Two points only
occur to me - in the second verse of the
Prof. Blessing is it the blessing of holy Eriene or
holy Eriene that is invoked and (forgive my
ignorance) who was she? And in the *Leaving*
sounds towards the end - *Tise, Taise*, - are
they rightly given just so; I ask because you
seem to have an accent on them.

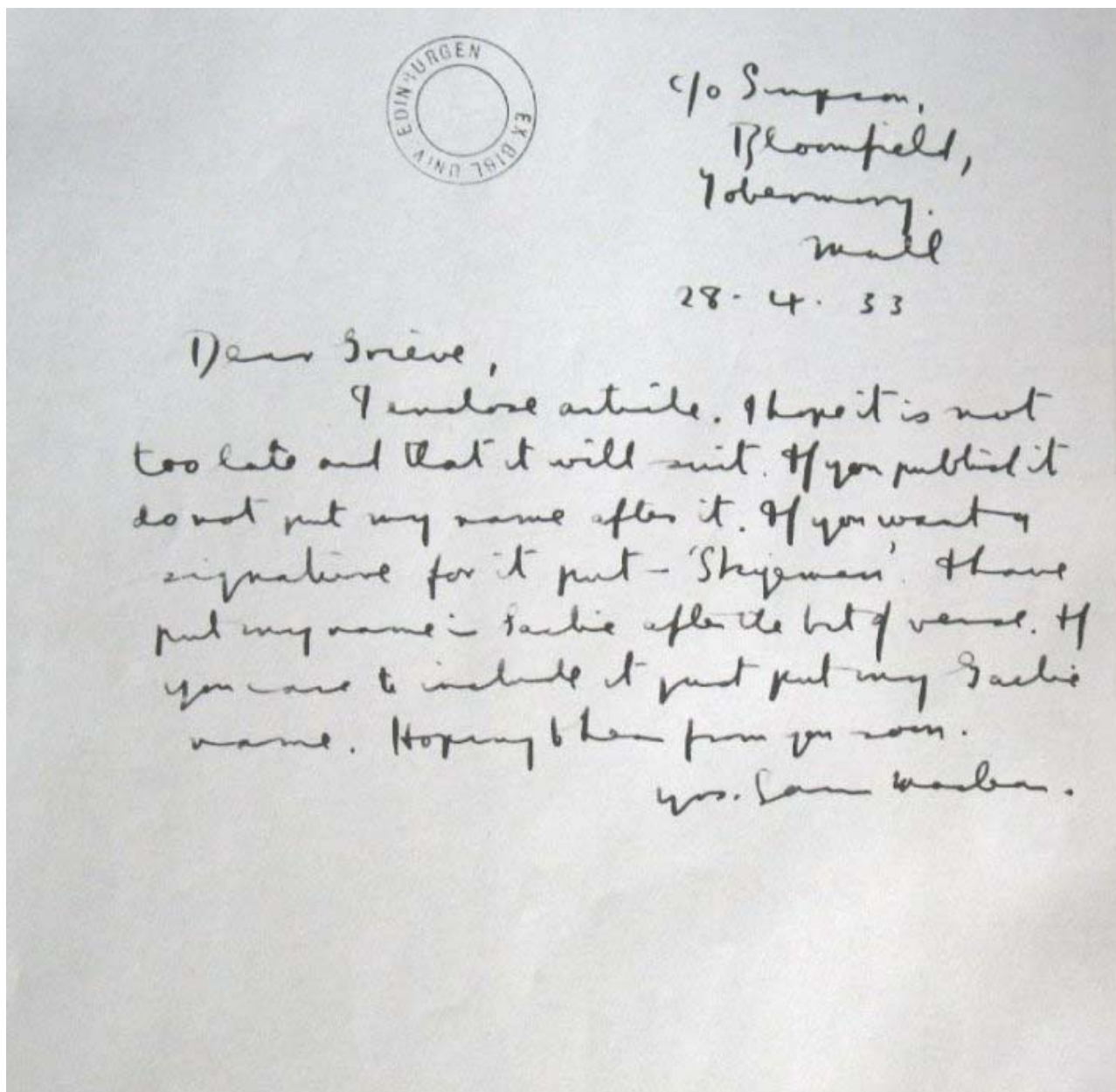
I am busy now with the
San Dorian which is a very very much more
difficult proposition.

Excuse this very short note.
But I could not delay longer in letting you know
I'd got your letters all right, that they were just
what I wanted, and that I am doing on them.

Every good wish.

Yours.
C. M. Grieve

Illustration 7: Letter from Sorley MacLean to Christopher Murray Grieve, written 28 April 1938 but incorrectly dated 28 April 1933 (SML MS 2954.13, f 1r)



1. To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)
(SML MS 2954.13, ff 2r-3v)

Churchton, Raasay, Skye

27 July 1934

Dear Mr. Grieve,

I have [been] wondering that I have not heard anything further from you about those Gaelic translations which you asked me to do for you, and as I thought that perhaps you had lost my address I decided to write to find out when you wished them and just how much and what exactly you wished. I have been working at them more or less since I came home at the end of June and as I am thinking that my speed is not what it should be I would like to know first when you wish them. I am enjoying the work very much and I find it extremely profitable to myself in every way. I have done MacIntyre's "*Ben Dorain*"² (*in toto*) and MacDonald's "*Moladh Moraig*"³ (*in toto*) and MacCodrum's "Mavis of Clan Donald",⁴ and am working at MacDonald's "*Birlinn*"⁵ just now but of course I can

² "Praise of Ben Dorain / *Moladh Beinn Dòbhrain*" by Duncan Bàn Macintyre (Donnchadh Bàn Mac-an-t-Saoir) (1724-1812). See Derick S. Thomson, ed., *The Companion to Gaelic Scotland* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1983) 159-60.

³ "Praise of Moraig / *Moladh Mòraig*" by Alexander MacDonald (Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair) (c. 1695-c.1770). See Thomson, *Companion* 184-85. See also Thomson, *An Introduction to Gaelic Poetry* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990) 168.

⁴ "Mavis of Clan Donald / *Smeòrach Chlann Dòmhnail*" by John MacCodrum (Iain MacCodrum) (1693-1779). See Thomson, *Companion* 161. See also Thomson, *Introduction* 191-94.

speed up my production if you require. I proposed doing MacIntyre's "Last Farewell to the Hills",⁶ and some of "Coire a' Cheathaich"⁷ (if you so wish) and one shorter thing by MacDonald, also of course something by Rob Donn (say "Iseabal Nic Aoidh")⁸ "Oran Mór Mhicleòid" by Roderick Morrison,⁹ one or two by Ross [-] fairly short things. But I thought it better to find out how soon you wanted them and which exactly you wanted before going further (also an estimate of the total amount you wished). If I am not getting along fast enough just tell me and I shall be delighted to put in some really hard work. Of course those I have mentioned do not at all exhaust the number I can do; there is of course Livingstone (what about "Fios thun a'Bhaird", I think it very good).¹⁰ I

⁵ "The Galley of Clan Ranald / *Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill*" by Alexander MacDonald (Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair). See Thomson, *Companion* 184.

⁶ "Last Farewell to the Hills / *Cead Deireannach nam Beann*" by Duncan Bàn Macintyre (Donnchadh Bàn Mac-an-t-Saoir) (1724-1812). See Thomson, *Companion* 159-60. See also Donald E. Meek, ed., *Caran an t-Saoghail The Wiles of the World: Anthology of 19th Century Scottish Gaelic Verse* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2003) 6-11.

⁷ "The Misty Corrie / *Coire a' Cheathaich*" by Duncan Ban Macintyre (1724-1812). See Thomson, *Introduction* 164; 186-87.

⁸ "Isabel Mackay / *Iseabal Nic Aoidh*" by Rob Donn (Robert Mackay) (1714-78). See Thomson, *Companion* 250. See also Thomson, *Introduction* 195-204.

⁹ "The Song of Great MacLeod / *Oran Mór Mhicleòid*" by Roderick Morrison (An Clairsair Dall – the Blind Harper) (c.1656-c.1713/14). See Thomson, *Companion* 44. See also Thomson, *Introduction* 150-53.

¹⁰ "A Message to the Poet / *Fios thun a' Bhàird*" by William Livingstone (Uilleam MacDhùn-léibhe) (1808-70). See Thomson, *Companion* 164. See also Thomson, *Introduction* 233-37.

remember you also mentioned that you would like something by Sinclair¹¹ included. Unfortunately I have only read one piece by Sinclair (in an anthology) and his work is not accessible to me just now, but I think you said that you had some or all of it in your hands. (I suppose that I could get it from the Carnegie Library in Dunfermline?). But I wait of course until I hear from you as to what you really wish. You may be assured that I will be greatly delighted to do anything I can towards helping your work.

As to myself, I have been at home since the end of June and am fairly well cut off from the outside world. As yet I have only seen one or two Reviews of *The Scottish Scene*¹² and *Stony Limits*¹³ (excuse the title if incorrect), I have not seen the books themselves, but I am looking forward to reading them soon. I have managed to get a teaching post beginning in Sept. at Portree Secondary School,¹⁴ so after this I shall have some cash to buy books and magazines although living far away from the cities.

¹¹ Donald Sinclair (Dòmhnall Mac Na Ceàrdaich) (1885-1932). See Ronald Black, ed., *An Tuil: Anthology of 20th-century Scottish Gaelic Verse* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2002) 736-37.

¹² Hugh MacDiarmid, and Lewis Grassie Gibbon, *Scottish Scene, or The Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn* (London: Jarrolds, 1934). See Alan Bold, *MacDiarmid: Christopher Murray Griev: A Critical Biography* (London: John Murray Ltd., 1988) 466.

¹³ Hugh MacDiarmid, *Stony Limits, and Other Poems* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1934).

¹⁴ MacLean taught at Portree High School on the Isle of Skye from 1934-37. See Black, ed. 765.

I hope to hear from you soon. Be sure to tell me to speed up if I have been rather sluggish and if you are behindhand with your anthology as a result.

With best wishes. Yours sincerely. Sam Maclean¹⁵

2. *To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, f 1r; NSL)*

c/o Woodhead, 12 Petherton Road, London N5

9 August 1934¹⁶

My dear Maclean,

Your letter of 27th ult. has just run me to earth here. I am delighted to have it. A variety of causes – also responsible for my unexpectedly protracted stay down here and my inability to get back to the Shetlands for a month or two yet – have prevented me from getting on with the anthology¹⁷ as quickly as I had

¹⁵ “*Somhairle* is often ‘anglicised’ as Samuel”, hence MacLean’s used of the diminutive “Sam”. See Donald Archie MacDonald, “Some Aspects of Family and Local Background”, in *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays*, ed. Raymond J. Ross and Joy Hendry (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press Ltd., 1986) 220, footnote 2.

¹⁶ The original version of this letter in the MacLean MSS was produced in typescript, with hand-written corrections by MacDiarmid. Otherwise the date of the letter and its text are identical to those published in *Hugh MacDiarmid: New Selected Letters* (2001).

¹⁷ CMG sought Sorley MacLean’s advice as to representative Gaelic poets for inclusion in the anthology he was compiling: *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*. Ultimately, MacLean provided MacDiarmid with translations of several Gaelic masterpieces, most notably *Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir*/ Duncan Ban Macintyre’s “*Moladh Beinn Dòbhrain*/ Praise of Ben Dorain” and *Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair*/Alexander MacDonald’s “*Birlinn Chlann-Raghnaill*/Birlinn of

hoped and forced me to concentrate on other matters first. But I have pretty well cleared my decks of these now and am ready to work double tides in order to complete the anthology¹⁸ by the contracted time. The bulk of the material must be in the hand of the publishers within the next fortnight but so long as that is done it won't matter although a few items are not delivered until a week or two later. I am immensely grateful to you for all your help and will be extremely glad if you will post off to me all you have ready right away. I am particularly anxious that the Gaelic side should be thoroughly well represented, but those poems you name – Macintyre's "Ben Dorain", MacDonald's *Moladh Moraig*, MacCodrum's "Mavis of Clan Donald", and MacDonald's *Birlinn* – seem to me an excellent start to that end. I should certainly like the others you mention by MacDonald, Rob Donn, Roderick Morrison, and Ross.¹⁹ And above all I am anxious to have Livingston represented by a characteristic piece, also Donald Sinclair.²⁰ Re the

Clanranald". MacDiarmid subsequently reworked MacLean's translations, versifying them in English, with the odd word in Scots or Gaelic, for publication in the anthology.

¹⁸ "*The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*, ed. Hugh MacDiarmid (London: Macmillan, 1940)." See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, eds., *NSL* 80.

¹⁹ "The Gaelic poets Duncan Ban Macintyre (1724-1808), Alasdair Mac Mhaighistir Alasdair (Alexander MacDonald) (c. 1700-70), Ian MacCodrum (1693-1779), Rob Donn MacAoidh (c. 1715-78), Uilleam Ros (William Ross) (1762-90) and Roderick Morrison (C. 1656-1714)." See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, eds., *NSL* 80.

²⁰ Here CMG refers to the Gaelic poets William Livingston (Uilleam MacDhun-léibhe) 1808-70 and Donald Sinclair (Dòmhnall Mac Na Ceàrdaich) 1885-1932. Livingston's anglicized surname is spelt variously without an "e" by MacDiarmid and MacLean and with the final "e" by other authors such as Derick Thomson. See MacDiarmid, ed., *The Golden Treasury* 408. All subsequent page

latter I still have some of his stuff in the Shetlands but there is no one there to look it out and send it on to you; the bulk I sent on to Sheriff MacMaster Campbell,²¹ but I will try at once to get hold of some of it for you. Have you seen Watson's book of Mary of the Songs?²² Is there anything there we could use? Also is there anything you know really good of by a living writer? I don't want to give the impression if I can help it that good Gaelic poetry is a thing of the past and that we have no one today worthily carrying on the great tradition. I wonder if there is anything we could use in young Aonghas Caimbeul for example?²³

references are to this first edition of the *Treasury* published in 1940. See also Thomson, *Companion* 164, and Black, *An Tuil* 736-37.

²¹ Campbell, John Macmaster (1859-1938). Born in Inverness. Campbell was one of the founders of the Glasgow Gaelic Society and of *An Comunn Gaidhealach* (The Gaelic Society). He also served as Sheriff-Substitute of Argyllshire. See Thomson, *Companion* 34.

²² "*Gaelic Songs of Mary Macleod*, tr. J. Carmichael Watson (London and Glasgow: Blackie & Son, 1934)." See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, eds., *NSL* 80.

Professor Watson taught Celtic Studies at Edinburgh University when MacLean was an undergraduate there and tried to arrange for MacLean to take an honours degree in Gaelic in addition to his honours in English. However, Moray House Teacher's Training College would not allow him to do both at the same time. See Angus Nicholson, "An Interview with Sorley MacLean," *Studies in Scottish Literature* 14 (1979): 26.

²³ "Aonghus Caimbeul (1908-49), an aspiring Gaelic poet, was not included in the anthology and seems only to have had one volume, *Gaelic Songs* (1943), published in his lifetime." See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, eds., *NSL* 80. Aonghus Caimbeul was also known by the nick-name "Am Bocsair" (the boxer), to distinguish him from his elder brother, also named Aonghus Caimbeul but nicknamed "Am Puilean" (no specific meaning in Gaelic). See Black, *An Tuil* 757; 762-63.

This is not a considered letter. I am just dashing it off immediately on receipt of yours to say how eager I am to have anything you can send right away and to take you at your word and enjoin all the speed-up you can possibly manage with regard to the rest. But there are other points I will mention when I write again in a day or two.

What a glorious Summer it has been! I hope you are in good form and having a thoroughly enjoyable holiday. Every kind regard,

Yours sincerely, C.M. Grieve

3. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, ff 73r-73v)

Churchton, Raasay, Skye

Undated [early August 1934]²⁴

Dear Mr. Grieve,

I send by this post a packet containing three poems. I hope they will suit your purposes. My translations are line and [sic] line and where possible, word by word. I have tried to give the exact meaning of the word; this I am afraid does

²⁴ Two remarks in the letter suggest that it was written in early August 1934. The first is MacLean's response regarding CMG's inquiry about J.C. Watson's book, *Gaelic Songs of Mary Macleod*, in the previous letter, dated 9 August 1934. The second is MacLean's comment on the summer weather, again in response to MacDiarmid's observation in the previous letter that it has been a "glorious Summer."

not convey the colour and associations of the word very well. I shall send some more, including “*The Birlinn*” in a few days.

With regard to Watson’s book[,] I think you might use any one or two of “*Griain ant-Saimh, An Golla am bu ghnàth le Mac Leòid*”, “*Fuinneog(?) Mhic Leòid*”, “*Cumha Mhic Leòid*.”²⁵ Watson told me before I left Edinburgh that he intended to work on the three early early women poets[:] *Diorbhail Nic a’Bhruthainn*,²⁶ *Sìlis na Ceapaich*²⁷ and *Mairead ni Lachluinn*,²⁸ and that if you wished he could send you selections from those. However I think their inclusion would depend on the amount of Gaelic material you included as I think that their historical importance to the development of Gaelic poetry is greater than their intrinsic importance. There is also of course *Iain Lom*²⁹ who could be represented. I also thought that if you wished I could send you one or two examples (fairly short) of the best poetically of the folk-song. Personally I think a

²⁵ Poems by *Màiri Mhór nan Oran* / Great Mary of the Songs published in *Gaelic Songs of Mary Macleod* and translated by J.C. Watson. See Joy Hendry, “The Man and His Work” in *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays* 11.

²⁶ *Diorbhail nic a’ Bhruthainn* / Dorothy Brown (c.1644). See Thomson, *Introduction* 92-93; 142.

²⁷ *Sìleas Na Ceapaich* (c.1660-c.1729) (Sileas MacDonald of Keppoch). See Derick S. Thomson, ed., *Gaelic Poetry in the Eighteenth Century: A Bilingual Anthology* (Aberdeen: The Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1993) 7.

²⁸ *Mairearad Nighean Lachainn* (c. mid-1660s-mid-17th century). See Thomson, *Introduction* 118; 141-42.

²⁹ *Iain Lom* / “Bare Iain” - John MacDonald, Bard of Keppoch (c.1620-c.1707) “The adjective *lom* has various senses, but surely it was applied to him because of his gift for the cutting, scathing phrase.” See Thomson, *Introduction* 118-27.

great deal of some of them, and I think they would be easier to translate than much of the other stuff.

Our summer has not been so glorious as yours; we have had Hebridean weather at its worst. With best wishes.

Yours sincerely, Sam Maclean.

4. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, ff 72r-72v)

Churchton, Raasay, Skye

Wednesday, 15th August [1934]³⁰

Dear Mr. Grieve,

I was awfully glad to get your letter last Saturday, and I [am] writing this hurried note to tell you that I shall send "*Moladh Moraig*", "*Ben Dorain*" and the Clan Donald "Mavis" by the next post that is Thursday's boat from Raasay. I cannot get them off this morning as I am just tied up[,] with very little time to catch the boat[,] in an exposition of the very difficult metrics of "*Ben Dorain*" and "*Morag*". But I shall post them today. The fact that I did not hear from you delayed my work a little as I thought that you were not in a great hurry for the stuff and for the last three weekends I was rather badly employed in purely

³⁰ The correct date for this letter was established by consulting the calendar for the common year 1934.

worldly affairs. But I shall send you "*The Birlinn*" etc in the course of the next few days. There is only one poem by Sinclair that I have read, a poem in *Voices from the Hills*. It is called "*Ros Aluinn*".³¹ I think it very fine. I have never seen any of Caimbeul's poems, and I am afraid that I don't know of any other modern Gaelic poetry worth while. Concerning Watson's book I shall speak when I send the first batch of poems to you today. Excuse my hurried scrawl. I have to catch the boat immediately. With best wishes.

Yours sincerely. Sam Maclean.

P.S. I thought that I could manage to get the poems away by this boat, but I will have to wait for the next.

5. *To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, f 2r; NSL)*

12 Petherton Road, London. N.5

31 August 1934

My dear Maclean

It is too bad my being so long in acknowledging your translations; but I have been absolutely up to the eyes. They are just the very thing I wanted and so far as I have gone everything seems clear enough. I have completed the

³¹ "*Ros Aluin*" by Donald Sinclair in John Macdonald, *Voices from the Hills* (Oban: *An Comunn Gaidhealach*, 1927).

translation of the “*Birlinn*” and am extremely pleased with it; you may not be so satisfied – but it is at least very close to your translation and at the same time a thoroughly good poem in the English (which were the two considerations I was striving after), while, also, I have been able to give such faint suggestions of the original structure and the assonance and other technical devices as are practicable in that antipathetic tongue. I will send you a copy as soon as I can get one typed. Two points only occur to me – in the second verse of the Ship Blessing is it the blessing of holy *Eruine* or holy *Gruine*³² that is invoked and (forgive my ignorance) who was she? And in the tearing sounds towards the end – *Tise, Taise*, -- are they rightly given just so;³³ I ask because you seem to have an accent over them.

I am busy now with the “Ben Dorain” which is a very very much more difficult proposition.

Excuse this very short note. But I could not delay longer in letting you know I’d got your letters all right, that they were just what I wanted, and that I am busy on them.

Every good wish. Yours, C.M. Grieve

³² Actually, the published version of this word reads “Triune”, likely a reference to the Holy Trinity, in keeping with the Gaelic tradition of invoking blessings at the beginning of a voyage. See MacDiarmid, *Golden Treasury* 65.

³³ In the published version of the “*Birlinn*”, these words read as “*Fise. Faise*”, an onomatopoeic Gaelic interjection referring to the noise of things breaking. See MacDiarmid, *Golden Treasury* 84.

6. To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)

(SML MS 2954.13, ff 4r-4v)

c/o Mackay, "Carn darach", Wentworth Street, 10 Sept. 1934

Portree, Skye

Dear Mr Grieve,

I am sorry after not replying to your letter as soon as I should, but for the last while I am been [sic] very busy. I have started teaching in Portree and have been distracted during the past fortnight by a great deal of all sorts of work. Regarding the other poems I promised to send you[,] I have done some, (MacIntyre's "Last Farewell to the Hills", three short ones of Ross, "*Iseabal Nic Aoidh*" by Rob Donn) and I shall send them on in a day or two.³⁴ I shall of course do as much as you like if you still have time to do more Gaelic translations. I am very glad to hear that you have done a translation of the "*Birlinn*" that satisfies you. I understand the greater difficulty that MacIntyre presents. As regards the points in the "*Birlinn*" the first word is "Triune", or "Trinity" (the Gaelic is "*Coimhedia*" = "co-dia" co-God.) My writing is so bad that a "T" easily becomes an "E". The onomatopoetic words near the end are "*Fise, Faise*"; they are meaningless words to express the sound. I am tremendously sorry that I have

³⁴ Duncan Ban Macintyre's "Last Leave of the Hills" and "The Praise of Ben Dorain" both appeared in *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*. Only one poem by William Ross, "Another Song", was included in *The Golden Treasury*. The anthology did not contain any of Rob Donn's poetry. See MacDiarmid, *Golden Treasury* 231-33; 43-58; 155-56.

not been able to send you more translations but if you still have time I shall be delighted to send as many more as you like as quickly as I can possibly manage. There is Buchanan,³⁵ of whom I could do some, and Morrison and others.³⁶ I suppose Watson too has done translations of those 17th century and early 18th cent. poetic women he was working on. I shall send on in a day or two one or two of Lingson which I have done.³⁷

with best wishes. Yours sincerely, Sam Maclean.

7. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*
(SML MS 2954.13, ff 5r-5v)

c/o Mackay, Wentworth St., Portree, Skye

4 January 1935

Dear Mr Grieve,

I was delighted to find on my going home for the Christmas holidays the present of your 'Selected Poems'. It is indeed a present to be proud of. I had long thought how imposing such a collection, comprising short lyrics from your

³⁵ Dugald Buchanan / *Dùghall Bochanan* (1716-68) *The Golden Treasury* contained two of his poems: "Omnia Vanitas" and an excerpt from "The Day of Judgement." See Thomson, ed. *Companion* 24-25. See also MacDiarmid, *Golden Treasury* 113-14; 304-05.

³⁶ *The Golden Treasury* did not include any poems by Roderick Morrison.

³⁷ Two poems by William Livingstone appeared in *The Golden Treasury*. These were "Ireland Weeping" and "Message to the Bard". See MacDiarmid, *Golden Treasury* 63-65; 327-31.

longer poems as well as from the short lyric collections, would be, but I was greatly struck when I saw the book itself. I realised that I had not fully appreciated the effect of the juxtaposition of such great lyrics.

What of the anthology of Scots poetry? I have been awaiting press notices of it but have seen none. You may be assured that if you want any more Gaelic translations to work on I will be delighted to send them. Since I came to teach to Portree in September I have been rather busy and after I had sent the "*Birlinn*" translation I thought that you would not have time to do more as I expected that the book was to appear at once. However[,] if the book has been delayed and if you have still time for more Gaelic pieces I should be delighted to send some.

With the best wishes for a happy and successful new year[.]

Yours sincerely. Sam Maclean.

8. *To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, ff 3r-3v)*

Whalsay Shetland Islands

23 January 1935

My dear Maclean,

I was glad to get your letter; I did not know you were working at Portree, and trust you are liking it. You won't have much time or energy for translating work, I am afraid. But I am anxious for whatever you can give me. The position

is that I have had to delay the *Golden Treasury* – but it must be completed within the next month or two now, and will be published in the Autumn. I do not know what texts you have handy, but I am anxious to have a poem of Ian Lom's, one of Livingston's, one of Donald Sinclair's and one of young Angus Campbell's, if we can hit on a good one. I'll send you MSS of some of Campbell's and of Sinclair's in a day or two; in the meantime I am sending Livingston's poems, and will be very glad indeed if you can let me have as soon as possible translations of a couple of typical poems of his (or of good passages from his longer poems) – particularly poems or passages which are markedly political and bring out to the full the quality of his nationalism and his Anglophobia. The translation of the "*Birlinn*", by the way, is appearing in the next issue of "The Modern Scot" (due out on 28th next) and simultaneously we are publishing it in a limited signed and numbered edition of 100 copies – a copy of which I will send you immediately it is available.³⁸ I have also completed the "Ben Dorain" poem – much more difficult to do than the "*Birlinn*" – and I am not quite so satisfied with certain bits of my rendering yet, tho' on the whole I think it is a good version.

If there is anything else that occurs to you – the text of which you have by you – which really ought if possible to be represented in the *Golden Treasury*, and can send me translations quickly now I will be extremely obliged.

³⁸ MacDiarmid's Scots translation of "*The Birlinn of Clanranald*" by Alisdair MacMhaighshstir Alasdair first appeared in the journal *The Modern Scot*, Vol 5, No 4, January 1934, pp. 230-47. It was subsequently published in a limited edition booklet by the journal's American editor/publisher, James Whyte. See Bold, ed. *The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984) 151. See also Bold, *MacDiarmid* 330, 333.

I am desperately busy having bitten off a great deal more than I can chew and being committed to no fewer than five books (exclusive of the *Golden Treasury*) for this Spring.

With every kind regard & good wish,

Yours, C.M. Grieve

9. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, ff 6r-7r)

Elgin Hostel, Portree, Skye

8 February 1935

Dear Grieve,

I am sorry that I have not managed to send you back [the] reviewer's letter by the first post. I have been delayed by pressure of work in this damned hostel and it was quite impossible for me to get time to reply to the Reviewer until today. Of course your letter did not reach me until the 5th or 6th of the month. However I hope it will be in time. I am terribly sorry to hear that Mrs Grieve and Mike and yourself are unwell.³⁹ I am really afraid that the Shetland climate is too severe for you – your present condition of health. It's a great pity you couldn't get a place in a milder quarter.

³⁹ CMG's second wife, Valda Grieve Trevlyn (née Rowlands), and their son, Michael. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 329; 280.

With regard to [the] reviewer's remarks he is in the same box as the rest of Gaelic scholars. As I have pointed out[,] the treatment of the Gaelic metrical question[,] esp. of stress in syllabic poetry[,] is hopelessly inadequate and esp. so in the case of poetry of the transition period such as MacDonald's is. Pages 1-4 of my remarks are indisputable I think. With regard to pages 5 and 6[,] there is the difficulty that you did make that mistake about *Aichill* and *Uaithne*.⁴⁰ I forget what I told you about it in my notes to the prose version of poem[,] but I am afraid that either I was careless in writing or that you mistook something. However[,] I think that I have covered your retreat in Page 5 quite well. You can[,] of course[,] use those remarks of mine on the Reviewer's letter in any way you choose. I hope you can read the writing alright [sic]. I have no type-writer and cannot use one, otherwise I would have typed it. However[,] I think you can make out of it a pretty imposing reply. I can't think who your reviewer is. Its piddling pedantry is quite typical of Gaelic scholarship on the whole. Of course if he has been fair in other respects you can modify my words esp. any abuse as you like, but take care that you get everything important I said in. I am prepared to argue my main contentions further with any man on earth. In the little point of *Aichill* and *Uaithne* I had of course to make a kind of honourable retreat.

⁴⁰ *Aicill* and *Uaithne* are technical terms on metrics especially older syllabic meters as practiced in the common cultural world of Gaelic Ireland and Scotland.

If you have further correspondence about it I shall try to be quicker in helping you. I am sorry I have not seen [the] review as I do not get Library Supplement⁴¹.

I hope that Mrs. Grieve and Mike are better and that your own general health is improving. It is a pity that you were not in Skye where the climate is much milder although this year we have had quite a lot of frost and snow. Give my best wishes to Dr. Orr.⁴²

Yours sincerely, Sam Maclean.

10. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, ff 8r-9r)

c/o Mackay, Wentworth Street,
Portree, Skye

16 February 1935

⁴¹ The Library Supplement was an annotated list of books sent out to schools. Books had to be provided after the 1918 *Education Act*. The Supplement was sent out by Holmes, the publisher, and included a list of “educational” fiction as well as a list of text books. The general public could borrow from the book boxes sent to the schools. See MacKay, email 25 July 2007.

⁴² Dr. David Orr was the resident medical practitioner on Whalsay in the Shetland Islands. At Helen Cruickshank’s urging, he offered to accommodate CMG and his family after their return to Scotland from London in 1933. However, plans altered with Orr’s marriage in May of that year. Ultimately, CMG rented a cottage at Sodom, just to the east of Symbister harbour. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 284; 291.

Dear Mr. Grieve,

I am sorry for being so long in sending you any stuff. I hope that the packet reaches you without delay. I have been dreadfully busy for the last fortnight or so and troubled by the imminence of inspectors and other evils. I hope that my delay has caused you no inconvenience.

I have seen your translation of the “*Birlinn*” in *The Modern Scot* and consider it wonderfully good. It is certainly far nearer the spirit of MacDonald than any translation of Gaelic poetry is to the spirit of the work translated, and as a poem there is of course no translation from Gaelic to be compared with it. All the Gaelic speaking people to whom I have shown it have expressed great approval. Knowing well the great difficulty of your task, I am really astonished at your success. I received a few days ago an enthusiastic letter from Davie,⁴³ who declares himself greatly stirred by a reading of it.

With regard to the poems I have sent this time[,] I hope you will approve of them. “Inverlochy”⁴⁴ and the MacKinnon⁴⁵ poem are very striking in their

⁴³ George Elder Davie (1912-2007), student of classics and philosophy at Edinburgh University, Scottish academic, friend to both Sorley MacLean and Hugh MacDiarmid. Davie published an important study of Scottish educational philosophy, *The Democratic Intellect*, in 1961. See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, eds., *NSL* 112. See also Robert R. Calder, “George Davie – Obituary” in *The Independent*, Online Edition, 29 March 2007.

⁴⁴ “The Battle of Inverlochy / *Oran air Latha Blàir Inbhir Lóchaidh eadar Clann Dòmhnail agus na Caimbeulaich*” by Iain Lom (John Macdonald, Bard of Keppoch). This was published in *The Golden Treasury*. See MacDiarmid, *Golden Treasury* 32-35.

⁴⁵ “To MacKinnon of Strath” by Iain Lom. This poem was published in *The Golden Treasury*. See MacDiarmid, *Golden Treasury* 97-99.

difference but both very characteristic of the two sides of Iain Lom. There is a great musical quality about the MacKinnon poem which will be difficult to reproduce in English. Perhaps the poems from Livingston are not so characteristic as a passage from a longer poem might be but I will look up some of his longer poems and try to hit on another passage as well. I am really sorry that I have not been all winter working for you[,] but since I did not hear from you in autumn (when you promised to send some of Sinclair)[,] I judged that you would have no further time to do translations. But now I shall be extremely delighted to send you stuff as long as you have time to make use of it.

Yours sincerely, Sam Maclean

P.S. I should be delighted if you could send any MSS of Sinclair's or Caimbeul's. I have read only one poem of Sinclair's[,] "*Ros aluinn*" in the *Voices from the Hills*. I shall send you a translation of it in a day or two. I have read nothing of Caimbeul.

11. *To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, f 4r)*

Whalsay Shetland Islands

19 February 1935

My dear Maclean,

I enclose copy of the "*Birlinn*" and hope you will like it. I did not see a copy of the proof of the preface and as an inevitable result annoying errors crept in – I have corrected these, as you will see, in the copy I send you. Let me know what you think; I took a few liberties with the text as the needs of English verse – translation required and there is certainly no serious departure – but you will know how to make the necessary allowances for things of that sort and I shall be very interested to have your verdict on the thing as a whole.

I hope you duly received the copy of Livingston's poems I sent you. I enclose one of Donald Sinclair's, and had meant also to enclose two or three of young Angus Campbell's but I can't put my hands on them at the moment.

Trust you are well & enjoying life.

All the best,

Yours, C.M. Grieve

12. *To Sorley Maclean (GL MS 29533, f 54r)*

Whalsay

[Spring 1935]⁴⁶

My dear Maclean,

⁴⁶ This brief note would seem to have been written in the spring of 1935 to accompany the copy of *Aonghus Caimbeul's* poems which CMG had promised to send to MacLean. In folio 63v of MS 29533, MacLean ascribes the letter to 1935.

Here are some of Campbell's poems which I have just dug out. I can't remember whether I sent you others before or not.

All the best.

Yours, C.M. Grieve

13. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, ff 65r-69r)

Churchton, Raasay, Skye

15th April [1935]⁴⁷

Dear Mr. Grieve,

I am really sorry for being so long in thanking you for the copy of "*The Birlinn*", which is indeed a splendid production. I have been terribly busy for the last month or so and I did not wish to write you until I had made a very close comparison with the original. With regard to the last poems I sent you, I hope you thought some of them worthwhile, and if you wish and have time for any more I shall be delighted to do others which may perhaps be better. However if you have no more time at present I shall be very pleased at any other time to help you with other Gaelic poems. But if you still have time for other translations

⁴⁷ This letter was likely written in 1935, as *The Birlinn of Clanranald* was published in *The Modern Scot* in January of that year and subsequently published in a limited edition booklet by its editor, James Whyte. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 330, 333.

for the anthology – e.g. folk poems – I should be very pleased to send you translations at very short notice.

Subsequent readings and close comparison with the original have fully confirmed my first impression of your translation of “*The Birlinn*”. I fully appreciate the difference of opinion you have with Mr. Lorne Campbell⁴⁸ concerning MacDonald’s capacity and I consider “*The Birlinn*” a very great poem, but nevertheless I have not lost my initial surprise at the wonderfully good translation you have done. You have kept remarkably close to the original in actual meaning, and I admit that considering the exceedingly technical nature of much of the poem, esp. in the disposition[,] the task was a very difficult one. I know no verse translation of a Gaelic poem so close to the original in actual meaning as yours and certainly yours has other merits which make comparison with it of any other verse translation of a Scottish Gaelic poem that I know quite impertinent. My first surprise was at the way you got MacDonald’s rhythm which I had expected would be your most difficult task. The ship blessing and the arms blessing are reproduced metrically in a splendid way[,] but of course the distinctive merits of your translation are not fully evident until the Incitement to Rowing (of course the blessings are indifferent poetry in MacDonald). Your translation of the Incitement is really amazing. It preserves the movement, rhythm, resonance, colour and sensuous quality of the original wonderfully. The

⁴⁸ John Lorne Campbell of Cana (1906-96). Gaelic author, editor, and tradition bearer; extensive collector of stories, poems, and songs from the Gaelic oral tradition. See Thomson, *Companion* 34. See also William Gillies, “John Lorne Campbell,” online obituary.

spirit, rhythm, sensuous quality, the whole quality of MacDonald is splendidly attained in e.g.

Under the great measured onstrokes
 Of the oar-lunges
 That confound the indrawn billows
 With their plunges[,]
 While the shrewd blades of the white woods
 Go cleaving
 The tops of the valleyed blue-hills
 Shaggily heaving. etc. etc.

How you managed to get the resonance and rhythm so splendidly as you got in such a passage as that really amazes me. The whole of “The Incitement” is splendid.

The *iorram*⁴⁹ is in my opinion perhaps the least good part of your translation. I suppose the reason is that in this part you have not caught the rhythm as you did in the rest of the poem. I expect of course that the strophic measure which depends almost wholly on stress and assonance and not on syllabic structure is far more difficult to reproduce in English. I am afraid that perhaps my note on the strophic metre may have put you wrong. I mentioned I expect that the number of syllables in the phrase were usually the same. Well, that is accidental not essential. The essential thing is the stress and assonance in strophic metre. As a matter of fact however I think you got the rhythm of the

⁴⁹ “[I]orram or rowing song.” See Thomson, *Introduction* 74.

long phrases very well, but in the short phrases with their penultimate stress and assonance you were not so successful. I think that the chief reason is that the penultimate stress in the short phrase (which is assonated throughout the poem) is so very strong. Where you got the penultimate stress in the short phrase you got the rhythm of the whole remarkably – e.g.

Row as one, cleanly, clearly;

Through flesh-thick waves cut sheerly;

A job that's not done wearily

Nor snáil-wise.

Except for those short phrases with their very strong penultimate stress you have got the strophic movement really well. In sensuous quality the translation of the *iorram* is very good although it is perhaps not so good in that as the rest of the poem[,] for instance an occasional want of concreteness as in “So all sea-problems set yet be, more than met.” That is of course only a very occasional defect. The sensuous quality is magnificently got in verses like “Let her oak go skelping through.”

The translation of the disposition of the sailors with its nautical technicalities must have been exceedingly difficult. You have kept remarkably close to the original meaning. (Of course parts of the description here suffer from the usual Gaelic redundancy in the use of many words of apparently little difference in meaning. No doubt however many differences of meaning and colour exist which the best modern Gaelic scholar cannot appreciate owing to the decline in the speaking of the language.) The closeness in actual meaning that

you have attained is remarkable when one considers how very closely you have kept to the spirit of the whole and how well you have suggested the original rhythm. I consider such lines as

Who hearing the shaggy surges

Come roaring

Her prow expertly to the rollers

Keeps shoring;

remarkable in faithfulness to the original in movement and general sensuous colour. This is true of your translations of all the dispositions of the sailors.

The translation of “The Voyage” is really splendid. The spirit of the whole is exceedingly well reproduced, the vigour, the verve, the concrete shall I say realist, phantasy of the thing is very well got over. What a confusion MacDonald and your translation must be to our “Twilightists”⁵⁰ and their latter-day successors! I think you have apprehended the changes in movement and in general sensuous quality remarkably, e.g. in the movement and sensuous effect of

⁵⁰ Gaelic scholar Derick Thomson describes “The Celtic Twilight style” as being “derived from a false idea of Gaelic literature, which is objective, concrete and free from mysticism. In place of the robust heroes of Gaelic mythology and tales, ‘Celtic Twilight’ gives us the rather wan and ethereal young men and women who appear in Pre-Raphaelite paintings.” Sorley MacLean expressed a similar view in many of the papers he delivered to the Gaelic Society of Inverness. However, this was not a purely Scottish phenomenon. The term “Celtic Twilight” is also a reference from the Yeatsian Irish literary revival and refers to the early Yeats story collection of that name and the style of much of his early poetry. Thomson qtd. in Christopher Whyte, ed. *Somhairle MacGill-Eain / Sorley MacLean: Dàin do Eimhir* (Glasgow: The Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2002) 159. See also William Gillies, “The Poet as Critic” in *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays*, 185-99, and Ann Dooley, “Report”.

Now they hoisted the speckled sails
 Peaked and close-wrought,
 And stretched out the stubborn shrouds
 Tough and taut
 To the long resin-red shafts
 Of the mast.

and the very different movement and sensuousness of

The sea [put]⁵¹ on his grim rugging
 Slashed [and] sore [rent]
 That rough-mapped mantle, a weaving
 Of loathsome torrents.

Both are equally well reproduced in their very different kinds. Also e.g.

The wild swelth and the pounding waves
 And the ship's nose
 Scattering their white brains callous
 Through the billows.

There are, by the way, one or two mistakes for which I am directly responsible
 e.g. Page 18. "Yet should [perhaps]⁵² the prop be sundered." I did not know nor
 could I find in a dictionary the word "*abhsadh*" which is a technical word for the
 shortening of sails, so the sense is missed. It should be last. When the sail-

⁵¹ The published version of the poem reads "The sea pulled on his grim rugging / Slashed with sore rents, . . ." See MacDiarmid, *Golden Treasury* 80.

⁵² The published version of the poem reads "Yet should perchance the prop be sundered / It may be stopped!" See MacDiarmid, *Golden Treasury* 76.

shortening was proclaimed it should stop it. I did not discover the mistake until a few days ago. There are only one or two others and they are of very little importance. I should however be glad if you could send me copies of your other translations before publication so that I could correct such mistakes of my own which show in your translation. There is for instance a wrong interpretation in the last verse of "The Mavis of Clan Donald"!

The great success of your translation of "*The Birlinn*" has made me very keen to see the others. I fully appreciate the greater difficulty of "*Ben Dorain*", and I look forward very much to your translations of the other poems. I have not seen any review of your translation of "*The Birlinn*", but I have heard that Wm Power referred to it in high terms in *The Daily Record*. I assure you that you need not be perturbed by anything that the Gaelic scholars may say. Which of them in Scotland has produced a piece of criticism worth mentioning? The best of them are good grammarians[,] not literary men. And which of them has produced a verse translation of a Gaelic poem that is not beneath contempt? Very likely those who hailed Mrs. Kennedy Fraser's fooleries⁵³ as good poetic reproductions of their Gaelic originals will dislike your translations. They will also

⁵³ Marjory Kennedy-Fraser (1857-1930), Scottish singer and musician. Both MacLean and MacDiarmid felt that the renditions of Gaelic song published in her 1909 collection, *Songs of the Hebrides*, served only to sentimentalize Gaelic culture. In their view, this tendency towards mediocrity was a characteristic shared by other "Celtic Twilightists." See Whyte, *Dàin do Eimhir* 159. See also Thomson, *Companion* 142; Hugh MacDiarmid, "Mrs. Kennedy-Fraser and the Songs of the Hebrides" in *Contemporary Scottish Studies*, ed. Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995) 314-22; and Sorley MacLean, "Realism in Gaelic Poetry," *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 37(1934-36): 80-114.

dislike Alexander MacDonald if they care to read him. I am exceedingly proud to be associated with you in such a work.

Yours truly, Sam Maclean.

14. *To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, ff 10r-10v)*

Whalsay

Friday⁵⁴

My dear Maclean

Many thanks for your kind letter received today. I was worrying in absence of acknowledgment as to whether you'd duly received the "*Birlinn*" book or not, as I know one I sent to a friend in London did not arrive at his address and the P.O. people haven't traced it yet. I've been on the point of writing you several times but have lacked energy – I've been badly off colour for several weeks and am in arrears with work on various contracts. Happily I'm picking up again now and hope to get fairly well abreast of my commitments by the end of the month. I'm going South then – speaking in Manchester University on 10th May – and then straight back for a month's clear work on the *Anthology* to finish it. That includes finishing the various Gaelic translations of which I can secure

⁵⁴ Although the letter is undated, the MS contains a pencil annotation which reads "?1935". Likely it was written in April 1935, as CMG mentions a forthcoming trip "South" and he spoke at Manchester University 10 May 1935. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 331.

satisfactory enough versions to include. I have had a lot of congratulations – from well-known Gaelic scholars too – on the “*Birlinn*” and it has been favourably reviewed, in *The Liverpool Post*, *The Glasgow Herald*, and elsewhere.⁵⁵ I’ll see to the correction when it appears in the *Anthology* of the “abdsadh” [sic] lines, which I can easily effect. I’ll send you copies of the others before they are published. There’s plenty of time for that after I return from Manchester – the main translation is, I think, to appear in the *Modern Scot*, not, however, in the current issue which is almost due, but in the issue of three months’ hence. The last ones you sent are all good and though they are in some ways hard nuts to crack so far as rendering them into English is concerned I think I’ll manage most of them as soon as I can apply an undivided mind to the task. But do please send me any more you can, as soon as possible. If I can’t manage them – or all of them – for the *Anthology*, at least they’ll come in for other purposes. If we can keep going at it we might before the end of July or August accumulate a sufficient number of representative poems to put together a Scottish Gaelic Anthology – printing the Gaelic texts and the verse translations on opposite pages, and equipping the volume with an introductory essay and adequate notes. I think I could find a publisher without difficulty willing to issue that next Spring, which would give us time to do the job thoroughly and have each of the essential poets represented by at least one piece.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ See footnote 38.

⁵⁶ Unfortunately, due to MacDiarmid’s ill health and later to the disruption of WWII, this anthology never appeared.

I need not tell you how appreciative and grateful I am for your collaboration and though I know you are otherwise busy, as I am myself, I feel that in this way we can do extremely useful work together and ought to make the very most of the opportunity we can.

All the best.

Yours, C.M. Grieve

15. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, ff 76r-76v)

Elgin Hostel, Portree, Skye

2nd May [1935]⁵⁷

Dear Mr. Grieve,

I was very pleased to get your last letter; it took some time to reach me however as I had left home before it arrived. As you may see by the address I am now staying in an institution, a hostel for boys from outlying districts at the school. It is rather an unsatisfactory place for work but I had more or less to enter it as there was no other teacher available.

I shall be very glad to send you some more translations which will reach you about the 10th or so, when you are ready for them. I think your idea of

⁵⁷ The correct date for this letter was established by consulting the calendar for the common year 1935.

another volume is a good one and I am prepared to do my very best for it. For instance, I could devote the whole of the summer vacation or the greater part of it to it and I shall certainly do as much as I can in the meantime. I am looking forward very much to see the "*Ben Dorain*" translation; it must have been an exceedingly difficult task as the very syntax of the thing is so remote from anything in English; indeed, it is difficult enough to put into Gaelic prose. I shall send a few translations as soon as I can.

Wishing you the very best success,

Yours sincerely, Sam Maclean

16. *To Sorley Maclean (GL MS 29533, ff 9r-9v)*

Whalsay

Friday⁵⁸

My dear Sam,

I just got back here on Thursday – after three weeks in Manchester, Glasgow, and Edinburgh, where – the last-named – I saw Aitken, Caird, and the others.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Although this letter is undated, there is an annotation in pencil, most likely written by Sorley Maclean, in the top right-hand corner of the page. It reads "?1935". As MacDiarmid's visit to Manchester, Glasgow, and Edinburgh occurred in May 1935, this was likely written in late May, early June of that year. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 331.

Your letter giving me the welcome news that you were willing to go on working with me with the aim later of publishing as our joint work an anthology of Gaelic poems accompanied by English verse translations⁶⁰ reached me in Glasgow, and on Wednesday here I received your translation of Angus Campbell's "*Amadan a' chridhe*"⁶¹ – which I like immensely and will do my very utmost to furnish with a good English verse rendering.

I'll be working steadily now on all the translations and send you my versions as I complete them. In the meantime I am sending you as promised a proof of the "Ben Dorain" as it will appear in the next *Modern Scot*. Will you please read it over and return it to me within the next week or so with any corrections or comments that occur to you?

I trust you are in good form and finding your work agreeable. It won't be long till the summer holidays now. Where are you going to spend them? At home, on Raasay? I suppose you wouldn't care to come up here for a week or

⁵⁹ William (Bill) Russell Aitken (1913-98), bibliographer of CMG's works, Reader in Librarianship at Strathclyde University, editor and literary agent. Aitken was another undergraduate befriended by CMG in the 1930s. He visited the Grieve family in Whalsay in 1937. James Bowman Caird (1913-90), another Edinburgh University undergraduate who, along with George Davie, introduced MacLean to MacDiarmid's work and to the poet himself. See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, eds. *NSL* 537; 539. See also "Aitken Collection", *Special and Named Printed Collections in the National Library of Scotland*, National Library of Scotland online catalogue.

⁶⁰ This project never came to fruition.

⁶¹ Gaelic for "The Heart's Fool". Campbell's *Òrain Ghàidhlig/Gaelic Songs*, a collection of 18 poems, was published in 1943. See Black, *An Tuil* 763. See also Gilleasbuig Ferguson, email 6 August 2007.

two; we'd be very glad to have you, and you and I might be able to do a little intensive work together.⁶²

All the best,

Yours, C.M. Grieve

P.S.

You haven't met Angus Campbell, have you? If you have – and could run over the bulk of his work and translate a few passages that specially appeal to you, and take a few notes as to his technical qualities, range of subject matter, etc., we might do an article about him for *The Modern Scot*. What do you think?

17. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, f 85r)

Elgin Hostel, Portree, Skye

4th June [1935]⁶³

Dear Grieve,

⁶² This invitation would seem to indicate the chronology of the letter as belonging to the early summer of 1935, prior to Maclean's visit to Whalsay in the first week of August of that year.

⁶³ In 1935 MacLean was a resident supervisor in the Elgin Hostel which housed students who lived outside Portree. In this letter he mentions marking history exams for the whole county, a fact he reiterates in his next letter of 13 June 1935. See Hendry, "The Man and His Work" 17.

Sorry for being so long in answering your letter. I also got your note with poems which I shall deliver to the best of my ability in a day or two. Only, not knowing the tunes, I shall have to consult a musical friend on the 3rd point before I send you the notation. I have been desperately busy having had to do correction in history for the whole county examinations.

I am very glad to hear that you can manage to come to Raasay this year and of course we shall all be very glad if Mrs. Grieve can come too. I should of course have asked her if I had thought there was any possibility of her coming. If you cannot find a suitable parking place for Mike by all means bring him to Raasay. As for myself I have made no plans at all for my holiday. It begins on the 9th of July and ends by 1st Sept. Indeed I am considering staying in Raasay all the time and at any rate I would not think of going anywhere if you can come. So if you can come any time between 9th July and 1st Sept. I shall be in Raasay. If I go away at all I shall make no arrangements beforehand so that I can suit my going away to your convenience. And really if I do go away one part of the holiday will be as good as another. So the time that will suit you will certainly suit me. With regard to my mother she is in Glasgow at present.⁶⁴ She has got very much better but is at present under observation with a specialist. I have had a note from her tonight that she has been x-rayed but has not got the result of it yet. I shall write you when I hear what the result of it is. But I really think she will be all right as she is now quite strong again.

⁶⁴ Christina MacLean (née Nicholson) (*Ciorstaidh Shomhairle Mhóir Iain 'ic Shomhairle Phìobaire 'ic Iain 'ic Eóghain*, 1886-1974). See Black, *An Tuil* 764.

I am sorry for my delay. Excuse hurry of this note. I shall send poems in a day or two. I am delighted to hear you are now so well. Give my regards to Dr Orr.

Yours sincerely, Sam Maclean.

18. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, ff 10r-13r)

Elgin Hostel, Portree, Skye

13 June 1935

Dear Mr. Grieve,

I hope my delay with the "*Ben Dorain*" proofs has not inconvenienced you. I have been desperately busy recently having had to correct exam papers for all Inverness-shire[,] but now I have got over that.

I think the translation wonderfully good, although not in the whole so good as that of the "*Birlinn*". You have got the general spirit of the thing wonderfully well and you have brought out very well the internal description of physical things in which "*Ben Dorain*" is so remarkable. What makes the translation not so good as that of the "*Birlinn*", I think, is the fact that it is I suppose quite impossible to suggest the rhythm and metre of "*Ben Dorain*" as well as you suggested that of

the “*Birlinn*”. In the short line translation of the *Siubhal*⁶⁵ you have been wonderfully successful and very near the Gaelic rhythm. I don’t think it would be at all possible to get the rhythm of the *Crunn-lùth*⁶⁶ in English; I think your reproduction of it is as near as could be got however. In Gaelic there are really only two stresses in the *Crunn-lùth* line, the 2nd or 3rd syllable and the antepenultimate syllable. It is that antepenultimate stress that carries with it assurance that I think would be impossible to reproduce in English. In the *Urlar*⁶⁷ there is one mistake in your rhythm; that is that every fourth line of the *Urlar* has only one stress[,] that being in the antepenultimate syllable. Except for that fourth line you have got the *Urlar* rhythm well. In general you have reproduced the sinuous quality peculiar to “*Ben Dorain*” very well.

I have marked one or two slips in letters e.g. “F” for “T” in *Coine Fraoich*.⁶⁸ There are one or two things that I should have told you of, first, I did not give you quite the whole poem as I had only the *Sàr Obair* edition of the poem⁶⁹ when I was translating it. Consequently there is a hiatus in two places, first at the

⁶⁵ *Siubhal* is the variation movement in *Ceòl Mór* or classical pipe music which alternates with the *Urlar* or Ground movement. See Thomson, *Introduction* 171.

⁶⁶ “The *crunluath/crunludh* is the intricately grace-noted climax to the classical pipe composition.” See Thomson, *Introduction* 317, note 26.

⁶⁷ The *Urlar* represents the basic melody or Ground movement in *Ceòl Mór*. See Thomson, *Introduction* 171.

⁶⁸ This reads as “Corrie *Fraoich*” or heather corrie in the third line of the *Urlar* in the published translation of “The Praise of Ben Dorain.” See MacDiarmid, *Golden Treasury* 55.

⁶⁹ “John Mackenzie, [ed.], *Sar Obair nam Bard Gaelach* (1877).” See Thomson, *Introduction* 318, note 41.

beginning of the 2nd *Urlar*, which in the full edition has a number of lines before “the Hind as she should be Is in the forest” and secondly there are about 20 lines missed out in the *Crunn-luth* between – “and the hail from the barrel is spent” and – “It was well loved [?] by the quality.”

There is one mistake in [the] technical sense, that is in the lines – “and the peg is drawn out The butt iron’s kick to relent.” readily [sic]⁷⁰ The mistake is due to my misunderstanding of technical matters. The exact source of the passage is – “the finger joint would be on the trigger, by which would be bent the spring that would give an unfailing blow (kick) to the man aiming it.” Perhaps it is not worth changing; the mistake is due to the fact that the word “rùlan” was misunderstood by me, that I thought “cerum-earrd” was “butt-iron” not “spring”, and that the word “tarruin” used for “trigger” (_ _)⁷¹ was “drawing”. Perhaps it is not worth changing.

I should be very glad to go to see to [sic] Shetland in summer and I thank you very much for the kind invitation. Apart from the pleasure to myself, I think we might get some good work done. I am getting my holiday about the 10th of July but I shall have to remain in Raasay about a week after that because I am expecting an Edinburgh friend up for a few days then, but if it suited you I would be delighted to come to Sheltand about the 20th of July or so. If this friend is unable to come up to Raasay, as I think may happen, I could come sooner.

Caird is at present spending a week in Portree, having finished his finals and I

⁷⁰ The word “readily” appears between “relent” and “The mistake.” It is inserted above the line of handwritten text and under the words “drawn out” in the MS.

⁷¹ This word in the MS is illegible.

see him daily. I shall write soon regarding one or two points in the other poems which I sent you.

Thanks very much for the invitation which I shall be very glad to accept.

Yours sincerely. Sam Maclean.

P.S. I have not met Campbell, but at any rate I am not very sanguine about his stuff. The poem I sent you was the only good among those you sent me and I really think that a translation of it[,] even in prose[,] might make it seem better than it is. The form of it is really poor and undistinguished and conventional, although the thought is better; the rest of those you sent me have no distinction at all. I am afraid that Campbell is not of much consequence, but perhaps he has better stuff than the rest of the poems you sent me.

19. *To Sorley Maclean (GL MS 29533, ff 5r-6r; NSL)*

Whalsay

21 June 1935

My dear Maclean,

Many thanks for yours to hand yesterday. I note the various little points you raise. What you say of the translation generally pretty well expresses my own feeling about it. I am glad that, on the whole, you think so well of it. I am not

bothering about changing the lines about the butt-iron's kick for the *Modern Scot*. But I'll put this right later on for the *Anthology*.

My wife and I are extremely pleased you're coming up and will expect you about the 20th of July or thereabouts. But send me a wire as soon as you know when the boat you are coming by is due in at Lerwick. The North Isles steamer only comes up from Lerwick twice a week and if it so happens that you don't reach Lerwick the night prior to one of these sailings you might have to stay (if so, stay at the Grand Hotel) a couple of nights – but, on the other hand, I might know of a means of getting you a lift up in one of the fishing boats and thus obviate the delay in Lerwick, or failing that I might come down and meet you in Lerwick. We'll be looking forward eagerly to seeing you.

Sorry Campbell does not seem as promising as I had hoped. I'd give a good deal to know any young Gaelic poet with a big intellectual background.⁷² Campbell, I take it, is quite untutored; probably since he is so young he could be influenced and developed a good deal if one were in close touch with him and had time to devote – provided, of course, he were of the temperament to welcome and profit by such intercourse.

You'll see I'm standing for the Edinr. rectorial.⁷³

Yours, C.M.G.

⁷² Ironically, CMG was writing to just such a poet, although Sorley MacLean did not publish his first volume of work, a joint collaboration with the poet Robert Garioch entitled *17 Poems for 6d*, until January of 1940. See Black, *An Tuil* 765.

⁷³ This was one of numerous occasions in CMG's life when he ran as a political candidate. "MacDiarmid came bottom of the poll in the Edinburgh University Rectorial Election that October [1935]." See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 338.

P.S. Bring up any Gaelic poetry books you have – I haven't any here just now.⁷⁴

20. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*
(SML MS 2954.13)

Elgin Hostel, Portree, Skye

Wednesday, 17th [July 1935]⁷⁵

Dear Grieve,

Sorry for the delay in sending those translations. I have been finding some difficulty with regard to your third requirement but I shall send what I can do in a day or two. Hope my delay is not an inconvenience!

Yrs, Sam Maclean.

21. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*
(SML MS 2954.13, f 14r)

⁷⁴ "Shortly after Sorley MacLean's visit, CMG was admitted to Gilgal Hospital, Pethshire." See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 96.

⁷⁵ The correct date for this letter was established by consulting the calendar for the common year 1935.

Churchton, Raasay, Skye

Wednesday, 17 July [1935]

Dear Mr. Grieve,

I expect to leave Raasay for Shetland next Monday. I don't know yet when I shall arrive or whether I better go by Aberdeen or Wick[,] but I shall find out when I get to Kyle of Lochalsh. At any rate[,] I shall wire you when I find out when the boat arrives at Lerwick. I shall bring all the Gaelic books that I have suitable.

Yours sincerely, Sam Maclean.

22. *To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, f 53r)*

Whalsay,

Wednesday

[Late July/Early August 1935]⁷⁶

My dear MacLean,

Many thanks for telegrams etc. Hope you have had a decent journey.

There may be a chance of a "lift up" to Whalsay on Thursday afternoon by one of

⁷⁶ Sorley MacLean visited the Grieve family in Whalsay, Shetland, during the first week of August 1935. He stayed in the family cottage at Sodom, and while there, he and CMG made a trip over to West Linga with CMG's young son, Michael. See Bold, *MacDiarmid: Christopher Murray* 332. This letter from CMG, including instructions on how to travel up to Whalsay, was likely sent in late July, early August 1935.

the drifters or motor boats. Ask along the quayside. It could be cheaper to give them a tip instead of coming up by the steamer, "The Earl of Shetland," while – failing the foregoing, you'll get on Friday.

Yours, Grieve

23. *To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, ff 55r-56v)*

Isle of Whalsay

15 September 1935

Dear MacLean,

I should have written you before – but have been so dreadfully worried – and busy – Christopher collapsed the day after you left and went down to the Dr. Orr's – on the following Tuesday night. Orr gave me no hope so I wired F.G. Scott⁷⁷ to meet us in Aberdeen and immediately got Christopher down. God! What a journey. I'll never forget it. He is now in a nursing home⁷⁸ and the Drs. give him a 30% chance of recovery – they say it's "complete nervous exhaustion" – poor fellow – he's down to just 8 sts. I did not think he was so emaciated – did you?

⁷⁷ Francis George Scott (1880-1958), Scottish composer, former teacher and close friend of Hugh MacDiarmid.

⁷⁸ With the help of F.G. Scott, MacDiarmid was admitted to Gilgal Nursing Home, part of the Murray Royal Hospital in Perth on August 17, 1935, where he was treated for nervous exhaustion. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 333-34.

I've been back a fortnight and have been kept busy soothing irate publishers.⁷⁹ Please!

Last week the news was fairly satisfactory. They had made various tests etc. and could find nothing organically wrong – also that he'd picked up a bit improving the last three or four days – the previous week he'd been very ill – but I suppose he will be up and down – one can really expect nothing else – but it is so worrying.

Michael still talks about you and calls you “my big man.” He's still a little devil.

By the way, I'm awfully sorry I did not post on the letter that came for you sooner – I hope it contained nothing important – forgive me!

Shall I send the book you sent – back to you – or shall I hang on to it for a few weeks until I see what is happening?

Don't you hate being back at school again – after such a long holiday – it must be pretty awful.

My kindest regards.

Yours sincerely[,] Valda Grieve

Will let you know how things go.

24. To Valda Grieve (SML MS 2954.13, ff 88r-89v)

⁷⁹ Probably Valda is referring to the extensive changes required for two works MacDiarmid had submitted to Routledge earlier that year. These were *Scottish Eccentrics*, and *What Lenin Has Meant to Me*, later renamed *Red Scotland*. This latter work was never published. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 331-32; 339.

Elgin Hostel, Portree, Skye

24 September 1935

Dear Mrs. Grieve,

I got your letter which was delayed at Raasay a day or two ago. I am terribly sorry to hear that Mr. Grieve is as bad as he is. I had heard from Stuart,⁸⁰ one of the teachers here, who was in Edinburgh at the end of August that Mr. Grieve was in the south. Stuart thought that he was staying with Whyte⁸¹ in St. Andrews[,] so I thought that he might not be very bad as he had intended to go south at any rate. I was greatly upset to hear that he is in such a serious condition. What a terrible time he must have had and is still having and what a terrible [time] you must be having too! I cannot understand how he managed to be as he was when I was in Shetland. How did he manage to have an interest in anything when he was suffering as he was? I hope he will get better – he had a strong constitution[,] that should make a great difference. I am glad to hear that your last reports of him were better and I hope that that progress will continue.

⁸⁰ Jack Stuart was a friend from MacLean's undergraduate days at Edinburgh and a fellow teacher at Portree High School. Stuart's elder brother Ellis, who had played shinty with MacLean at Edinburgh University, introduced the two. Jack Stuart suggested to MacLean that they consider joining the International Brigade during the Spanish Civil War though neither one was able to fight in Spain due to personal obligations at home in Scotland. He also introduced MacLean to the poet Robert Garioch Sutherland with whom MacLean jointly published his first collection of poetry, *Seventeen Poems for Sixpence*. See Hendry, "The Man and His Work" 17-18.

⁸¹ James Whyte, editor of *The Modern Scot*.

What a terrible thing it would be for everything that is worthwhile in Scotland if anything happened to him!

You must be having a very unhappy time in Shetland just now. Whereabouts is Mr. Grieve? Is it in Edinburgh or St. Andrews? I only wish I were in the south just now so that I could see him. You must have had very bad trouble about all those books due for publication this year. If there is any way in which I could possibly help you tell me and I shall be very glad to do anything I can in any way. But I am so cut off up here and so far away that I seem remote from everything. There is no way at all in which I could get down south before Christmas.

As far as myself is concerned[,] I am having a very thin time just now. I am now back in Portree for three weeks and am kept working pretty hard and see nothing worth doing around me. I was never so fed up and despairing and have never felt myself so futile as I do just now.

Never mind about that book. I intended Mr. Grieve to have it at any rate. It is not worth posting back to anybody even if I wanted it again. It was all right about that letter. There was nothing in it of any consequence at all.

I hope I shall hear better news soon. I have not had word from Caird or Davie for ages. I shall write them and they will tell me how Mr. Grieve is getting on. Thanks very much for your letter. You must have a tremendous amount to do and think of just now. How did you manage to write me? I shall never forget the stay I had with you. My love to Mike. I thought he would have forgotten me by now. Regards to Dr. Orr.

Yours sincerely, Sam Maclean.

25. To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, ff 57r-57v)

Isle of Whalsay

[2 October 1935]⁸²

S. MacLean, Esq.

Elgin Hostel, Portree, Skye

Dear MacLean,

Thanks for your kind letter. Christopher[,] I'm glad to say[,] has made a remarkably rapid recovery since I last wrote you – and I'm expecting him back tomorrow – it seems too good to be true. The Orrs would rather he stayed in a month or six weeks longer – but you know how obstinate he can be – he hand washing smalls would he truly be glad of a few weeks extra rest - With a struggle I managed to get the proofs of *Scottish Eccentrics*⁸³ and *Stony Limits* poems – corrected and away – a bit late but still. *Red Scotland* I'm afraid proved too much and it is being held over until January – a pity in view of this last month's political

⁸² This letter was likely written 2 October 1935, as Valda Grieve states that she is expecting CMG the next day. He was discharged from Gilgal Hospital on 3 October; he traveled to Edinburgh and subsequently took a steamer from Leith to Shetland. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 336.

⁸³ Hugh MacDiarmid, *Scottish Eccentrics* (London: Routledge, 1936).

events – and it would have been nice to have it out for the Rectorial.⁸⁴ I saw R.M. when in Edinburgh⁸⁵ – also had a letter from him last week – he seems very hopeful for the O.P.⁸⁶ He was up the weekend before last and saw the committees and he's now predicting (_ _)⁸⁷ as he's come off. I do hope things are happier with you – you have all my sympathy.

Sincerely, Valda Grieve

26. To Valda Grieve (SML MS 2954.13, ff 90r-90v)

Elgin Hostel, Portree, Skye

14 October 1935

Dear Mrs. Grieve,

⁸⁴ MacDiarmid had hoped to see *Red Scotland* published by Routledge prior to his running as a candidate in Edinburgh University's Rectorial Election in October 1935. Unfortunately, Routledge found the MS to be too controversial and the work was never published in its entirety as a book. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 331; 339.

⁸⁵ Roland Eugene Muirhead (1868-1964): Scottish nationalist who was extensively involved in the Scottish Home Rule Association [SHRA], the National Party of Scotland [NPS] and the Scottish National Party [SNP]; friend and supporter of CMG who had supposedly funded the latter's attempt to repatriate the Stone of Scone in April 1934. See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 553. See also Bold, *MacDiarmid* 317; 320-21.

⁸⁶ This would appear to be Valda's abbreviation for "[t]he Oban Project to launch a paper in Oban which would employ MacDiarmid and bring the family down to Oban from Whalsay – this project was never realised." See Beth Junor, ed., *Scarcely Ever Out of My Thoughts: The Letters of Valda Trevlyn Grieve to C.M. Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)* (Edinburgh: Word Power Books, 2007) 51; 63.

⁸⁷ This word is illegible in the MS.

I am awfully glad to get your post-card. It is splendid that Mr. Grieve has made such a good recovery. It must be a tremendous relief to you after the terrible time you have had. I do hope he will take good care of himself for a while and run no risk of going down again.

I am looking forward very much to the Rectorial and I hope it will go well[,] but those medicals are always such a draw-back. However[,] I think the chances are quite good in view of the apparent split in the Tory vote. It is a pity that *Red Scotland* is not to be out. By the way, I saw *The Eccentrics*,⁸⁸ *The Wolf*[,]⁸⁹ and *The Hymn to Lenin and Other Poems*⁹⁰ among a bit of forthcoming autumn books in last week's *New Statesman*. I have two brothers in Edinburgh just now [-] one at the university. They will be of some help for the Rectorial. I wish I were down there myself just now. Meanwhile I am just existing here. A day's teaching makes one unfit for anything really active at night. I am busy trying to keep myself together from going to pieces altogether. I want [to] get out of this hostel as soon as possible as it is extra bad.

How is everything in Shetland just now? We have dreadful weather here from the beginning of September and there is very little hope or prospect of its

⁸⁸ Reference to MacDiarmid's collection of essays entitled *Scottish Eccentrics* published in London by Routledge in 1936.

⁸⁹ In 1935 MacDiarmid began work on *The Wolfe of Badenoch*, a book about the Scottish rebel Alexander Stewart who had fought in the Scottish Wars of Independence of the fourteenth century. The study, initially written for the publishers Rich & Cowan, was later rejected by them as well as by Routledge, so it was never published. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 330; 338.

⁹⁰ Hugh MacDiarmid, *Second Hymn to Lenin, and Other Poems* (London: Stanley Nott, 1934).

getting better in the near future. I expect weather in Shetland won't be too good at this time.

My kindest regards to Mr. Grieve. Tell him I shall be quite ready to begin to send him stuff for translation whenever he wants it. Also regards to Mike and Dr. Orr. I hope R.M.'s project will come off.

Yours sincerely, Sam Maclean.

27. *To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, ff 7r-8r; NSL)*

Whalsay

25 November 1935

My dear Maclean,

Sorry to have been so long in dropping you a line since my return here in the beginning of last month. But, apart from the ordinary exigencies of life here, trying enough in themselves unless one is perfectly fit, and from the special difficulties due to the almost unbroken continuance of the world's worst weather, my situation has been greatly complicated by the fact that we have all been ill; Valda went down with nervous exhaustion, Michael with what was at first diagnosed as fracture of the base of the skull but turned out not to be, but a very painful ear-trouble which has kept him in bed for a month now – and a deuce of a handful he is; while I completed the unholy trinity with exceedingly painful and disabling accidents first to one arm and then to the other, and finally collapsed

with a dose of flu' specialising in sore throat and swellings of the supertonsilar glands. We are all much better, but Valda's nerves and mine are all to pigs and whistles. While conditions have thus scarcely favoured my convalescence I have gone on all right in not incurring any relapse of the grave illness which took me to hospital, or, I think, lost any of the essential benefit my sojourn there conferred.

Literary work has been out of the question and a couple of books of mine (*Red Scotland* and *Scottish Eccentrics*) had perforce to be postponed publication until January. All the same I am ready for any more translations you have managed to make, and hope to get that *Golden Treasury* finished in the next few weeks. My contract only gives me to the beginning of March anyway.

I hope you are having a better time, and are in good form. You will understand that I can scarcely recall the circumstances of your visit here or appreciate how far short I must have fallen as a host. But I know you understood at the time that I could not help myself. I became very much worse, losing all responsibility for my actions, after you left, and it is in fact a miracle that I am still alive.

Valda encloses the snaps for you, and joins with me in sending you all our love. I hope that we may have a chance of a holiday together some time again and greatly regret that my developing illness gave you such a poor time and prevented you from making much more of your first visit to Whalsay.

Ever yours, C.M. Grieve

28. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*
(SML MS 2954.13, ff 15r-16v)

Churchton, Raasay, Skye

25 December 1935

Dear Grieve,

Sorry for being so long in writing. Thanks very much for your last letter and for the Christmas card which I received a few days ago. Thanks also very much for the photographs which I shall always be glad to have. What a devil of a time you must all have had this winter with illness! I am glad to hear that you are now better and that Mrs. Grieve and Mike are also better. It is a great pity that the Oban project⁹¹ has not come off as I was looking forward very much to the chance of your coming to Raasay just now. I hope[,] however[,] that you will be able to come some other time.

I am glad to hear that you are by now so much better that you can work, but I believe you will still have to be very careful. I am not sending any translations with this letter but I shall send some in a day or two. I myself have had a mishap which more or less put me out of action for a month. I had a very bad breakage of the collar bone and tearing of ligaments in the shoulder for which I had to go to Edinburgh for treatment. The result has been that I could do very little writing for the last month. It was my left shoulder but even then writing

⁹¹ Alan Bold notes that when CMG was discharged from hospital in October 1935, he hoped to obtain a job as the editor of a new Oban newspaper. Unfortunately this did not happen. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 336.

was a very difficult thing for me as I had an arm trussed up and as the strain of a day's teaching with a broken bone was so great that I found very great difficulty in doing any writing at all. I am alright now however and I have some translations done in rough copy. I shall send you some within the next few days. I hope my delay will not be a bother. We are all looking forward very much to *Red Scotland*[,] which I hope to see out soon. By the way I read as a curiosity some remarks on *Second Hymn* etc. which appeared in the *New Statesman* at the time of the volume's appearance. Perhaps you have not seen it. I think Stonies was responsible as far as I can remember.

I am sorry to hear that *The Modern Scot*⁹² is stopping. It will be a bad nuisance if nothing else decent turns up to take its place. I have not seen *New Scotland*⁹³ yet but intend to get it. I hope it will do something. Meanwhile there is nothing at all happening in our part of the world. I am afraid that the New Deal for the Highlands business does not mean much and that it merely takes the wind out of the sails of the Highland League⁹⁴ movement which I thought more promising. I suppose you have heard that the new Celtic College⁹⁵ is to be

⁹² Early in 1936, *The Modern Scot* amalgamated with the *Scottish Standard* to form *The Outlook*, a new monthly publication. David MacEwen served as *The Outlook*'s editor, and J.H. Whyte was appointed as literary editor. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 340.

⁹³ The first issue of *New Scotland*, which appeared on October 12th, 1935, included MacDiarmid's poem "The Covenanters". See Bold, *LHM* 152.

⁹⁴ Possibly the Highland Land League formed in the 1880s and particularly concerned with crofters' rights.

⁹⁵ Unknown institution, possibly a precursor to Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the Gaelic College at Sleat on the Isle of Skye.

reserved for the study of “Celtic idealism, mysticism and theology” à la Angus Robertson.⁹⁶ At any rate there appears to be very little money for it.

I hope the Shetland weather is better than it was when you wrote last. If not it must be a terrible strain on your constitution. Even we have had a fortnight of extreme cold and frost. I think the cold was worse than anything we have had in the Hebrides for ten years.

I shall certainly send translations in a day or two. Kindest regards to Mrs. Grieve, Mike and to Dr. Orr, and best wishes for a good new year.

Yours sincerely, Sam Maclean

29. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, f 17r)

Elgin Hostel, Portree, Skye

13 January 1936

Dear Grieve,

I hope Mrs. Grieve and Mike and yourself are now fully restored to health. I am sorry for being so late in sending this poem⁹⁷. It is wonderfully musically[sic] – one of the greatest Gaelic songs. I shall send other stuff in a day or two.

⁹⁶ President, in 1923, of *An Comunn Gaidhealach* / The Highland Association, which was founded in 1891 to organize and oversee the annual festival, the Mod. See Black, *An Tuil* xxiii.

Kindest regards, Sam Maclean

Eight verses of this poem have never been published. I have never seen them. I believe they are in the National Library. The attack on Roderick evidently becomes so scurrilous that the polite ears of Gaelic editors cannot bear it.⁹⁸

30. *To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, f 11r)*

Whalsay

30 January 1936

My dear Maclean,

Many thanks for additional translations. Alas, I can make little progress yet – Valda has been down with a terrific cold, and both Mike and I have had abridged editions of it. And what with feeling none too robust and having far too many irons in the fire I hardly know where I am.

⁹⁷ “*Oran do Mhac Leòid Dhùn-Bheagain / A Song to MacLeod of Dunvegan*” by *An Clàrsair Dall* / Roderick Morison, the Blind Harper (c.1656-c.1714). See Colm Ó Baoill, ed., *Gàir nan Clàrsach / The Harps’ Cry: an Anthology of 17th Century Gaelic Poetry* (Edinburgh: Birlinn Ltd., 1994) 198-207.

⁹⁸ *An Clàrsair Dall* composed many songs to the MacLeods. The one to which MacLean refers here is an indictment of Morrison’s patron’s son Roderick MacLeod (c.1674-99), censuring him for his financial profligacy and his failure to fulfil his responsibilities as chieftain to both clan and estate. See Thomson, *Companion* 44.

The Times Literary Supplement gave a very good notice to the “*Birlinn*” but incidentally found fault with the preface and questioned my knowledge of classical Gaelic writers.⁹⁹ I sent in a pretty sharp reply which has evoked the following. Will you please send me your comments on it at your earliest, and also please return this enclosure?¹⁰⁰ Hope you are quite fit again. Valda and Mike join me in all regards to “the big man.”

Yours, C.M.G.

Please excuse pencil

31. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, ff 74r-75r)

⁹⁹ The “*Birlinn*” was reviewed in the *TLS* of 4 January 1936. The brunt of its criticism was directed at MacDiarmid’s comments on the poem’s metrical structure, which the reviewer deemed “confused and misleading”. Ultimately, the reviewer felt that a detailed description of a traditional *birlinn* or galley would have been more helpful to contemporary readers of the poem. See Bold, *LHM* 777.

¹⁰⁰ Presumably the enclosure MacDiarmid refers to is the *TLS* critique of his comments in the preface to the “*Birlinn*” as it appeared in the *Modern Scot* of January 1935, but they may have referred to James Whyte’s subsequent chapbook publication of the same work in 1935 under the imprint of the Abbey Book Shop (*Hugh MacDiarmid: An Exhibition*); however, no copy of the enclosure remains in the correspondence MacLean saved, likely because he returned it to MacDiarmid, as requested.

Elgin Hostel, Portree, Skye

Thursday, 26th March [1936]¹⁰¹

Dear Grieve,

I hope you will excuse my bad delay in writing to thank [you for] your "Charles Doughty and the Need for Heroic Poetry."¹⁰² I have read it with great interest; I had not read it before. I think that your thesis as to his significance as a pointer towards the kind of poetry inevitable to a really revolutionary poetry is very well established and I certainly think that the significance of his achievement throws much light on the problem of Gaelic and Scots poetry as opposed to an English poetry using traditional diction. I am very grateful for your sending me the valuable pamphlet.

I was just sitting down to write you tonight when someone told me that you were to broadcast. I had not read the day's papers and had not heard of it previously but I got the news in time and I was very glad to be able to listen in (we have a wireless in this institution). I heard every word quite well and I thought your uncompromising approach to the question was just the thing necessary. The B.B.C. are not always treated to such fearlessness and to such a comprehensive fundamental examination.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ The correct date for this letter was established by consulting the calendar for the common year 1936.

¹⁰² Originally published in 1936, this essay later appeared in Hugh MacDiarmid, "Charles Doughty and the Need for Heroic Poetry," *Selected Essays of Hugh MacDiarmid* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969) 75-85.

¹⁰³ Alan Bold refers to a broadcast given by MacDiarmid in 1936 for the BBC in Aberdeen, though no specific date is provided. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 340.

I hope you are now fully returned to health and that Mrs. Grieve and Mike too are in the best of health. Is there any chance of your being in Edinburgh or Glasgow between the 2nd and the 12th of April[?] I intend to go south at Easter (we have only a week and a week-end). I shall go to Edinburgh and also to Glasgow and if there is any chance of your being in either place at the time[,] I would be awfully glad to see you. There is however a chance that I may not be able to go down as my mother has been unwell recently. If she is not definitely better I am afraid I shall not be able to go south, but I think she will be fully recovered by then. By the way what has happened to *Red Scotland*? I got a note from Thin's¹⁰⁴ the other day telling me that the publishers had told them the book was not to come out. I was very disappointed. How about the anthology? I have not sent any stuff recently because I gathered from your last letter that there was no likelihood of your being able to do more just now. If you are[,] I shall of course send more any time.

I must close as I have to catch the post in a hurry. My best regards to Mrs. Grieve and Mike and remember me to Dr. Orr.

Yours sincerely, Sam Maclean.

32. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, ff 77r-79r)

¹⁰⁴ A family-owned bookshop in Edinburgh.

Elgin Hostel, Portree, Skye

Monday, 11th May [1936]¹⁰⁵

Dear Grieve,

I have been wondering very much where you are and how you are getting on for a while now. I was in Edinburgh and in Glasgow for a few days at Easter but I was told that you had gone back to Shetland a few days before I reached Edinburgh. However I saw in the press that you were down at Cunninghame Graham's funeral¹⁰⁶ and I wondered whether I had been misinformed about your returning to Shetland. The thought that you had been either in Edinburgh or Glasgow when I was south and that I had missed you was very annoying. How are Mrs. Grieve and Mike getting on[?] Give them my kindest regards.

I have had a very bad time for the last three months as my mother has been very unwell since January. She is not really recovered yet and to make things worse we are not at all sure what is wrong with her. She seems to be getting better. She has had an attack of phlebitis and I don't know whether it is from the after-effects of that or from what she is suffering. At any rate she is going to Glasgow this week for specialist treatment and I am getting Friday, the 15th, off to go down with her. I shall, however, have to return here on Saturday. I have been so unsettled and worried for the last two months especially that I have

¹⁰⁵ The correct date for this letter was established by consulting the calendar for the common year 1936.

¹⁰⁶ R.B. "Robert" Cunninghame Graham (1852-1936), Liberal MP, Scottish Nationalist, and first President of the Scottish Labour Party. Cunninghame Graham, with MacDiarmid, was a founding member of the National Party of Scotland. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 231-32.

done very little work of any kind and my mental condition at present is, I am afraid, most deplorable. I am very glad to hear that you are getting on well in health recently. I saw Davie in Edinburgh and I was very delighted when he told me that you had said that you thought you could manage to go to Raasay this year. I hope that you shall be able to come. Don't be deterred by the fact that my mother is not well. She is definitely recovering, I think, and at any rate she is going for at least a month to the South for a change and for specialist treatment, and I confidently hope that she will be all right by July at least. However, even if she is not fully recovered you can easily come to Raasay as we have a very big house and have a servant girl now since my mother became unwell. You see we are very much better off financially than we used to be. I think that my mother should be quite recovered in a month or two. At any rate I shall write you and tell you how she is getting on. Even if my mother has to stay south all summer that is no reason why you should not come to Raasay. I have my holiday in July and August and I intend to remain in the North all the time. Of course my mother's illness has unsettled us all very much and it was my reason for not getting time to write you long before now.

How are your productions getting on? I read a review of *Scottish Eccentrics* by Donald Carswell in *The New Statesman* and I was very pleased that the Scottish writers had publicly made some recognition of your work recently. Try to write to me soon and tell me what you are doing and above all try to come to Raasay sometime this year no matter when you come. I hope this letter will get you in decent time.

Yours sincerely, Sam Maclean.

33. *To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, ff 12r-13r; NSL)*

Whalsay

22 May 1936

My dear Maclean

Sorry I missed you; I did go back to the Shetlands but only to return South with Valda and Mike. They are in Cornwall where Valda's mother¹⁰⁷ has been seriously ill – tho' now happily improving. I was down in Manchester and elsewhere talking to the students, and subsequently in Glasgow and then – as you may have heard from you brother Calum¹⁰⁸ – in Edinburgh; Davie and Aitken¹⁰⁹ saw me off back here and I understand there is to be another Edinburgh Rectorial and that I am to stand again– but this time I think with the advantage of having a book out first on the question of Scottish University

¹⁰⁷ Valda's mother, Florence Ann Rowlands, lived in Bude, Cornwall. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 262.

¹⁰⁸ Calum MacLean / *Chalum Iain MhicGill-Eain* (1916-60), Gaelic scholar and folklorist, younger brother of Sorley MacLean.

¹⁰⁹ MacLean, Davie, and Aitken all began their friendships with CMG while they were undergraduate students at Edinburgh University. Eventually Aitken would become MacDiarmid's "bibliographer and co-editor of *The Complete Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid*." See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 345.

problems.¹¹⁰ Besides I have now the emphatic commendation of Sir J.M. Barrie behind me.¹¹¹ We'll see. Anyway these peregrinations account for my delay in receiving yours of 11th inst and replying to same ere this. I am in great form again – I've taken to regular kilt wearing (as has Dr Orr) and you'd scarcely know me for the same man as you saw last year. I am infernally busy, and *inter alia* have now *Red Scotland* adjusted and appearing shortly,¹¹² and the *Anthology* (on which I got a 6-months extension of time) to finish as one of my earliest tasks.

I note all you so kindly say about my coming to Raasay and unless something unforeseen happens I will certainly come. I do hope your mother is speedily restored to complete health. (Phlebitis – and thrombosis – is what's wrong with Valda's mother too.) When we went South, we did not know anything about Valda's mother's illness; the result was unfortunately that Valda who very badly needed a thorough holiday and rest just landed home in time to be saddled with all the work and worry. The original intention was that she should leave

¹¹⁰ Although unsuccessful in the 1935 Edinburgh University Rectorial Election, MacDiarmid agreed to run again in 1936, mainly to promote his political aims based on a vision of a Scottish republican socialism. During the autumn of 1935 he brought together student activists to form the Red Scotland Group. They issued "The Red Scotland Thesis", a manifesto which advocated "Scottish Workers' Republicanism" à la John Maclean, the labour hero of Red Clydeside. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 343.

¹¹¹ "Sir James Matthew Barrie (1860-1937), Scottish playwright and novelist, author of *Peter Pan* and Chancellor of Edinburgh University (1930-7). In the spring of 1936 Barrie, along with many other prominent writers, had been signatory to a public testimonial to CMG, praising him for 'bringing [his] own country into vital touch with the main currents of world thought.'" See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 113.

¹¹² "*Red Scotland*: now placed with Lawrence and Wishart." See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 113.

Mike down in Cornwall, rejoin me in Scotland herself, and that she and I together should then have a jolly good holiday. That programme still holds, only the time schedule has had to be shifted ahead almost indefinitely. However, as matters now stand, it is likely that Valda will return to Scotland in July and if we can then park Mike somewhere we will be free. From what you say about the accommodation available at your home I wonder if I might dare to suggest bringing Valda up with me; if so I would certainly do that, tho' I cannot give you a definite date yet. In any case you can certainly rely upon my coming up some time towards the end of the Summer.¹¹³

I hope this finds you in good case yourself. I'll look forward very keenly to seeing you again. What are your own plans for July and early August?

Scottish Eccentrics was extraordinarily well reviewed; I have my big new poem *Cornish Heroic Song*¹¹⁴ almost finished; and have piles of other work on the stocks.

Every kind regard (Orr joins me) – and, again, I do hope your mother is securely on the upgrade.

Yours, C.M. Grieve

¹¹³ In fact, CMG was unable to visit MacLean until mid-September 1937. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 345.

¹¹⁴ "The years 1937-9 represent the last great creative effort of MacDiarmid's poetic career. In that period he produced more than 20,000 lines of poetry – which he envisaged as about one-third the complete *Cornish Heroic Song for Valda Trevlyn*." Unfortunately although portions of it were published, this epic poem was never completed. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 346-47; 349-50.

34. To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, f 14r)

Whalsay

30 May 1936

My dear Maclean,

Can you look over enclosed for me? You'll see from date of Arthur Geddes's¹¹⁵ covering letter that this is a job I ought to have tackled long ere this but – apart from being busy with all sorts of other things – you'll also see from same covering letter what difficulties it presents if I'm to make any shot at renderings that could be savy [sic] to the original settings. I don't know these settings and have no facilities here of hearing them. Can you 1/ "vet" the translations 2/ give me the exact notation for the poems – i.e. metres etc. 3/ give me a poetical notation which would be an effective transposition of the tunes.

Sorry to ask this as I know you are busy enough anyhow.

Do hope your mother keeps making good progress.

Excuse this hasty note.

All kindest regards.

Yours C.M. Grieve

¹¹⁵ Dr. Arthur Geddes, son of Scottish academic Sir Patrick Geddes (1854-1932). CMG greatly admired Patrick Geddes for the broad scope of his intellectual interests. In January 1948 CMG applied to Arthur Geddes for the position of "General and Research Editorship" of his father Patrick's MSS. MacDiarmid also devoted the third chapter of *The Company I've Kept* (1966) to Patrick Geddes, Francis George Scott and William Johnstone. See Bold, *LHM* 857. See also "Geddes, Sir Patrick", *A Dictionary of Sociology*.

35. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, ff82r-82v)

Elgin Hostel, Portree, Skye

Saturday, 20th June [1936]¹¹⁶

Dear Grieve,

I am very sorry for my long delay. I herewith enclose "*Creag Ghuanach*" and the verses from Hunting Poem really, as far as I know, the same as "*Creag Ghuanach*" and also "*Oran Seachran Seilg*".¹¹⁷ I hope my rhythm notation will do. I think what you should do is to send me your versions before you send them to anyone else and I can tell you whether they go to the Gaelic lines. I shall send "First

36. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, ff70r-71r)

¹¹⁶ The correct date for this letter was established by consulting the calendar for the common year 1936.

¹¹⁷ The second poem, "*Oran Seachran Seilg*" is by Duncan Ban Macintyre. It is unclear whether these poems were the ones MacDiarmid refers to his translating for Arthur Geddes in the letter dated 30 May 1936, or whether they are additional translations which MacLean has prepared for potential inclusion in *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*.

¹¹⁸ The first poem is unidentified. "Hail to the Breadalbane" could refer to poems by either Duncan Bàn Macintyre or by William Livingstone. See Thomson, *Introduction* 183; 234.

Churchton, Raasay, Skye

Sunday, 26th July [1936]¹¹⁹

Dear Grieve,

I should have written you long ago but was delayed by the fact that I had lost the copy of that first poem. However I have found it; I had left it in Portree but I was over the other day and found it. I send a translation with as near a metrical notation as I can devise.

I was very glad to hear from Calum my brother that you had been feeling very well when you were in Edinburgh. I hope you are still in the same condition. Now, what about coming to Raasay for some time? We shall all be very glad to have Mrs. Grieve and yourself and Mike any time now. I shall be at home until the last day of August and after that, at least for all September, John¹²⁰ and Calum will be at home. So, if you find it impossible to come in August perhaps you might come in September. I hope Mrs. Grieve and Mike are in the best of health. I heard from Calum that Davie was up with you. If he is still with you give him my very best wishes and tell him that if he and Caird are coming to Skye as they had expected we shall be very glad if they give us a visit in Raasay. We have got a big motor launch and if you come to Raasay we shall be able to cross to Skye very frequently.

I am sorry for having been so long with those translations but I hope you will manage to make singing translations of them. If you do we might try it on

¹¹⁹ The correct date for this letter was established by consulting the calendar for the common year 1936.

¹²⁰ MacLean's elder brother John. See Black, *An Tuil* 764.

other and better poems. Be sure that I shall be very glad to do anything that I can of the kind for you. Since last New Year I did very little of anything. We had a very rotten time. I really thought for most of the time that my mother was done for and felt very unsettled and unable to concentrate on anything. However she is now fully recovered and the only thing she has really to watch against is a recurrence of the leg trouble, but she is feeling wonderfully well at present. I intend to get properly to work this winter. I shall leave that hostel in which I am staying and will have more time and inclination for work. So if you have anything for me to do I shall be very glad to do it and do it more quickly than I have done it in the past.

I hope you will manage to come to Raasay, if possible, in August. My best regards to Mrs. Grieve and Dr. Orr and Mike.

Yours sincerely, Sam Maclean.

37. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, f 86r)

Churchton, Raasay, Skye

3rd Aug. [1936?]¹²¹

¹²¹ The content of the letter would suggest that although it lacks a year, it was written in 1936. At this time, MacLean was still providing translations for CMG. Letter 36, dated 26 July 1936 mentions MacLean's having found a "lost copy of the first poem" and says he will forward a translation of it as soon as possible. As well, the informal nature of the salutation suggests that the letter was written after 1935; until then, the tone of their correspondence was more formal. Finally, MacLean was holidaying at home on Raasay in August 1936 and hoped that

Dear Chris,

I am very sorry this has been so delayed. I could not find Nicolson on my way home and had to write him and the paper arrived here only now. I am sending it in the hope that it is not yet too late. Also I had not realised that the writing was quite as bad as it is. Still I hope you can make something of it. All the best to Valda and Mike and yourself.

Yrs. Sam.

38. *To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, f 15r)*

17 August 1936¹²²

My dear Maclean,

I'll write to you fully ere long re the translations (for which many thanks) etc. I haven't been able to do much work lately – owing to too good weather, visitors, etc. I had intended coming over to Raasay, with my wife, this month, but difficulties cropped up unexpectedly – owing to serious illness at her home and her consequent longer stay in Cornwall. It is impossible for us to manage this

CMG would be able to come for a visit that month. See Letter 36, dated 26 July 1936.

¹²² This letter appears on letterhead which reads “from hugh macdiarmid (C.M. Grieve) WHALSAY, VIA LERWICK, SHETLAND ISLANDS”.

month now unfortunately; but there is still just a chance that we may be able to next month. That depends on a lot of factors tho'; I have really a tremendous amount of work in hand and am in arrears with a lot of it. I'll be very sorry indeed if we fail to come over – but please do not be disappointed, for if we cannot manage this year we'll "*mak' siccar*"¹²³ for next. I hope my delay in writing you, and so leaving you uncertain as to whether we were coming or not, hasn't worried you; I really kept putting off writing in the hope that after all we would manage.

I am so glad your mother is now so much better.

Again with our best thanks for your kind invitation we'd have been so glad to accept, and with love from all here.

Yours, C.M. Grieve

39. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, ff 83r-84v)

Elgin Hostel, Portree, Skye

Monday, Sept. 21st [1936]¹²⁴

Dear Grieve,

¹²³ Scots expression meaning "make certain" ("*Mak siccar*").

¹²⁴ The correct date for this letter was established by consulting the calendar for the common year 1936.

I intended to write you long ago but put it off again and again. How are you all getting on? We were indeed sorry that you did not manage to come to Raasay this year and we hope that you will manage to come next year if not before then. Davie was up with us for about 10 days fairly soon after his visit to you. He was greatly inspired by his visit to the Shetlands and we greatly enjoyed his stay. I was very glad to hear from Davie that you had been so well when he went up. You seem to have done a great deal of work together. I was very interested to hear of your break with the Whyte crowd.¹²⁵ I of course knew what your real attitude to them had been for a long time. I only hope that it will not be a serious inconvenience to you in the way of getting things published. Of course *The Outlook* has been so hopelessly right-wing that it was at any rate a very unsatisfactory place to write anything in. Still it must be a difficulty to have all the blighters against one. How are other things going? I saw a notice in the *The Record* or *Bulletin* (I forget which) about your getting a paper going, but I have not heard anything else since and also about a club of your readers but I have not heard any particulars of that either. I am very keen to join the club business if it comes off. At present I am reading nothing but Marxism in which I am considerably more proficient now than I used to be, and I am convinced that the

¹²⁵ In June of 1936, *The Outlook*, of which Whyte was literary editor, published an extract of Edwin Muir's book *Scott and Scotland*. Although Muir's book was nominally a discussion of the writer Sir Walter Scott, it served as a vehicle for Muir's attack on the viability of Scots as a literary language and his dismissal of MacDiarmid's poetic achievements in the vernacular. Henceforth, MacDiarmid perceived both Whyte and Muir as adversaries, believing that they "were responsible for preventing the publication of *Red Scotland*." See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 340-42.

special line you are taking with regard to the Scottish and communist question is the best especially in view of the great difficulty of striking at British Imperialism otherwise. Of course the position of a school teacher is intolerable in the matter of getting anything done but I fear that for the present at least I shall have to abide it. I can only try to sail as near the wind as I can.

How is the Edinburgh Rectorial?¹²⁶ Davie intended to get very busy at the matter when he returned from Raasay to Dundee. I hope he will be successful but you can hardly imagine what hopeless places the Scottish universities are. I really don't know which is the worst. I suppose it is St. Andrew's but Edinburgh is bad enough and it matters more as far as mere numbers are regarded.

I suppose that by now *Red Scotland* and the anthology will be ready soon. If you have any other Gaelic stuff for me to do [be] sure and tell me. I am managing to get more things done now than I was last year. I seem to have become more or less inured to this Hostel place and can work better in it than I used to. At any rate I fully intend to leave it in a month or two.

I expect to go down south at Christmas and if you happen to be down then I hope you will let me know as I should like to see you. I thought it a great pity that you did not manage to come to Raasay this year. See and write me when you can manage. I know you are dreadfully busy. Give my best regards to Mrs. Grieve and Mike and to Dr. Orr.

Yours sincerely, Sam Maclean.

¹²⁶ CMG had run as a candidate with little success in the Edinburgh Rectorial election in October 1935; however, he was persuaded to try again in 1936. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 338; 343.

40. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, ff 18r-23r)

Elgin Hostel, Portree, Skye

20 December 1936

Dear Grieve,

I have been for a long time now intending to write you to find out how you were keeping. I learned some time ago from Edinburgh that you had not been well but I hoped that was a false rumour. For a while now I have been very much out of touch with Davie and the set at Edinburgh and thus I could hear very little news of you. I hope that your health has not again given way. I have not for a while now seen any notice of a forthcoming book by you and I have heard nothing more of the papers you were intending to begin. I hope the paper scheme has not failed. For a while I have been very much isolated and practically all my reading has been confined to politics and economics. By the way[,] have you seen or got Yeats' *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*?¹²⁷ I thought his very scant selection from your poems, apart from "O wha's been here," was very misleading and not at all representative of your best work. But of course his anthology is rather queer taken all over. If you haven't yet got a copy of Yeats'

¹²⁷ W.B. Yeats, ed., *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse, 1892-1935* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936).

anthology I shall be very glad to send you mine as I have pretty well exhausted it by now. To me Yeats seems a man full of all sorts of misgivings and indecisions, making half-hearted attempts to make the best of a few worlds.

I have not for a long time seen *The Outlook*. The last issue of it, I saw, was very feeble but I suppose I should have got it to see what those people were doing. I believe Whyte is in America just now. My fourth brother is at St. Andrews' University and he tells me that Whyte is in America.¹²⁸ I am going south, to London, at the end of next week. I shall be there for about a week; then perhaps I can find out what things like *Outlook* have been saying for the last month or two. Meanwhile the Western Islands are most dormant. That bourgeois infant, the Highland Development League, is even deader born than I had expected and I wasn't giving it credit for much. As for myself I have to stay in this hostel place for the next two terms as my colleague is leaving (getting another job).¹²⁹ If I am here much longer I shall be extinguished completely. I can read here but that is about all. I cannot get the necessary concentration for doing any real work. I suppose a teacher has sooner or later to recognise the fact that he cannot use what talents he has, however modest they are.

I do hope that there is nothing wrong with your health again. Give my best regards to Mrs. Grieve and Mike and Dr. Orr. Hoping to hear good news of you soon.

¹²⁸ MacLean's younger brother, Norman. See Black, *An Tuil* 764.

¹²⁹ MacLean is referring to his friend and fellow teacher, Jack Stuart, who left Portree to take up a teaching position in Aberfeldy. See Hendry, "The Man and His Work" 18.

Yours sincerely, Sam Maclean

41. *To Sorley MacLean* (GL MS 29533, ff 16r-17r; NSL)

Whalsay

15 January 1937

My dear Maclean

I can only thank you on behalf of us all for your far too generous parcels. Mike – who had a bumper Christmas – was vastly delighted with all his presents and sends his love to “the big man.” I myself am specially indebted for the books. Babette Deutsch’s very useful and intelligent survey was on my own list to purchase and I am particularly glad to have it.¹³⁰ I don’t agree with you about Yeats’s anthology.¹³¹ He could of course have made a more representative selection of my stuff – and that of most of the poets he includes – but that would not have suited his special purpose – to give a very shrewd thrust from an unexpected quarter at the “English-English” view of poetry in the English

¹³⁰ “Babette Deutsch, *This Modern Poetry* (London: Faber & Faber, 1936).” See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 129.

¹³¹ “*The Oxford Book of Modern Verse, 1892-1935*. ed. W.B. Yeats. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936).” See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 129.

language. And his thrust has been telling enough – witness the bad press the book has had from all the stuffy little English Ascendancy¹³² reviews.

My health has been causing me some anxiety again, but I think I am now over that hurdle – it was not unconnected with a proper log jam of work I'd developed. But that is now beginning to clear away nicely, and things are opening out for me in a way that will in turn be the best possible tonic. Enough that this year is to be one of my very busiest and most productive.¹³³ That is already assured.

I cannot write you at any length just now – but will soon. There is one thing however. *Inter alia* I am doing a book on *The Islands of Scotland* – Hebrides, Orkney, Shetland etc. and I want to come over to Skye – probably next month or March; I'll know definitely in a few days' time.¹³⁴ Whether I bring Valda with me or not will depend on the weather etc. But would that be convenient for

¹³² The irony in CMG's observation is that Yeats was himself a member of the Anglo-Irish Protestant Ascendancy through his mother's family, the Pollexfens. See W.B. Yeats, *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan, 1956) 5-18; 67-74. See also MacDiarmid, "English Ascendancy in British Literature," in *Selected Prose*, Alan Riach, ed. (Manchester: Carcanet, 1992) 61-80.

¹³³ "No longer receiving his retainer of £52 per year from Routledge, MacDiarmid was forced to take on further commissions though his priority was to be the completion of an epic vision of a world language, a sequence (cast in a multilingual idiom though essentially in English) he intended to call *Cornish Heroic Song for Valda Trevlyn*. He was still working on *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*, still writing his autobiography [*Lucky Poet*], and now took on two more books: *The Islands of Scotland* for Batsford and *Scottish Doctors* for Harrap." See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 345. Ultimately, *Scottish Doctors*, intended as a history of Scottish medicine, was never published. See also Bold, *LHM* 120.

¹³⁴ "Hugh MacDiarmid, *The Islands of Scotland: Hebrides, Orkneys and Shetland* (London: Batsford, 1939)." See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 129.

us – or me – to come to Raasay? Don't hesitate to say no, if it isn't, because in that case we'd just stay in Skye. I'll write you as soon as I am able to make definite arrangements.

Hope this finds you – and all your people – in good form. Orr joins me in kindest regards. All the best to all of you for 1937. And again, our warmest thanks.

Yours, C.M. Grieve

42. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, ff 24r-24v)

Elgin Hostel, Portree, Skye

26 January 1937

Dear Grieve,

I was very glad to get your letter and I am very glad indeed that you can manage to come to Raasay. Of course it will be splendid for us if you come and if possible bring Mrs. Grieve with you. Our house (which is a pretty big one) is practically empty at present and my brother John is at home and he would be able to take you about and all that. Either month, February or March, would suit us fine. I am getting my Easter holiday on the 25th of March and I am getting nearly three weeks this time. I hope you can manage it this time and be sure we shall all be very very delighted as everything is much better with us this year than

last. My mother has made a very good recovery and is now very well so you need not worry at all on that account.

I have begun at last to do some really hard work on Gaelic work but it is still – the ordure of preparation and is still quite formative. However I hope to be able to write something fairly soon but of course publishing is another matter. There is not even a suitable periodical at present, is there?

I am very glad to hear that you are keeping well and able to do a lot of work, and I hope Mrs. Grieve and Mike are well too and in the best of spirits. Give them both my best regards. I hope to hear from you very soon.

Yours sincerely, Sam Maclean

P.S. John and I had a very good evening with F.G. Scott in Glasgow when I was south.

43. *To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, ff 18r-18v)*

Whalsay

30 March 1937

My dear Maclean,

Sorry to have been so long in writing you again. I have been hoping ever since I wrote you last to get to Raasay, but alas! The trouble is 1/ that I have too much work in hand, and 2/ contrary to what often happens – namely, that a certain sum is paid on signature of contract and the rest on final delivery to the

publishers of complete MSS – the contracts I have at present did not provide for that initial payment. So I must complete the books before I can replenish the Grieve family coffers and in the interval I have no spare cash for holidaying. It is a pity – especially as one of the books is on *The Islands of Scotland* – and it would have been a great advantage to have had a run round the Hebrides before writing it. It cannot be helped, however, so I can only apologise for another false alarm, and assure you that Valda and I will make a bee-line for Skye at the first possible opportunity – assuming that your patience is not worn out and that your kind invitation still holds good.

I do not suppose we have missed much in the way of weather anyhow. It has been a fiendish winter here, and while slightly better remains deuced cold and unpleasant. We are all well, barring colds.

I'm going South – to broadcast from Aberdeen on 16th April¹³⁵ – and thence on for a day or two in Edinburgh and Glasgow. I'm not sure when E.U. [Edinburgh University] takes up, but I'm hoping to see Davie, Calum, and others.

I was much interested in what you said in your last letter about tackling serious Gaelic work,¹³⁶ and will be glad to hear more of this. I hope you keep fine and fit.

¹³⁵ MacDiarmid's BBC broadcast, "The Shetlands and the Faroes", given on April 16th, 1937 in Aberdeen. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 344.

¹³⁶ Likely MacLean had begun to work on the series of poems which would culminate in his first collection, *17 Poems for 6d in Gaelic, Lowland Scots, and English*, a joint publication with the poet Robert Garioch in 1940. At this time he was also working on some of the poems which would later be published in *Dàin do Eimhir agus Dàin Eile*.

I'm enclosing a photograph of Michael. He still remembers his "big man" – and I was quite amused the other day to read (I think somewhere in MacKenzie's *History of the Outer Hebrides*¹³⁷) that Raasay was known as "the island of the big men".

With love from all here.

Yours, C.M. Grieve

44. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, ff 25r-25v)

Elgin Hostel, Portree, Skye

25 April 1937

Dear Grieve,

I am sorry for being so long in answering your letter and very sorry that you have not managed to come to Raasay, but I hope you will manage to come before the end of this year. You know the invitation always stands. The time of the year does not matter in the least as far as we are concerned. If you can come you know it would be more pleasant in Summer or Autumn. We too have had a dreadful winter and certainly Skye would not have been pleasant for you this year; only now is it becoming really pleasant, but all growth has been greatly

¹³⁷ W.C. MacKenzie, *History of the Outer Hebrides* (Lewis, Harris, North and South Uist, Benbecula and Barra) (Paisley: Alexander Gardner, 1903).

retarded, only that this last week there has been a rapid bursting out of things and a new mildness.

By some mistake or other I missed your broadcast. I don't know how I managed to do such a thing. I expect you will be back from Edinburgh now. I don't know if Calum would have been down in time for you to see him; I hope you did manage to see him. I have not heard from him since he went down.

Thanks very much for the photographs. They are all very good. I was very glad to see from them that you looked much more robust last year than you did when I was in Shetland. I have not heard from Davie for some time; he is dreadfully busy just now. However I expect that when this year is over (June exams I mean)[,] Scotland can be prepared to sit up.

I hope Mrs. Grieve and Mike, Dr. Orr and Auntie Betty¹³⁸ are all well. Give them all my regards. I shall write you at greater length soon. I hope you are still keeping well.

Yours sincerely, Sam Maclean.

45. *To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, f 19r)*

Post Office Telegram sent at 11:36 am from Eigg and received in Portree on 15 September 1937. Addressed to S. MacLean, Elgin Hostel, Portree.

¹³⁸ "'Auntie Betty' Croskey lived at Anchor cottage, between Hamister and North Park [on Whalsay]." Initially, CMG had debated buying a house she owned on the island, but due to financial constraints he was unable to do so. Eventually he purchased the cottage he had been renting from John Anderson. See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 74-75.

Arriving tomorrow afternoon Grieve.¹³⁹

46. *To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, ff 20r-20v; NSL)*

Whalsay, via Lerwick, Shetland Islands

21 October 1937¹⁴⁰

My dear Sam.

I caught a bad chill on the way back, about a fortnight ago. Hence my delay in writing – prior to that, after leaving you, I was of course too busy and too much on the move. Altogether it was the most wonderful holiday I ever had – a perfect revelation – and I saw almost everybody I wanted to see, alike in Scotland and in the Islands. Everybody was extremely kind to us. And it was an especial happiness to visit Raasay and meet your father and mother and the

¹³⁹ On June 6th, 1983 MacLean wrote to Alan Bold: “It was in September 1937 that Christopher and W.D. MacColl made the trip. I was then teaching in Portree School. They came first to Raasay and stayed with my family, then stayed for a hectic week-end with me in Portree and then went I think to Barra. The trip was for Grieve’s Islands (Batsford) book.” See Bold, *LHM* 259.

¹⁴⁰ This letter appears on letterhead which reads “from hugh macdiarmid (C.M. Grieve) WHALSAY, VIA LERWICK, SHETLAND ISLANDS”.

other members of your family.¹⁴¹ Please give them all my love, and my warmest thanks for their hospitality.

McCull¹⁴² and I had a great time in South Uist – visiting Staoiligery and the Four Pennies of Drinisdale, etc. etc. – and then on to Barra, where we saw Compton Mackenzie,¹⁴³ Annie Johnston,¹⁴⁴ Father John MacMillan,¹⁴⁵ and Donald Sinclair's brother, Neil¹⁴⁶ who is the schoolmaster at Northbay.

I was sorry not to see Jock Stewart¹⁴⁷ again. Please remember me to him – and the others we met, including Miss Flora MacDonald¹⁴⁸ and her sister.

¹⁴¹ Malcolm and Christina MacLean. The other members of the family may have included Sorley's brothers John, Calum, Alasdair, and Norman, and his two sisters, Ishbel and Mary. See Black, *An Tuil* 764.

¹⁴² "W.D. MacColl, Scottish nationalist and Gaelic revivalist, expelled from the National Party of Scotland along with CMG in 1933." See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 144. See also Bold, *LHM* 259.

¹⁴³ "Compton Mackenzie (1883-1972; knighted 1952) is probably the most celebrated novelist to be associated with Scotland [in the 20th century]. . . . Mackenzie's decision to support the National Party of Scotland in 1928 was welcomed by MacDiarmid Mackenzie played a crucial part in MacDiarmid's life when he persuaded him to leave Montrose to go south as London Editor of the radio-critical journal *Vox* which Mackenzie had set up as a potentially successful companion to his magazine *The Gramophone*." See Bold, *LHM* 387.

¹⁴⁴ Annie Johnston, Scottish nationalist, author and activist. See Bold, *LHM* 459.

¹⁴⁵ "Father John MacMillan, a priest on Barra on whom Father John Macalister in [Compton] Mackenzie's *Whiskey Galore* (1947) was based." See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 145.

¹⁴⁶ "Donald Sinclair was a Gaelic poet much admired by MacDiarmid who wrote a poem 'Donald Sinclair' . . . in his memory." See Bold, *LHM* 259.

¹⁴⁷ Jack Stuart, a fellow teacher of Maclean's at Portree School.

¹⁴⁸ Unidentified. Possibly a descendant of the Jacobite heroine, Flora MacDonald (1722-90) of Skye.

I'm not in a mood for writing tonight (indeed, I wouldn't try were it not that I have already been so long in doing so) but I'll write you at greater length soon and send you my versions of the different translations etc. If you have any more for me please send them on as soon as possible now, as I am putting the whole job¹⁴⁹ ship-shape and want to get it off to Macmillan's now as quickly as I possibly can.

George Davie didn't go to Germany after all – but to Montpellier in France instead. That is certainly a great deal better; Fascist Germany was a hopeless place – indeed a damned dangerous place – for George.

Again, with best thanks and all good wishes

My remembrances to your landlady and all the other kind people we met
And love from Valda and Mike,

Yours, C.M.G.

Would you please remind me again too when you write of the point you raised about a mistake in the "*Birlinn*"? I have your previous letter about it somewhere but can't lay my hands on it yet, and it is of course desirable to correct this for the *Anthology*.

47. To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)

(SML MS 2954.13, ff 26r-27v)

¹⁴⁹ CMG is referring to *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*.

c/o MacDonald, Burnbrae, Portree, Skye

8 November 1937

Dear Grieve,

I am terribly sorry for being so long in writing you but I have been again and again delayed by various things and in general by a most unsettled state of mind which prevented my doing any proper work.

I am very glad you enjoyed your trip to the west so much and my only regret and the regret of our people at home is that you did not manage to stay longer. It was a pity you got that chill going back and I hope you are feeling fine again. I have had a very kind letter from MacColl too, which I have not yet answered.

We are in for some changes at Portree. Jock Stuart is going away in a fortnight; he is going to Aberfeldy. His going away will make Portree a very much less pleasant place for me. I myself am being asked for an interview for a job at Tobermory, Mull, and if I get it I shall take it. I am going south to Dunoon at the end of this week for the interview. I do not like the idea of leaving Skye but things have changed for the worse in the school of late. However, I really do not know what is to happen. Of course I shall never get a fellow like Stuart to teach with again and without him I am afraid of the prospect of Portree School. There is not very much happening here. At Edinbane they were very sorry that we did not get back there on the Sunday and they all send their regards. How are Mrs. Grieve and Mike. Give them my best wishes?

I am sending pages of the *Birlinn* from *The Modern Scot* with one or two corrections, the only important one being the first, on page 239. I hope you will have little difficulty in making the changes you think fit.

I have not done any other translations. By the way, I did not manage to get a copy of the "Dispraise of Morag"¹⁵⁰ but I suppose I could get one without much difficulty. If you think you can still manage some more tell me and I shall certainly send others. Perhaps also you could send me a list of those I have actually sent you as I have forgotten whether I sent certain poems or no. A great number of little things esp. little additional jobs have kept me engaged for the last month or two but now I have time for real work. I hope I have not put you to great inconvenience by my awful delay and I promise I shall not delay again so much. If you send me copies of your other translations I shall revise them and send them back at once. I shall certainly send a few more poems before the end of the next ten days or so.

Yours sincerely, Sam Maclean.

48. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, ff 28r-31v)

c/o Simpson, Bloomfield, Tobermory, Mull

27 February 1938

¹⁵⁰ "Dispraise of Morag / *Miomholadh Moraig*" was written by Alasdair Mac Mhaigstir Alasdair "in the hope of regaining favour with his wife, who was hurt or incensed by his poem '*Moladh Moraig*' ('Praise of Morag')." See Thomson, *Introduction* 168.

Dear Grieve,

I am afraid that you will by now be of the opinion that I have completely forgotten you. I simply don't know what prevented me from writing you and sending you some translations as I promised to do when I wrote you in the end of October sending you the corrections of the *Birlinn*. But about that time when I decided to leave Portree and got the job here I was in a strange mood. I was in a terrible state of anger against things done against me by a certain gent in Portree and I could not do anything about [it] as I had pledged myself not to use openly the inside information I did get. Being in such a mood I wasted about six weeks, November and December. At nights then I could do nothing but drink and I could settle down to nothing. Alas I wasted two months or nearly two months and after that I felt I would be far too late to send you any more stuff at any rate. I had intended writing you immediately I got to Mull but when I got here I thought then that it would be too late.

What is happening at present with the anthology? I am very much ashamed to write you about it now but if there is still time perhaps I could yet send you a few poems translated. I know I promised that when I last wrote you and did not do it but then I was obsessed with my own private affairs and feeling in such a mood of impotent wrath that I was unfit for anything in the way of work

after school.¹⁵¹ I must certainly be the most undependable person you have ever had to deal with.

By the way, I was thinking over your wish for one of Charles Matheson's¹⁵² poems but I cannot really see how a translation of any of his stuff would do. You see the matter is rather trivial although he had definite talent of expression. Of any other modern stuff I do not know anything even as worthy apart from Sinclair. You see apart from trivial little songs written by people like old Bannerman¹⁵³ and Cameron,¹⁵⁴ Paisley,¹⁵⁵ there is nothing being published in Gaelic verse at present. Of course by delving in certain places one has the chance of hitting on talented stuff by some local bard. I believe that in that line Matheson was better than anything that existed in point of actual talent but I am afraid that his actual subject was so limited by locality that his stuff would not translate at all. You remember the stuff you sent me once, done by a Lewisman, Campbell.¹⁵⁶ You remember, I did send you the translation of one poem. The subject of Campbell

¹⁵¹ According to Christopher Whyte, MacLean met the Irishwoman who inspired "more than half" of the poems in the collection, *Dàin do Eimhir* while attending a Celtic Congress held in Edinburgh in August 1937. At the time, Nessa Ní Sheaghda (1916-1993, Nessa O'Shea, later Mrs. Doran) was conducting research in the National Library of Scotland. See Whyte, *Dàin do Eimhir* 11-12.

¹⁵² Unidentified.

¹⁵³ Unidentified.

¹⁵⁴ Possibly Alexander Cameron / *Alasdair Camshron* (1848-1933). See Black, *An Tuil* 14.

¹⁵⁵ Unidentified.

¹⁵⁶ Angus Campbell / *Aonghus Caimbeul* (1908-49). See Black, *An Tuil* 762-63.

was of more general interest but actually I thought very little of his frame of language and thought. Probably a translation of his stuff would be immeasurably better than the original in every way, but would it be worth [it] to bother with such stuff?

By the way, I don't think I sent you anything of Neil Macleod,¹⁵⁷ the well-known Skye Victorian poet, who died about 1910. I don't like his stuff in general but I will send you a copy of what I think his best poem. If you have any time yet send me word as soon as you can and I will rack my brains to get something suitable. I am in a fine mood for working now as I have got settled down here and have plenty [of] time for work as my classes are very small and I am not thus bothered with much correction. You were in Tobermory in September with MacColl. I see quite a lot of MacLachlainn;¹⁵⁸ he is a very well meaning man but I don't think he is very effective although a great improvement on the general run of person in the *Comunn*.¹⁵⁹

I felt pretty bad about leaving Portree. In the circumstances I could do nothing else as I could not have waited there longer without throttling the headmaster of the school. Besides Stuart had left and Swanney,¹⁶⁰ who was a very fine chap, was leaving too and I would have been badly isolated. Quite a

¹⁵⁷ Neil MacLeod / *Niall MacLeod* (1843-1913). See Meek 481-82.

¹⁵⁸ Unidentified.

¹⁵⁹ *An Comunn Gaidhealach* / The Highland Association. See Thomson, *Companion* 48-49.

¹⁶⁰ Two of MacLean's fellow teachers at Portree High School.

few gents in Skye would rejoice to see Stuart and myself away as we had been more successful there than ever we had realised. But we had a good circle in Portree and with it and places like Edinbane I had become a kind of fanatic for Skye or, perhaps at any rate for a false mystical idea of Skye. There were indeed few places where one felt less cramped than in Skye. The radical tradition was strong enough to make the teaching of Marxism unnoticed and Portree has so [much?] Puritanism about drink. Perhaps your sojourn in Skye will have lessened your belief in Tom MacDonald's¹⁶¹ estimate of the hold of Secederism¹⁶² on the people of the west; at least it did not trouble us in Portree. A renegade Seceder makes quite a good Marxist and renegades are now very common.

I must apologise for not acknowledging the card I got from you at Christmas. I myself never send Christmas cards for some reason that I don't really know and at the time I felt I could not very well write you as I was so ashamed of not having kept my promise about sending you stuff. I have heard a few times from MacColl. I was so long in answering his first letter that I brought on myself an exceedingly sharp reminder. Since then I have been more or less punctual in answering MacColl's letters.

¹⁶¹ "MacDONALD, Tom (*Fionn Mac Colla*) (1906-75). Novelist." Friend of CMG, joined SNP, studied Gaelic. "CMG stayed with the MacDonalds in Edinburgh, in 1935 and 1937. MacDonald typed much of *Lucky Poet*." See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 549.

¹⁶² A term "referring to the Free Presbyterian Church and its members" See Whyte, ed. *Somhairle MacGill-Eain / Sorley MacLean: Dàin do Eimhir* 141.

I hear little from the south. Calum, my brother, was seconding MacCormick¹⁶³ in that Union Debate in Edinburgh in which the Socialists, Liberals and Scottish Nationalists had all bigger votes than the Tories. I understand Calum's speech consisted chiefly of a denunciation of Maude [sic] Ramsay,¹⁶⁴ the Pro-Franco Tory speaker. I don't know how his speech and MacCormick's suited one another but I could image that they would have been slightly different. Davie is at Frieberg [sic] not Montpelier [sic] as you thought. I have not heard from him. Caird is teaching in Wick. I must write him sometime.

I expect Michael is quite a big fellow now. Give my very best wishes to Mrs. Grieve and him and also to Dr. Orr. It is now quite a long time since I was up with you and I expect changes are taking place in Whalsay. How is Aunty Betty? Give her my regards. I wonder when you can come to the west again. It would be splendid to have you again but for a longer time than you were there last time. What about the place in Eigg?¹⁶⁵ I am now nearer Eigg than I was in Portree. I hope you will manage to [visit] the west this summer.

Write when you can. Meanwhile I will send some stuff in the hope that even as late as this you may use it.

¹⁶³ Unidentified.

¹⁶⁴ HH Princess Maud of Fife (Alexandra Victoria Georgina Bertha Duff) (1893-1945), The Rt. Hon. The Countess of Southesk, Lady Carnegie, née Lady Maud Duff, granddaughter of King Edward VII. Tory Counselor of State from 1942-45. See "Maud Alexandra Victoria Georgina Bertha Duff, Princess of Great Britain and Ireland", *The Peerage*, online.

¹⁶⁵ In a subsequent letter to MacLean dated 28 August 1938, MacDiarmid mentions the possibility of moving to a cottage on the island of Eigg for a few months. He never made the move.

Yours sincerely, Sam Maclean.

49. *To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, ff21r-21v; NSL)*

Whalsay

Monday, 28 March 1938¹⁶⁶

Dear Sam,

Please excuse a pencil scrawl. I was very glad to get your letter at last. Though puzzled at your continued silence, I somehow or other guessed what had happened – i.e. that you had left Skye¹⁶⁷ – and I was worrying as to what had happened to you. I knew you had had an interesting and enjoyable time there and was sorry that your pleasant little group had been broken up. I spent a few days in Tobermory with MacColl¹⁶⁸ and liked it greatly, and I hope you will have a good time there too and meet congenial spirits. But in many ways I am afraid it will not suit you as well as Portree – and, of course, you won't be able to get home so often! I hope all your family are well and would be particularly glad to

¹⁶⁶ The original letter, handwritten by MacDiarmid, gives Monday as the day of the week. The letter, as published in Grieve, Edwards, and Riach's *MacDiarmid: New Selected Letters* reads "Tuesday, 28 March 1938." The correct day of the week, according to the common calendar for 1938, was Monday. See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 152.

¹⁶⁷ MacLean taught at Tobermory Secondary School on the Isle of Mull for the 1938 academic year. See Black, *An Tuil* 765.

¹⁶⁸ Here CMG is recalling his trip to the Hebrides with W.D. MacColl in September 1937. See Bold, *LHM* 259.

hear that some suitable post was presenting itself at last for your brother John.¹⁶⁹
Please give them all my kindest remembrances and best wishes when you write.

Here I am absolutely bogged in work, but tackling it systematically at last with the aid of a very competent secretary-typist – an M.A. honours French and German, of Edinburgh.¹⁷⁰ So I am hoping if no unforeseen snags develop to get all the books I have on the stocks polished off at last. While I have not yet delivered to the publishers the actual copy for the *Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*, I have given them the full contents-list, the MSS of my Introductory Essay, etc. So I am afraid it is too late now to add translations of any additional poems. But at the same time I am anxious for another reason to have any such you care to send me. This other reason is the fact that I am going to launch very shortly (I hope to have the first issue out in the beginning of May) a new quarterly¹⁷¹ devoted to Scottish Literature and Politics (i.e. Scottish Republicanism à la John Maclean¹⁷²). So do send me anything you can as soon

¹⁶⁹ Sorley MacLean's elder brother John, also a teacher, was hoping to obtain a teaching position at Royal High School, Edinburgh. See Robin Boog, email dated 01 September 2006.

¹⁷⁰ Henry Grant Taylor (b.1914): Henry Grant Taylor was a recent graduate of Edinburgh University when he went to Whalsay in January 1938, at the request of Robert Garioch Sutherland, to provide "secretarial assistance" to MacDiarmid. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 370-71; 376-77.

¹⁷¹ "*The Voice of Scotland; a quarterly magazine of Scottish arts and affairs*, ed. Hugh MacDiarmid, vol. 1, n. 1, June-August 1938. Although interrupted by the War, it ran till vol. 9, no. 2, August 1958." See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 153.

¹⁷² "John MacLean (1879-1923), Marxist-Socialist and teacher. Sacked for his support of the Glasgow rent strike (1915), he devoted his time to giving lectures on Marxism and advocating workers' education. Lenin appointed him Bolshevik

as possible. I suppose you wouldn't care to see if you could give me a quarterly letter for this magazine – covering anything you thought of special interest, in relation to the Gaelic movement, the land question and other public affairs in the West Highlands and Islands etc., written from the angle mentioned above – i.e. Marxist-Nationalist? I'd be awfully glad if you could. It wouldn't have to be long, of course, -- but, say, about 700 words.

Excuse this short letter. I have no news of any kind – save that I had a letter from Davie, who seems to be having a very good time of it in Freiburg. We're all O.K. here and all of us, including Dr. Orr and Auntie Betty, send you our best love. Mike still refers to you as his Big Man. By the way, we'd be only too happy to see you here again any time you could come. Write soon again.

All the best. Yours, CM Grieve

50. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, ff 32r-32v)

c/o Simpson, Bloomfield, Tobermory

28 April 1938

Dear Grieve,

consul to Glasgow in 1917. He was arrested six times between 1916 and 1923 for his political activities." See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 153.

Again I am damnably late. This time I was very busy with an important paper on Gaelic poetry I had to give to the Gaelic Society of Inverness a week ago¹⁷³ and when I had finished it I was seized with one of the fits of complete and hopeless inertia which I take now every alternate month or so. I hope the general lateness of your ventures will enable my contribution to reach you in time. I am sending by next post an article on The Highland Development League and Crofters' Unions and a bit of Gaelic verse of my own.¹⁷⁴ I hope it is in time. Perhaps neither one [is] worth while, at any rate.

I am glad to hear you are now getting on well. My best regards to all in Whalsay. As it is very late I cannot get my stuff away tonight but I will follow by next post.

Yours, Sam Maclean

P.S. Last November John, my brother, got a good post in the Royal High School of Edinburgh, the most celebrated, for Latin and Greek, of Scottish schools.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Possibly "The Poetry of the Clearances," *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 38 (1937-41) 293-324. See William Gillies, "The Poet as Critic," *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays* 199.

¹⁷⁴ This "bit of verse" was MacLean's short poem "*Ban Ghàidheal* / A Highland Woman." See *Somhairle MacGill-Eain / Sorley MacLean, O Choille gu Bearradh: Dàin Chruinnichte / From Wood to Ridge: Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1989) 26-29.

¹⁷⁵ According to the records of the Royal High School in Edinburgh, the first mention of a John MacLean as a member of staff is in the Annual Report for session 1937 - 38. He appears in the List of Masters as part of the Classics Department and is named as John Maclean M.A. (Edin). B.A. (Cantab). He worked in the school till session 1941 - 42 when the Rector's report mentions that

He likes it well. After Portree, Tobermory is awful. I am absolutely alone, except for MacLachlainn. I seem to require external stimulus to keep me going at anything. Almost the whole male staff has cleared out of Portree School in disgust at developments. I am so lacking in mental resources that I think I can now stand nowhere in Scotland except Skye or Glasgow. Mull is hopeless. Practically all the people are retainers of landlords.

51. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, f 1r)

c/o Simpson, Bloomfield, Tobermory, Mull

28 April 1933 [1938]¹⁷⁶

Dear Grieve,

"Mr Maclean has been appointed Senior Classics Master at Inverness Academy." See Robin Boog, email dated 01 September 2006.

¹⁷⁶ This date of this letter, though clearly written in MacLean's hand, is incorrect. MacLean was not teaching in Tobermory on Mull until 1938. According to Bold, Hendry, and MacLean himself, he and MacDiarmid first met in the Spring of 1934. In the "Preface" to *O Choille gu Bearradh/From Wood to Ridge*, originally published in 1989, MacLean states "In late 1933 or early 1934 I met MacDiarmid, and agreed to his request that I help him to translate some Gaelic poems" (xiv). The familiarity of the letter's salutation and the tone of its contents are characteristic of MacLean's correspondence from early February 1935 onwards, when his friendship with MacDiarmid was firmly established. In the early '30s MacDiarmid published poetry and critical essays, but he was not editing a literary journal in 1933. MacDiarmid's quarterly journal, *The Voice of Scotland*, was first issued in 1938. See Black, ed. *An Tuil* 765. See also Bold, *MacDiarmid* 468, 239-317.

I enclose article. I hope it is not too late and that it will suit. If you publish it do not put my name after it. If you want a signature for it put – “Skyeman”.¹⁷⁷ I have put my name in Gaelic after the bit of verse. If you care to include it just put my Gaelic name. Hoping I hear from you soon.

Yrs, Sam Maclean

52. *To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, f 22r; NSL)*

Whalsay, via Lerwick, Shetland Islands

9 May 1938¹⁷⁸

My dear Sam,

Just a very hasty note to thank you for your poem and article. Both are admirable and exactly the sort of thing I want for the *Scottish Republic*.¹⁷⁹ I'll very gladly use them both in the first issue, and you'll probably receive proofs before we go to press. I'm busy getting a good first number in shape, but am still

¹⁷⁷ In 1938, MacLean submitted the piece “The Highland Development League and Crofters’ Unions” signed “Skyeman” and the poem “*Ban Ghàidheal*” under his own name to MacDiarmid’s new quarterly, initially entitled *The Scottish Republic*, and subsequently renamed *The Voice of Scotland*.

¹⁷⁸ This letter appears on letterhead which reads “from hugh macdiarmid (C.M. Grieve) WHALSAY, VIA LERWICK, SHETLAND ISLANDS”.

¹⁷⁹ CMG changed the name of his publication from the *Scottish Republic* to *The Voice of Scotland; A Quarterly Magazine of Scottish Arts and Affairs*. Volume 1, issue 1 was published as June-August 1938. See Bold, *LHM* 611. See also Bold, *MacDiarmid* 372-73.

waiting to hear from various people I want stuff from. But I expect to have the first issue out early next month all right.

I am very sorry you find things so uncongenial in Tobermory and about these periods of lassitude or loss of will or whatever it is – probably just a question of your age, a love (or need of love) matter. I hope things will even out for you; and fancy they may do so via writing – especially poetry. I cannot tell you how glad I am to have this excellent poem of yours and how keenly I will look for more. The all-absorbing interest of the development of a genuine creative faculty in you may well dispose of your other problems in the most satisfactory way.

I am extremely glad to hear that John has a post in the Royal High, hope he is enjoying life, and that this post will lead on to still better things.

Love to you all. All here send their warmest regards. I'll write you soon again.

Yours, Chris.

53. *To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, ff 23r-23v)*

Whalsay

24 [August] 1938¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ The letter is dated in MacDiarmid's hand writing as "24/8 1938." It is difficult to determine whether the number is "8" or "9," but as the letter makes reference to "a busy summer", the letter has been ascribed to the month of August. See *GL MS 29533, f 23r*.

Dear Sam,

I am wearying to hear from you again – and to find whether you have other contributions to send me for the *Voice of Scotland*. And to hear what you thought of that. The second issue is almost ready. We have had a busy summer here with visitors – Bill Aitken and John Brough¹⁸¹ and their sweethearts; two Communist friends from Glasgow; two artists from Manchester.¹⁸²

I think the time is ripe for a united Celtic Front of Welsh, Irish and Scottish writers. The periodical *Wales* has had a Celtic Front number with contributions from groups of young writers in each of these countries.¹⁸³ I am hoping to follow suit in the *Voice of Scotland*. Believing that the Auden-Spender group have got altogether undue prominence and that the younger Irish, Welsh, and Scottish writers have been unduly neglected, Norman MacLeod is arranging to publish an

¹⁸¹ A friend of W.R. Aitken. The only reference to him occurs in a letter from MacDiarmid to Aitken, dated Monday, 10 July 1939, and transcribed in Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 163-4.

¹⁸² Although the “two Communist friends from Glasgow” are unidentified, the “two artists from Manchester” were Barbara Niven and her husband, Ernest Brooks. They spent the summer of 1938 with the Grieves in Whalsay. As Alan Bold notes, “The couple were committed Communists (Niven became the main fund-raising force for the *Daily Worker*, the Party newspaper) and were active in the Artists International Association, rallying support for the Spanish Republicans.” See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 373-74.

¹⁸³ This was an Anglo-Welsh literary magazine edited by Keidrych Rhys (William Ronald Rhys Jones). It was published sporadically from the late 1930's to the late 1940's. Keidrych Rhys later edited *Modern Welsh Poetry*. See Francesca Rhydderch, “War Archives”, editorial in *The New Welsh Review*, 60 (Summer 2003). See also Keidrych Rhys, ed. *Modern Welsh Poetry* (London: Faber, 1944), and Duncan Glen, *Hugh MacDiarmid and the Scottish Renaissance* (Edinburgh; London: W. & R. Chambers Ltd., 1964) 140; 160.

anthology of the latter in America.¹⁸⁴ You'll have seen *Albannach*?¹⁸⁵ Further issues of it are to appear. And T.S. Eliot is publishing the opening section (about 500 lines) of my *Cornish Heroic Song* in the *Criterion*.¹⁸⁶

I'm extremely busy – must finish a couple of books before the end of this month. A little later I hope to migrate to Eigg and have a cottage there for a few months.¹⁸⁷

I am wondering if you could possibly give me the English (and note of the metres) of Calum MacFarlane's "Na Goidheil an guailibh a cheile"¹⁸⁸ and of John MacFadyen's "Oidhche Mhath Leibh".¹⁸⁹ I would be very glad if you could.

¹⁸⁴ Norman Macleod (1906-85), Scottish American Communist and poet. CMG's review of MacLeod's *Thanksgiving before November*, entitled "A Scottish American Communist Poet" appeared in *Outlook*, vol. 1, no. 4, July 1936. See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, eds., *NSL* 122-23. See also Glen, *Hugh MacDiarmid* 260, and Beth Junor, ed., *Scarcely Ever Out of My Thoughts: The Letters of Valda Trevlyn Grieve to Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)* (Edinburgh: Word Power Books, 2007) 94.

¹⁸⁵ *Albanach: A Little Anthology of 1938 Scots Poetry* (1938), edited by C.J. Russell and J.F. Hendry, included two of MacDiarmid's poems: "The Glen of Silence" and "A Golden Wine in the Gaidhealtachd". See Bold, *LHM* 170.

¹⁸⁶ "Cornish Heroic Song for Valda Trevlyn" was initially published by T.S. Eliot in the January 1939 issue of *The Criterion*. It comprised merely the first segment of what CMG's envisioned as a much longer poem which he frequently referred to by the title "Mature Art". This was never published in its entirety. See Bold, *LHM* 268; 408; 446-9; 600.

¹⁸⁷ The Hebridean Isle of Eigg. CMG never relocated to Eigg. After he left Whalsay in 1942, he went to perform manual labour on Clydeside as an industrial conscript and was later transferred to the Merchant Service. See Bold, *LHM* xxxiii.

¹⁸⁸ Malcolm MacFarlane of Lochaweside and Paisley (Calum MacPhàrlain) (18? – 18?): 19th-century Gaelic poet, renowned for poetry expressing a "love for land and language", such as "The Gaels shoulder to shoulder / *Na Gaidheil an guailibh a chéile*". See Thomson, *Introduction* 225-26.

I hope all goes well with you.

We are all O.K. here. Valda and Michael will probably be going down to Glasgow for a holiday in a few days' time. A little later I hope to be in Glasgow too, broadcasting,¹⁹⁰ and to go thence to address the Annual Meeting of the London Scottish Self Government Association in London.¹⁹¹

You'll be back to school, I expect, ere this. I've forgotten your Tobermory address in any case, so I am sending this to Raasay. Please give your father and mother – and the other members of your family – my warmest regards.

Love from us all.

Yours, C.M. Grieve

54. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, ff 33r-36v)

¹⁸⁹ John MacFadyen, of Mull (*Iain MacPhaidein*) (18?-18?): 19th-century Gaelic poet and author of such works as "Good Night to You / *Oidhche Mhaith Leibh*." See Thomson, *Introduction* 230-31.

¹⁹⁰ In a letter to W.R. Aitken, dated Monday, 28 November 1938, CMG mentions a trip to Glasgow to visit F.G. Scott, who was ill at the time, and to attend a "PEN function" on Saturday, 3 December. No mention is made of a broadcast. See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 155-56.

¹⁹¹ Also known as The London Scots Self Government Committee, formed in 1936, and following the mandate articulated by Tom Johnston, MP, that "Scotland must have a Legislative Assembly of its own, to deal with its own special grievances and meet its own special needs." See The London Scots Self-Government Committee, *The New Scotland* (Glasgow: Civic Press Ltd., 1942), to which CMG contributed.

c/o Scott, Lyndhurst,

Wednesday, 10 January 1940?¹⁹²

Langlands Road, Hawick

My dear Christopher,

I have great difficulty in writing you now as I am so terribly ashamed of myself for not answering your two last letters and for not doing anything for *The Voice of Scotland* except reading it and for not acknowledging the terribly kind words you had to say of the poem of mine which you published in the first number.¹⁹³ I think the real reason is that I have gone through over a year of sluggish depression when I had nothing poetical to send you of which I thought you might approve and when I felt I had nothing to say in prose which others could not say better. But for the last month or two I have been more active. I have now about 3,000 lines of Gaelic verse on my hands which I would publish if I could. It includes a medley of some 1,700 lines in 7 parts called "The Cuillin"¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² The year "1940?" has been added to the handwritten original of MacLean's letter. This is chronologically accurate, as MacLean taught evacuees in Hawick from October 1939 to June 1940, prior to his mobilization in WWII. See Hendry, "The Man and His Work" 27.

¹⁹³ "*Ban Ghàidheal*."

¹⁹⁴ MacLean's unfinished long poem "*An Cuilithionn / The Cuillin*," named for the hills he loved on Skye, was "an attempt, like *A Drunk Man*, to maximize the force and scope of the lyric." Dedicated to MacDiarmid, this long poem of approximately 10,000 words combined the local with the universal, beginning as a meditation on the landscape of Skye and expanding to a contemplation of the human condition. MacLean abandoned the poem after the war due to his disillusionment with communism because of the Soviet Union's treatment of

and dedicated to yourself and to the memory of Alexander MacDonald.¹⁹⁵ It varies from the most direct political utterance to varying degrees of symbolism. It works out from the history of Skye to a sort of contemplation of Scotland and the rest of Europe. When I get the whole of an English translation of it typed I shall send it you. There are about 100 lines of it in the booklet I am sending you.¹⁹⁶ Since the war started I have confined myself to writing verse. I have been in Hawick with evacuees since October and find it a good place to work in.¹⁹⁷

How are things with you now? If you manage any more numbers of *The Voice* I shall send you all I have to do what you like with it. I am glad you published Campbell Oig's.¹⁹⁸ He is a fine chap and I would like to recommend to you to publish anything he sends you in Gaelic.

Nowadays I am more and more worried and ashamed of the way Scotland has treated yourself whom, I at least, recognise as one of the great European poets of all time. I find that all the people whose opinions I value are now certain that this century has seen two major poets in the British Islands, yourself and Yeats, and they are all agreed that in lyric intensity your poetry is far above

Poland. See Hendry, "The Man and His Work" 17; 26. See also MacLean, *O Choille gu Bèarradh* 64-131.

¹⁹⁵ Alasdair Mac Mhaighistir Alasdair (Alexander MacDonald) (c. 1700-70).

¹⁹⁶ The "booklet" is MacLean's joint publication with the poet Robert Garioch. See note 196.

¹⁹⁷ See footnote 189.

¹⁹⁸ Possibly Aonghus Caimbeul (1908-49), "*Am Bocsair*." See Black, *An Tuil* 757; 762-63.

Yeats's. It is amazing to find how many subscribe to that view without doing anything about it in public. I shall send you translations of my own stuff very soon. I hope you will like Garioch's poems.¹⁹⁹ Though temperamentally he is poles apart from you, you will easily see how much his poetry owes to you though he is so very different from you.

The booklet is so very small because Garioch underwent the labours of printing it himself.²⁰⁰ I add a translation of the poem for you on page 5. It is a slight thing but technically it satisfies me. It is really one of 4 poems I have written for a woman whom I call Eimhir in the booklet.²⁰¹

I wish I had the past year over again so that I could have a chance of pulling my weight for *The Voice*[,] which owing merely to my sluggish depression I have badly let down.

¹⁹⁹ Robert Garioch Sutherland (1909-81), Scottish poet, publisher, and school teacher. He published his work under the name Robert Garioch. He and MacLean jointly published their first collection of poetry entitled *17 Poems for Sixpence* in 1940. See Somhairle Mac Ghill-Eathain and Robert Garioch, *17 Poems for 6d: in Gaelic, Lowland Scots & English* (Edinburgh: Chalmers Press, 1940). See also Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 180.

²⁰⁰ Garioch produced *17 Poems for 6d* using his own hand press in late December 1939. See Whyte, ed. *Dàin do Eimhir* 11.

²⁰¹ As Christopher Whyte observes, the figure *Eimhir* of MacLean's poem cycle, actually represents three different women whom the poet knew or was involved with during the late 1930s and early 1940s, as well as an "abstract meditation" or idealized woman. Thus, he concludes, "[t]he presence of different women behind the overarching figure of Eimhir is explicit in XLVI . . ., first published in 1970." See Whyte, *Dàin do Eimhir* 11-16.

How are Mrs. Grieve and Mike[?] I expect Mike will be a big fellow by now. Give them both my very best regards. Also give my regards to David Orr who I suppose is now in Whalsay again.

I have spent a year in Mull, which depressed me. I left it last New Year and have been in Edinburgh until last October[,] but I expect to get back to Edinburgh in February.²⁰² It is a pity you are so far away and isolated from us all just now. I have been seeing very much of George Davie for the last while. Hood,²⁰³ by the way, is with me in Hawick. Caird is teaching evacuees in Banff. At the end of January I am going to Glasgow to give a paper to the Gaelic Society there and I hope to see Scott.²⁰⁴ In March I am to give the Gaelic Society of Inverness a paper on the poetry of Livingston.²⁰⁵ I have not yet decided what to give the paper on in Glasgow but I think it will be on certain aspects of MacDonald and Macintyre.

I shall write you again very soon. At the moment I am in a hurry as I have great arrears of work owing to having been down a week or two with a very bad throat. Calum, my brother, is doing research in Dublin. He hopes to get into

²⁰² Following his post at Tobermory Secondary School, MacLean taught at Boroughmuir Secondary School in Edinburgh, from 1939-40. See Black, *An Tuil* 765.

²⁰³ John Hood. See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 179-80; 567.

²⁰⁴ The composer F.G. Scott, former teacher of and mentor to MacDiarmid.

²⁰⁵ Sorley MacLean, "The Poetry of William Livingston," *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 39/40 (1942-50): 1-19. See Gillies 199.

touch with Higgins as soon as possible.²⁰⁶ John is now married to Morag MacDonald of Edinbane and is teaching in the Royal High, Edinburgh.

All the best just now.

Somhairle Mac Ghill Eathain

55. *To Sorley MacLean* (GL MS 29533, ff 24r-26v; NSL)

Whalsay

11 February 1940

My dear Sam.

I was delighted to hear from you again, to receive the little book of your verse and Sutherland's, and to note with pride your inscription of a poem to myself. I had been wondering what in the world had come over you, but I note what you say thereanent and I am the last person to underestimate the value and necessity of the harsh and dark rigours of winter to the subsequent seed-time and harvest; and I am immensely cheered to learn that the spell of sluggish repression to which you refer has already resulted in such a rich yield of poetry. I will look forward very keenly to the eventual publication of the whole Cuillin poem²⁰⁷ you have so kindly dedicated to myself, coupling my name with the great

²⁰⁶ F.R. Higgins (1896-1941), Irish poet, friend of Yeats, director of the Abbey Theatre for 1936. See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 163.

²⁰⁷ Having published the beginning of the poem in *17 Poems for Sixpence*, MacLean abandoned it after WWII and never completed it.

name of Alexander MacDonald, and the collection of poems to *Eimhir*, and to the English thereof you promise me.²⁰⁸

Fancy you being in Hawick which as probably you know is only 20 miles from my own birthplace of Langholm and a town in which I used to have uncles and aunts and still have cousins, and, to boot, a town that is the birthplace of F.G. Scott. I hope you got to Glasgow all right at the end of last month and saw F.G. (who would be delighted to see you) and that your address to the Gaelic Society there went off all right. I wish I could get down to Inverness and be present on the occasion of your paper on the poetry of Livingston there next month: and indeed if steamer sailings had been normal I think I would have managed it – but as matters are with war-time curtailments and uncertainties of sailings it is out of the question.

I note Hood is with you in Hawick. Please give him my greetings. He asked me last year to lend him my material on John Maclean.²⁰⁹ I had hoped to have been in Edinburgh in the autumn and to have stayed with Hood and meant to take the material in question down with me then and give it to him. But the

²⁰⁸ “They were to appear as *Dàin do Eimhir agus Dàin Eile* (Glaschu: W. MacLellan, 1943) – a book which is recognized as a major turning point in the world of modern Scottish Gaelic poetry.” See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 180.

²⁰⁹ Reference to material MacDiarmid had himself been given by James Maxton, then Chairman of the Scottish Independent Labour Party (ILP), while working in Glasgow in 1913. MacDiarmid never finished the Maclean biography, which he was co-writing with MacLean’s daughter, Nan Milton. “He eventually turned all his material over to John Broom whose *John Maclean* was published in 1973. Nan Milton’s *John Maclean* also appeared in 1973.” See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 72-73; 460, note 15.

advent of War knocked all my arrangements sideways. Later I asked Davie if Hood was ready for the stuff, but I haven't heard from George since. So will you now ask Hood if he still wants it. If so, I can post it to him right away.

Talking of Hawick, my friend H.G. Taylor (who has lived here with me for a couple of years and acts as my secretary and typist) was in Hawick a few weeks ago seeing a friend of his – a Miss Tait, a school-teacher, whom perhaps you also know. Perhaps he met you too. Taylor is still holidaying in Dumfries but I expect him back soon now.

I note Calum is in Dublin and hopes to meet Higgins. I do not expect he will have any difficulty but if he liked I would be glad to send him letters of introduction to Higgins and any of the others he'd like to meet. Please give Calum my kindest regards – also your brother John and his wife, whom I have pleasant memories of meeting at Edinbane.

I am very busy myself. I enclose a prospectus of my huge new poem.²¹⁰ In addition to this “enormity”, I have also coming out this Spring my *Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* (via Macmillan) at long last, and my autobiography,

²¹⁰ It is likely the poem CMG refers to here is *Cornish Heroic Song for Valda Trevlyn*. As Alan Bold states, “When MacDiarmid published *Cornish Heroic Song for Valda Trevlyn* (Glasgow: Caledonian Press, 1943) he indicated that this was the opening section of an extremely long unpublished poem; in a letter of 18 June 1938, to T.S. Eliot, he offered the ‘First Appendix (Cornwall)’ for publication in the *Criterion* where it appeared in January 1939 as ‘Cornish Heroic Song for Valda Trevlyn’ – the same text as the Caledonian Press booklet.” See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 349-50; 460-61, note 32.

“Lucky Poet,” which Messrs Victor Gollancz are publishing.²¹¹ As you will know the *Voice of Scotland* is temporarily suspended²¹² but I hope to restart it soon now.

Mike and Valda are both in good form and join me in warmest greetings to you, as does Dr. Orr (here as *locum tenens* again for a while *vice* Dr. MacCrimmon). I have written to Sutherland separately.

Yours. Christopher.

56. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*
(SML MS 2954.13, ff 37r-38r)

Lyndhurst, Langlands Road, Hawick

12 May 1940

My dear Christopher,

Again I have to apologise for my very long delay in answering your letter of February. A few days ago I sent you a translation of “The Cuillin” and I hope it has reached you. It is a crude declamatory poem but certain passages manage to sound fairly well in Gaelic. In the very rough translation which I made for

²¹¹ Hugh MacDiarmid, ed., *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1940). Hugh MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet: A Self-Study in Literature and Political Ideas* (London: Methuen, 1943).

²¹² *The Voice of Scotland*, a quarterly journal founded by CMG and published sporadically in Dunfermline from 1938-39, in Glasgow from 1944-49, and in Edinburgh from 1955-58. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 468.

Davie and which Jessie Scott²¹³ typed the crudity is painfully apparent and such few graces as it has in the Gaelic are conspicuously absent but there is in Gaelic some crude effective voice in parts of it. I have a fair amount of lyrical stuff of which I shall send you versions when I can. They please me more. At present I have begun what I hope will be a fairly long thing but quieter, more introspective and more imaged than “The Cuillin.”²¹⁴

I did long ago send the subscription form for *Mature Art*²¹⁵ to Paris but I have had no word at all from the Obelisk Press.²¹⁶ I hope my letter got there. I was very glad to meet Taylor but having to go to Edinburgh on the week-end when he was in Hawick[,] I saw far less of him than I should have wished. Perhaps he told you that John’s wife died about the middle of February.²¹⁷ You remember her at Edinbane. She had been really unwell for about 10 years

²¹³ Unidentified.

²¹⁴ MacLean is likely referring to another portion of the *Dàin do Eimhir* sequence, for most of the poems were written during the period from October 1939 to June 1940. See Whyte, *Dàin do Eimhir* 11.

²¹⁵ By December 1939 “Mature Art” had expanded to approximately 20,000 lines. Ultimately, the German invasion of Paris in June 1940 prevented the Obelisk Press from publishing the poem, and although CMG subsequently submitted it first to Methuen, then to the Hogarth Press, both firms rejected it. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 349; 379.

²¹⁶ The Obelisk Press was an English language press founded in Paris by Jack Kahane. It closed shortly after Kahane’s death just after the outbreak of World War II, but reopened again in the years following the war by Kahane’s son, Maurice Girodias. Obelisk published works by several important twentieth-century authors as Henry Miller, Anais Nin, James Joyce, and Lawrence Durrell. See Neil Pearson, *The Obelisk: A History of Jack Kahane and the Obelisk Press* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007).

²¹⁷ Morag MacLean (née MacDonald).

having T.B. John himself is very well and is still teaching in Edinburgh in the Royal High School. Calum is enjoying himself immensely in Dublin and has met Higgins a few times but, as far as I know, he has not yet met O'Connor²¹⁸ who, I believe, now lives in Wicklow. I have not seen Davie for about three weeks but expect to see him in Edinburgh next weekend. Hood, of course, has been in the army since February. When I was in Edinburgh last I saw Campbell Hay²¹⁹ but what happened to him since I don't know. He has given all his Gaelic verse to my safe-keeping and the English he has given, as far as I know, to Young.²²⁰ I think Hay is about the finest young Scotsman of our day. He is at least the finest young Highlander I have ever come across but I am afraid he is in for a bad time.²²¹ The Cairds have been in Banff since September last. I saw Caird at

²¹⁸ Frank O'Connor (Michael O'Donovan) (1903-66), Irish short story writer, Gaelic poetry translator, anthologist, critic and biographer. "Grew up under the influence of Daniel Corkery and the Irish language revival." See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 554-55.

²¹⁹ George Campbell Hay (*Deòrsa mac Iain Deòrsa*) (1915-84), Gaelic poet. See Bold, *LHM* 611.

²²⁰ Douglas Young (1913-73), Scottish nationalist, academic, poet, literary agent and pacifist. Young, who believed conscription for Scots was illegal under the 1706 Act of Union, was prosecuted and imprisoned for refusing compulsory enlistment in WW II. A friend of both MacDiarmid and MacLean, he served as custodian of MacLean's papers while the Gaelic poet was in the British Army, and arranged for the publication of *Dàin do Eimhir agus Dàin Eile* (Glasgow: William Maclellan, 1943). See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 562. See also Whyte, *Dàin do Eimhir* 33-37; 170-72.

²²¹ Hay, like Young, was an opponent of the war. Hay's essay, "Gaelic and Literary Form" had been published in the *Voice of Scotland* issue of June-August 1939, and he was celebrated by CMG as one of the bright young talents among the second generation of Scottish Renaissance poets. Hay's refusal of conscription resulted in a prison sentence in Edinburgh, after which he was sent to fight in North Africa. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 391. See also Michael Byrne,

Easter in Edinburgh and his account of life at Banff and its cultural side was devastating and somber.

I look forward greatly to the appearance of your autobiography and of *The Golden Treasury* which I hope will be out soon. This is a bad time for such but all the same there are some people who now cling more than ever to that in view of the apparent hopelessness of the political scene. Perhaps I should have said that the political scene is rather terrifying than hopeless for, whatever happens, I suppose capitalism and imperialism are doomed, and I can imagine that ten or twenty or perhaps even five years hence may be times of great hope.

Give my best regards to Valda, Mike, and Dr Orr if he is still in Whalsay.

Yours. Sam Maclean.

57. To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, f 27r)

Whalsay, via Lerwick, Shetland.²²²

13 May 1940²²³

"Tails o the Comet? MacLean, Hay, Young and MacDiarmid's Renaissance", *ScotLit*, 26 (Spring 2002):5-6, and MacDiarmid, *Golden Treasury* 351-52.

²²² This is one of the few letters from MacDiarmid which is actually typed. However, there are two brief hand-written notes on the typescript. The first of these notes consists of the two lines immediately following the date, beginning with "Lost your Hawick address" and continuing through "as soon as I hear from you."

²²³ This date is originally typed as "6-5-40", with the "6" later crossed out in pen and replaced with the number 13.

Lost your Hawick address. The typescript of your big poem²²⁴ has just this moment arrived. Glory be! I'll write you about it as soon as I hear from you.

My dear Sam,

The Hogarth Press²²⁵ are willing to consider putting out in their "Poets of Tomorrow" Series a selection by me of poems by six Scottish poets, viz: George Campbell Hay, Douglas Young, William Soutar,²²⁶ Sydney Smith,²²⁷ yourself and myself.

For this purpose unfortunately Gaelic originals cannot be given; but I would be very glad indeed if you could stretch a point on this occasion and let me represent you by the English²²⁸ of "Ban-ghaidheal", and if you could send me similar Englishings of two or more of what you consider your best shorter poems (or short passages that can stand alone from your long poem). I will make the

²²⁴ Presumably the English typescript of "The Cuillin" which MacLean referred to in his letter of 12 May 1940.

²²⁵ The Hogarth Press was owned and run by Leonard Woolf (1880-1969) and Virginia Woolf (née Stephen) (1882-1941). This selection of poems by six Scottish poets was never published. See Letter 61 dated 3 December 1940.

²²⁶ William Soutar (1898-1943). Scottish poet. See Watson, *The Poetry of Scotland* 582.

²²⁷ Sydney Goodsir Smith (1915-75). Scottish poet. See Watson, *The Poetry of Scotland*, 624.

²²⁸ The second hand-written notation on the letter occurs in the lower left margin and is connected by a line to the word "English". It reads, "tho' I may be able to give this as in the *Voice*, i.e. the Gaelic, followed by the English." The *Voice* referred to is MacDiarmid's publication, *The Voice of Scotland*, in which "*Ban-Ghàidheal*" was first published.

necessary explanation regarding the injustice this does to your work – and to Hay's.²²⁹ I am anxious to have these as soon as possible.

I hope all goes well with you and that you are still hard at work. I am, of course, longing to see the English version of your long poem²³⁰ as promised, but understand this is no easy matter and so I am possessing my soul in what patience I can.

With every kind regard from all of us.

Yours, Chris

P.S. Particularly I'd be grateful if you would English for me in your own words

Dain do Eimhir III – Garioch's Scots of it is good but not quite good enough.²³¹ It is an exceedingly beautiful and moving poem.

58. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, ff 39r-40v)

c/o Lyndhurst, Langlands Road, Hawick

Saturday, 25 May 1940?

²²⁹ Hay, like MacLean, wrote poetry in Gaelic.

²³⁰ This had arrived, as is evident from CMG's handwritten note at the top of the letter, before this was posted.

²³¹ Here CMG is referring to "*Dàin do Eimhir, iii*" and Robert Garioch's rendering of it in Scots, as published in *17 Poems for Sixpence*.

My dear Christopher,

I got your letter some days ago and I here enclose English versions of 19 or 20 of my shorter pieces. You may do what you want with any of them you choose and with "The Highland Woman" too. I am not very concerned as to which of them you choose because it may be right to take one that sounds better in English even if others are really better in the original. For example, George Campbell Hay thinks "*Dàin do Eimhir IV*" the best poem in the little book. I agree and yet it sounds pretty awful in English. My stuff[,] like most Gaelic verse[,] has a sensuousness chiefly for the ear. Now, as far as I can see, recent English poetry concentrates on a jungle of bristling, more or less surrealist imagery which strikes the eye. To me it is bad because I like rhythmic line or whatever you call it most in poetry. For that reason Dylan Thomas²³² leaves me impressed but really unmoved. My antecedents are Gaelic and, quite sure that I could never approach the under-the-skin awareness and auditory magic of your own lyrics, which I consider as quite unrivalled and unapproached in the British Isles at present, I sometimes imagine that I could be a humble follower of the School of Yeats, who essentially is a very mundane poet compared with you. I am especially interested in Yeats because I am certain a sense of inferiority is one of the main dynamics of his poetry, though this sense of inferiority frequently, as in his Anglo-Irish Ascendancy aristocratic sense, is an inferiority complex. I don't think I have the complex[,] but I have the inferiority feeling quite clearly. Names

²³² Dylan Thomas (1914-53), Welsh poet and writer.

like Lenin,²³³ Connolly,²³⁴ John Maclean etc. are more to me than the names of any poets.

Whatever is deficient in my verse it has in Gaelic a rhythm and auditory sensuousness that pleases myself. This, of course, cannot be translated. I do not strive after imagery. Usually a lyric comes to me quite spontaneously as a whole and then I don't blot a line. I fail to see how the jungle of poorly defined imagery that you have e.g. in Dylan Thomas can have any spontaneity. At any rate Dylan Thomas to me does not achieve significant form in his whole poem. As for Auden, Spender etc. they are beneath contempt.²³⁵ I shall not be unduly perturbed if you do not accept any of my pieces for the anthology. If you think any part of "The Cuillin" will do you can use it provided you tell me beforehand as a good deal of it is libelous and I can't afford a libel action.

How are things with yourself at present[?] I myself expect to be in the army sometime in Autumn, as our reservation age is being raised from 25 to 30. If Hitler does win[,] what can Scotland expect? Slovakian status, at the very best! That is my opinion and the prospect does not cheer me sufficiently to make me object to serving in the British army. I may be totally wrong and the best men I

²³³ Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov Lenin (1870-1924), leader of the Russian Revolution of 1917.

²³⁴ James Connolly (1868-1916), socialist, labour leader, and participant in Ireland's Easter Rising of 1916.

²³⁵ Wystan Hugh "W.H." Auden (1907-73), English poet; Stephen Spender (1909-95), English poet, novelist, and essayist. Both MacLean and MacDiarmid shared a mutual contempt for the "MacSpaundy" group of English poets which included Auden, Spender, MacNeice, and Day Lewis. See Whyte, *Dàin do Eimhir* 164-65; 198-99.

know, like Hay, do not agree. And would Russian communism survive a Nazi domination of Europe for very long? I think our fate would be ultimately to cooperate with Hitler in the destruction of Russian communism. I think the Nazis would make a thorough job of a domination of Europe which the English and French could not do. Therefore I cannot but think a Nazi victory the very worst possible. Of course the possibilities of a long war of exhaustion are infinite. That would ultimately be the best conclusion but what if the Nazis are going to have a rapid victory? They would get a ready welcome from hosts of English *Gauleiters*²³⁶ and their power would be very difficult to break, far more difficult to break than the power of the ramshackle British Empire.

At present I am studying Rilke.²³⁷ I am fascinated by the complete antithesis in his attitude to life to all my own instinctive feelings. To me his attitude is completely unreal but I suppose no modern poet has at all expressed the whatever-is-is-right feeling with anything like his subtlety and consistency and poignancy.

I shall write you soon again. If you have time and do choose any of these pieces[,] perhaps you might tell me which so that I could spend more time over those selected in order to improve the version.

²³⁶ A German term used to refer to senior officials high in government; a title frequently associated with prominent SS officers. Possibly also an allusion to Ernest Bevin (1881-1951), who was Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union from 1921-40, and Minister of Labour and National Service in Churchill's coalition government. See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 191. See also Letter 63, dated 2 April 1941.

²³⁷ Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926), German poet.

Kindest regards to Valda, Mike, and Orr.

Yours, Sam.

59. *To Sorley MacLean* (GL MS 29533, ff 28r-32r; LHM)

Whalsay

5 June 1940

My dear Sam,

I am sorry to have been so long in writing to you anent the typescript of your great poem.²³⁸ You will understand that I am not in a letter-writing mood these days – too trapped under the Ossa-on-Pelion of current events and forebodings (not to mention immediate personal difficulties of all kinds). But equally you must understand that the arrival of your poem is a tremendous event in my life – and its dedication to me an honour equivalent to (and because of poetry and in respect of a contribution to *Scottish* Literature even greater and more brain-seizing) than Sorabji's dedication to me of his stupendous *Opus Clavicembalisticum*.²³⁹ Nevertheless you must let me write to you of it again –

²³⁸ Writing to Alan Bold on 18 October 1982, MacLean explained why the poem was never completed: "I was on the point of getting it published in 1944 [when] the Polish business of that year shocked me terribly, and some of my perceptive friends condemned it. I do myself because, apart from my pre-1944 uncritical support of the Russian government, the symbolism of it is inadequate to the theme. Besides it was never really finished, but stopped abruptly by a personal tragedy I suffered in Dec. 1939." See Bold, *LHM* 610.

²³⁹ "SORABJI, Kaikhosru Shapurji (1892-1988). Composer. . . . Composed *Opus Clavicembalisticum*, the longest non-repetitious published piano piece. . . .

and not just now. You will see a little of what it means to me however in the enclosed essay, which will you please, after perusal, send to, along with the accompanying note to him, Johnston-Stewart²⁴⁰ of the *New Alliance*.

(Incidentally if you happen to be seeing him you might also before transmitting it to Johnston-Stewart give a read of it to Sidney Smith). I don't expect Johnston Stewart to use it: but I'll be able to place it elsewhere. And I have in mind one or two other shorter essays on your work and Hay's I intend to write and send to other quarters.²⁴¹

The poem I quote from in the essay I enclose also a typescript of to you which – since it is my only copy – you might please return to me later. It will also serve to give you some indications of how your work has excited and pleased me.²⁴²

He dedicated it 'To My Two Friends (*E Duobus Unum*): Hugh MacDiarmid and C.M. Grieve'" See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 559.

²⁴⁰ "In a letter of 18 October 1982 to [Alan Bold] Sorley MacLean writes: 'Johnstone-Stewart [was] a Galloway laird associated with [George] Scott Moncrieff in the *New Alliance*, and, as I remember, associated with the *Free Man*, a Scottish Nationalist then [and] a very likeable man.'" See Bold, *LHM* 610.

²⁴¹ No reference is made to the essay in any of the critical studies of either MacDiarmid or MacLean. Possibly it was later incorporated as the chapter entitled "The Ideas Behind My Work" in MacDiarmid's autobiography *Lucky Poet*, for it concludes with a long poem "welcoming the first of Mac Gill'Eathain's and Hay's poems to reach [him]." See Hugh MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet* 312-62.

²⁴² It is unclear which poem MacDiarmid is referring to: possibly "On Receiving the Gaelic Poems of Somhairle MacLean and George Campbell Hay" which is quoted in Michael Byrne's essay "Tails o' the Comet? MacLean, Hay, Young and MacDiarmid's Renaissance" and was published in *Lucky Poet* in 1943. This poem has also been referred to by the title "The Gaelic Muse". See Hugh MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet* 358-62. See also Byrne 1-2.

I do wish we could foregather. I realise in large measure the difficulties of Englishing your shorter poems: but I fancy that if we were together we might between us succeed in writing English lyrics which would do a far greater measure of justice to them than these prose renderings. And it would be enormously worth it. Some of them are very great lyrics indeed.

I haven't heard further from the Hogarth Press people, but I will write you at once if the project goes ahead and arrange with you what of yours I'll include. We must get really good renderings of some of these lyrics; and I'd also use the Highland Woman I had in the *V of S*, and, I think, the Clio part from the big poem.²⁴³ But we'll see shortly. You will understand how difficult it is to get things published just now – and with what infernal delays.

I am extremely sorry to hear of the death of your brother's wife²⁴⁴ whom I have a happy recollection of meeting at Edinbane. Please give John my deepest sympathy in his terrible trial.

I hope you are in good form yourself, and liking your sojourn in the Borders. I haven't had a cheep from Davie²⁴⁵ for ages.

²⁴³ "The first published version of '*Ban-Ghaidheal*' (A Highland Woman), by MacLean, was published in 1938 in MacDiarmid's *The Voice of Scotland*. The poem was written on Mull. MacLean clarifies the reference to 'Clio' thus: 'The 'Clio' part is from 'The Cullin' [sic]. There is a series of verse paragraphs, each beginning "I am the Clio of Scotland or Ireland or England or France or Italy, etc. etc.'" See Bold, *LHM* 611.

²⁴⁴ "MacLean writes: 'My eldest brother John, who died in 1970, was first married to Morag MacDonald [who] was an outstandingly beautiful woman. She died in late January or early February 1940. I took Chris and W.D. MacColl to Edinbane during their visit to Raasay and Skye in Sept. 1937, but I don't think Morag was at home then [sic].'" See Bold, *LHM* 611.

I note what you say about the War but do not agree although the Germans are appalling enough and in a short-time view more murderously destructive, they cannot win – but the French and British bourgeoisie can, and is a far greater enemy. If the Germans win they could not hold their gain long – but if the French and British bourgeoisie win it will be infinitely more difficult to get rid of them later. That is my point of view.

I am sorry the raising of the reservation age ropes you in. Please keep in touch with me. I earnestly hope that you may yet be spared this terrible waste of your time (to say the least of it) but if not I will be glad to know your whereabouts as continuously as possible. Being marooned up here is bad enough for me as things are, but to have people like you and Hay²⁴⁶ and others just vanish into the all-consuming maw and drag on indefinitely not knowing how and where you are would add terribly to the torment. I hope Calum²⁴⁷ is still safe in Dublin.

Valda, Mike, Dr. Orr, and Grant Taylor join me in every kind regard. Please convey my best respects to your father and mother.

I'll write you soon again.

Yours, Chris.

²⁴⁵ “George Davie, author of *The Democratic Intellect* (1961); a philosopher and friend to both MacDiarmid and MacLean.” See Bold, *LHM* 611.

²⁴⁶ “The poet George Campbell Hay [*Deòrsa mac Iain Deòrsa* (1915-84)].” See Bold, *LHM* 611.

²⁴⁷ “MacLean’s brother Calum, a Scottish Nationalist and opponent of the War, got a post-graduate scholarship to Ireland in 1939.” See Bold, *LHM* 611.

P.S. I have Oliveira's book about Rilke's poetry;²⁴⁸ also a collection of R.F.C. Hull's translations²⁴⁹ (better than Leishman's,²⁵⁰ Sackville West's,²⁵¹ etc.), and Rilke's own books in German. I'll send you any of these if you care.

60. To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)

(SML MS 2954.13, ff 83r-84v)

c/o Douglas,

Saturday, 21st Sept. [1940]²⁵²

10 Polwerth Crescent, Edinburgh

²⁴⁸ The only reference found to a work on Rilke's poetry written by a critic named Oliveira was in *The Year's Work in Modern Language Studies* for 1930. The entry refers to "Ranier Maria Rilke e as cartas de . . . 42" *Cartas Inéditas do Cavalheiro de Oliveira, publicidas por A. Rodrigues, Bi, 1934-5.*" See "Rainier Maria Rilke" in *The Year's Work in Modern Language Studies* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1930) 116.

²⁴⁹ This book in question is unidentified. R.F.C. Hull did not publish his translation of Rilke's *Selected Letters* until 1946. See R.F.C. Hull, *Selected Letters of Rainer Maria Rilke, 1902-1926* (London: Macmillan, 1946). See also S. Goodman, "Rainer Maria Rilke in English: a Bibliography" *Notes and Queries* 198 (1953): 132.

²⁵⁰ Again, the book MacDiarmid is referring to is unspecified. J.B. Leishman published two translations of Rilke prior to 1940. See Rainer Maria Rilke, *Later Poems*, trans. J.B. Leishman (Letchworth, Hertfordshire: n.p., 1938). See also Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, trans., intro., and commentary by J.B. Leishman and Stephen Spender (New York: W.W. Norton, 1939).

²⁵¹ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duineser Elegien: Elegies from the Castle of Duino*, trans. V. Sackville-West (London: The Hogarth Press, 1931).

²⁵² The correct date for this letter was established by consulting the calendar for the common year 1940.

Dear Chris,

How can you forgive me for being such an age in answering your letter and thanking you for the letter, the article, which I sent on to Johnston-Stewart, and above all for the poem about my own and Hay's stuff.²⁵³ I herewith return the script of the poem and I hope you will excuse this delay and this hurry.

I am leaving Edinburgh on Wednesday first for the army, Catterick camp in Yorkshire and when I get there I shall write you at length and tell you all the news I have of Davie, Young, Hay, myself etc. whom I have seen much of recently. Meanwhile my best regards to Valda, Mike, Taylor, Orr and yourself.

Yours, Somhairle

61. *To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, ff 33r-37r)*

Whalsay, Shetland

3 December 1940

My dear Sam,

I had been wearying for your promised letter and wondering how you were faring. So am glad to hear that on the whole you are fairly comfortably circumstanced, and hope that a little later once the intensive training phase is

²⁵³ Although the title of the essay is unknown, the poem is likely "On Receiving the Gaelic Poems of Somhairle MacLean and George Campbell Hay" (1940). This poem is also referred to as "The Gaelic Muse". See footnotes 238 and 239.

passed you'll find yourself not too badly placed and with more time to yourself for your own ends.

I haven't much news. *The Golden Treasury* hasn't appeared yet. It ought to have been out weeks ago. Macmillan's last catalogue scheduled its publication previously for September and so far as my side of the matter is concerned there was nothing to hinder that date being kept. I mean, everything was finished and in type, all the proofs passed etc. I suppose war-time difficulties account for the delay. However it'll come to hand one of these days.²⁵⁴

The Autobiography²⁵⁵ which has given me endless difficulty is now finally finished up too. It ran to ½ million words – a hopeless proposition under present circs. Then it was suggested that I divide it up into two separate books – 1/ dealing with me *qua* poet, my poetic processes, ideas on poetry etc. 2/ dealing with my friendships with Yeats, Joyce, and others. 3/ dealing with my private and domestic life. Each vol. about 150,000 words. That has now been done and Vol 1 – entitled *Lucky Poet* – is to be published at 15/- by Methuen's. That of course won't be until Spring now.

²⁵⁴ When *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* was published in December, 1940, it was dedicated to CMG's friend and mentor, F.G. Scott. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 378.

²⁵⁵ *Lucky Poet: A Self-Study in Literature and Political Ideas* was eventually published by Methuen in 1943. The second volume in the series, *The Company I've Kept*, was not published until 1966. The third volume was never published. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 379; 424-26; 466-67.

All this has involved endless work of course – all the more so since I lost Taylor's secretarial assistance in July. He was turned down by the Tribunal; then on appeal; and is now going the whole hog – Court Martial, Imprisonment, etc.²⁵⁶

Dr. Orr has taken up a large practice in Leith – address: 4 Hope St, Leith Walk, Leith.

Glad to hear about Calum. Please give him my warmest remembrances when you write: also your father and mother and the rest of your family.

I don't know what's happened to MacColl. I was hearing from him regularly until August – but I haven't had a word since then, tho' I've written him repeatedly.

Bill Aitken is still at home – tho' he's been expecting to be called up for months, having been passed A, in May.

I've had no word of Davie for an unconscionable time.

*The Scots Socialist*²⁵⁷ (to which the poem Douglas Young sent you was a supplement) is publishing 3 articles of mine on John Maclean,²⁵⁸ beginning with the current number.

²⁵⁶ Like Douglas Young and George Campbell Hay before him, MacDiarmid's secretary, Hugh Grant Taylor had been called before a military tribunal, convicted as a conscientious objector and imprisoned. He was later compelled to serve overseas for the remainder of WWII. From this point onwards, he and MacDiarmid lost contact and the friendship dissolved. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 379.

²⁵⁷ Reference to a periodical edited in the 1940s by James Harrison (Wheeler) Miller. See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 552.

²⁵⁸ These were never published. In a letter to the Rt. Hon. Thomas Johnston, P.C., M.P., H.M. Secretary of State for Scotland, dated 25 May 1941, CMG states: "I am writing you today in the hope that you may be able to do something

I hear every now and again from Sydney Smith, Douglas Young, and George Hay.

*The Voice of Scotland*²⁵⁹ is starting again almost immediately, I think.

Keep me posted as to your address like a good fellow. I'll write you again shortly. Valda and Mike join me in every affectionate remembrance.

Yours, Chris

P.S. Methuen's still have the Six Poets Selections under consideration. No decision yet.²⁶⁰

62. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, ff 41r-42v)

for me with regard to the seizure of an important typescript of mine of about 20,000 words – 'A Brief Survey of Modern Scottish Politics in the Light of Dialectical Materialism'. This was seized during the recent raids and domiciliary searches on Scottish nationalists and republicans in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, etc. It was in the possession of Mr. H.J. Miller, the editor of the *Scots Socialist*, whose home address is 54 Arrowsmith Avenue, Glasgow, W3." CMG was informed the MS had never been seized by police; apparently Miller had posted the typescript to MacDiarmid, but it never arrived. Thus, it was irretrievably lost. See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NLS* 191-95.

²⁵⁹ Publication of *The Voice of Scotland* was sporadic. It was not published again until it ran from 1944-9 in Glasgow; it was later revived in Edinburgh from 1955-58. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 468.

²⁶⁰ Possibly the same work CMG had initially discussed with the Hogarth Press; ultimately, it was never published. See Letter 57, dated 13 May 1940, and Letter 59, dated 5 June 1940.

233381 Sig. S. Maclean

8 March 1941

33 Squad, 2 Coy, 1st O.T.B.

Le Catrain Lines, Catterick Camp, Yorks.

My dear Chris,

Again I have to apologise for my long delay in answering your letter of December[,] but I have practically no time to myself, no time to read and very little even to think or write letters. As for writing verse[,] I just cannot because I can't get the simmering time that is necessary for me. That is my chief personal quarrel with the army life and especially with the Signals training which is excessively technical requiring almost continuous concentration on the most boring of things. In the interval I have had leave, at the very beginning of January. The snow prevented my getting home to Raasay and I had to spend my seven days in Edinburgh with John who is still teaching there and with Norman who is now a medical student there. I saw much of Caird and of Davie. Caird is in the Searchlights and was then at Dreghorn but I think he has since been moved to Duns or thereabouts. Garioch too is still in Edinburgh as he is over 30 which is still the teachers' reservation age. I have seen *The Golden Treasury* and at present I am still waiting for a copy I ordered by post but it should be here any day now. With it I have one quarrel[:] namely that you did not include nearly enough of yourself and perhaps of Souter. I cannot thank you

enough for your over-generous mention of myself and Hay.²⁶¹ I hear much from Young and from him I get news of Hay but I don't hear from Hay directly. I am very much looking forward to the appearance of *Lucky Poet* which I hope will be out very soon.

How are things with you? With Orr away and Taylor too Whalsay will now be rather lonely for you but I hope you are getting much work done. I have seen various numbers of *The Scottish Socialist* which appears to me the kind of political paper that was very much needed. I hope its circulation will increase but conditions are so difficult and there is so much perplexity as to immediate policy, especially on the war, among left wingers in general that it will obviously be very difficult for it to get a proper audience. As to general revolutionary influence it or any paper can have at present I don't know. I can only go with my personal feelings which are at sixes and sevens, my fear and hatred of the Nazis being even more than my hatred of the English empire. My own only hope is the one which I had from the beginning, namely that the British and German empires will exhaust each other and leave the Soviet the dominating influence on the oppressed people of all Europe including Britain and Germany and my experience of the army has only confirmed my long conviction that the only real war is the class war and I see my own little part merely as one that contributes to

²⁶¹ CMG acknowledges "the assistance in regard to Gaelic of Mr. Somhairle Maclean" in the introduction to *The Golden Treasury*; then, in the notes following the poems in the anthology he refers to "two very remarkable young Gaelic poets, George Campbell Hay and *Somhairle MacGill-Eathain*." Following a brief discussion of their poetry, MacDiarmid continues, "[t]he work of these two young poets, alike in quality and quantity, . . . heralds a new efflorescence of Scottish Gaelic poetry. . . ." See MacDiarmid, *Golden Treasury* x; 351-52.

the mutual exhaustion of the German and British empires. I support the British just because I think it the weaker and therefore not as great a danger to Europe and European socialism as a German victory would be. I cannot therefore go the whole hog with yourself and Young and Hay though I must confess I find my present position involving me in very bad company politically. I cannot share the belief that Britain is likely to win and, as a result, the fear of a long Nazi domination of Europe is an obsession with me and at any rate I cannot see what the Nazis would give Scotland when they have given Vichy²⁶² to France and Franco²⁶³ to Spain and Antonescu²⁶⁴ to Romania and Quisling²⁶⁵ to Norway. Everywhere this victory has meant the erection to power of the most hateful and reactionary of capitalist thugs. Scotland I suppose would get Maude [sic] Ramsay²⁶⁶ and Ireland O'Duffy²⁶⁷ and the rule of the Lithgows,²⁶⁸ Warrens²⁶⁹ etc.

²⁶² Reference to the Vichy régime which governed in France from July 1940 until August 1944 under Marshal Philippe Pétain.

²⁶³ Generalísimo Francisco Franco Bahamonde (1892-1975), right-wing nationalist, military dictator, and Spanish head of state from October 1936 until 1975.

²⁶⁴ Ion Victor Antonescu (1882-1946) was the prime minister and leader of Romania during World War II from September 4, 1940 to August 23, 1944.

²⁶⁵ Vidkun Quisling (Abraham Lauritz Jonsson) (1887-1945), "Norwegian army officer and fascist politician . . . [who] held the office of Minister President in occupied Norway from February 1942 to the end of World War II" See "Quisling, Vidkun", *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*.

²⁶⁶ Princess Maud of Fife (1893-1945), The Rt. Hon. The Countess of Southesk, Lady Carnegie, Lady Maud Duff, granddaughter of King Edward VII. Tory Counsellor of State from 1942-45. See "Maud Alexandra Victoria Georgina Bertha Duff, Princess of Great Britain and Ireland", *The Peerage.com*.

would be made even more permanent. And I am afraid that if they knock out Britain[,] they will knock out the Soviet later and thereby extinguish the greatest, perhaps the only hope of Europe's working classes. I cannot therefore view this war as I would have done the last war when Germany was more hopeful from the working class point of view than Britain was. I know hundreds of so-called Socialists are advancing this viewpoint merely to put a face on their own cowardice and fear of any real Socialist activity but the certain fact that all the Dollans²⁷⁰ etc. are doing this cannot really alter my own obsessing fear and hatred of the Nazis. God knows my course is indirect and unsatisfactory and based on a very pessimistic outlook whereas at the beginning of the war I was full of hope expecting Germany and Britain and France to knock each out and leave a clear field for the Soviet. This hope was chiefly responsible for the hopefulness that I sometimes expressed in the "*Cuilthionn*" but Germany's great victories have done much to dissipate that hope, which was very real,

²⁶⁷ Eoin O'Duffy (1892-1944), leader of the Irish brigade fighting for Franco during the Spanish Civil War. See "Blue Shirt", *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*.

²⁶⁸ James Lithgow, 1st Baronet of Ormsary (1883-1952), owner of shipyards in Port Glasgow. During WWII, Sir James was Controller of Merchant Shipbuilding and Repairs, a member of the Board of Admiralty, briefly served as Controller of Tanks, chair of the Industrial Capacity Committee of the Production Council, and president of the Iron & Steele Federation from 1945-45. His brother Henry Lithgow (1886-1948) served as director of their shipyards and ran the business during his brother's wartime government service in London. See "Lithgow", *Port Glasgow 4u.co.uk*.

²⁶⁹ Unidentified.

²⁷⁰ Reference to "Patrick Joseph Dollan (1885-1963), Lord Provost of Glasgow, 1938-41." See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 229.

notwithstanding my realisation of the terrible immediate suffering it would all involve.

Forgive my long silence. I shall try to write more often in the near future but here I am so cut off from most of my friends that I have little news of any kind. Give my best regards to Valda and to Michael who will now be getting a big fellow and if you can write me sometime and let me know how things are with [you] I shall be more than grateful. Meanwhile all the best.

Somhairle

63. *To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, ff 38r-41r; NSL)*

Whalsay, Shetland

2 April 1941

My dear Somhairle

It was a great treat to get your letter. I remember well how in my own experience last War the conditions of army life (congenial in many ways as I found them – more congenial than anything I've had since) militated against letter-writing and literary pursuits etc. but such a fallow time may prove later to have been no bad thing. I read all you say about the political situation with great sympathy and in detail not without agreement with you, tho' on balance I regard the Axis powers, tho' far more violently evil for the time being, less dangerous than our own Govmt. in the long run – and indistinguishable in purpose if not in

the present face of that purpose, tho' in some vital respects the greater speed is being shown now by our own rulers.

The Conservatives have now practically every section of our people "in the bag", and the labour movement has scarcely a vestige of any effective minority who realise how completely – and perhaps irreversibly – they have been sold. No wonder the P.M. can go out of his way to express the profound satisfaction he and his cronies feel at Britain's possession of a strong Trade Union body, under Gauleiter Bevin. For reasons you will realise I cannot go into these issues fully here – I may try to do so in a form that will pass in a longer letter ere long. So far as Scotland is concerned I am glad that there is one healthy development – the steady if subterranean progress of the Workers' Republican groups. Not only Miller's paper and Arthur Donaldson's²⁷¹ *Scottish News and Comment*: the latest is the fact that whereas at the People's Convention meeting in London nothing was said at all about Scottish Independence, despite a strong resolution to that effect from the subordinate Scottish People's Convention, now the London people have been compelled to agree to a considerable measure of Scottish autonomy in this organization, Miller and others have won on to the Executive, Pearson of the Mineworkers and others (mainly C.P.ers) have been won over to a recognition of Scottish Independence, and all is now set for the establishment

²⁷¹ "Harry (James Harrison) Miller (Wheeler): . . . Arthur Donaldson, poultry farmer, editor of *The Scottish News and Comment*, founder of the United Scotland Movement, Chairman of the SNP through the 1960s." See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, eds., *NSL* 191. In November 1963 CMG published a "Tribute to Harry Miller" in *Forward Scotland*. See also Angus Calder, Glen Murray, and Alan Riach, eds., *Hugh MacDiarmid: The Raucle Tongue – Hitherto Uncollected Prose Volume III* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1996) 653.

of the Scottish People's Convention equal in status to the English body. It is along these lines that the real and only hope so far as we are concerned is moving, and moving at last I think to some purpose.

As to the *Golden Treasury* I enclose a copy of the *Times Lit. Supp.* review in case you haven't seen it, because it is the best the volume has evoked and because as you will see it pays special attention to the Gaelic translations. In its view that I make out my case against Muir in the Scots being a better medium for Scottish writers than English²⁷² – and in its welcome of the possibility of live developments in Scots literature – it is at one with most of the more important reviews in English papers (many of them by well-known writers) e.g. Louis MacNeice [sic] in the *New Statesman*,²⁷³ Edmund Blunden in the *Book Society News*,²⁷⁴ and Naomi Royde-Smith in *Time and Tide*.²⁷⁵ In contrast to this generous recognition of and welcome for the differences of the Scottish tradition and the possibilities of Scots and Gaelic in the English papers, the Scottish papers' reviews were not only very short and quite inadequate, failing to recognise the importance of the book, quite hostile to any such developments,

²⁷²“*Times Literary Supplement* (15 Feb. 1941) noted MacDiarmid's combative introduction; praised the scope of the anthology and the quality of the Latin and Gaelic translations; and concluded (p.84) that ‘this new *Golden Treasury* is a very heartening, as well as a very pleasing volume.’” See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 462, note 78.

²⁷³ Louis MacNeice (1907-63), Ulster poet and playwright.

²⁷⁴ Edmund Charles Blunden (1896-1974), Poet, author, and critic.

²⁷⁵ Naomi Royde-Smith (1875-1964), “Literary editor and writer.” See “Naomi Royde-Smith”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

and in most cases went out of their way to condemn me personally while taking good care not to join issue in any genuine debate on the contentions I put forward. In a word they showed themselves *plus royaliste que le Roi* – more English than the English – and completely neither more nor less than reactionary Eng. Lit's Fifth Column in Scotland. In general this did not surprise me: but the virulence of the attacks on myself, and the total dismissal of the book, did – tho' it is a welcome measure of the alarm of these people and their recognition that they have failed, and despite all their efforts will probably continue to fail, to arrest the developments (associated with my name) which they detest so much.

I think the book has probably sold very well: and I understand that Macmillan's are now putting out an American edition of it.²⁷⁶

In other ways America is coming more into my orbit. Two American firms wrote me recently with proposals to issue selections of my poems. I accepted the proposals of the Colt Press, San Francisco, and that book will be out this autumn – prefaced by Horace Gregory, the Irish-American Socialist poet and critic, and strongly supported by Edmund Wilson²⁷⁷ of *The New Republic*, the ablest Marxian literary critic, I think, in the English-speaking world. The other firm was New Directions, Norfolk, Connecticut, and I am still in correspondence with

²⁷⁶ MacDiarmid, Hugh, ed. *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* (New York: Macmillan, 1941).

²⁷⁷ "Horace Gregory (1898-1982), American poet and critic. Edmund Wilson (1895-1972), American critic and author of the landmark of literary criticism *Axel's Castle* (1931), edited the *New Republic* 1926-31. James Laughlin edited *New Directions in Prose and Poetry 1941*, including MacDiarmid's 'The Divided Bird', pp. 220-9." See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 191.

them but in any case they are to publish a long piece (1000 lines or so) of my big unpublished poem in *New Directions*, 1941 (which comes out this back-end) a big magazine-book of advanced prose and poetry they issue annually.²⁷⁸ Some of my Left Wing poems have also been appearing in the *New Tribune*,²⁷⁹ Canada, which, however, has just been suspended for a warning period of three weeks.

My *Autobiography* was to have been out this Spring, but the publishers (Methuen's) have found, no doubt owing to the London blitzes and other war conditions, that they cannot have it ready until September. I think I told you my total MSS amounted to over half a million words – hopeless proposition just now, and, perhaps, at any time – and it was finally decided to split it up into 3 separate volumes of 150,000 words each. This is the first of these and consists of the parts dealing with myself as poet, my ideas on poetry etc., leaving to a second volume my reminiscences of Yeats, A.E., etc. etc. and to a third my personal and domestic revelations. So it will be a big book and with all the proofs to read and

²⁷⁸ *New Directions in Prose and Poetry*, ed. Edmund Wilson, was published from 1925-1940/41. See "New Directions in Prose and Poetry", *American Literature and Literary Magazines*.

²⁷⁹ "All of the publications banned [in Canada during WWII] were of secondary importance, the largest being the Communist weekly, the *Clarion*, with a circulation of about 12,000. . . . The one paper suspended was the *Canadian Tribune*, of Toronto, the principal communist organ in Canada and successor to the banned *Clarion*. The order proclaiming a suspension of three weeks was made, after one oral and one written warning, because the *Tribune* had studiously refrained from supporting the Canadian war effort, and was publishing references to speeches and utterances of a Communist member of the United Kingdom House of Commons." See Lester H. Phillips, "Canada's Internal Security," *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science / revue canadienne d'Economie et de Science politique* 12.1 (Feb. 1946): 22-23.

many matters to consider carefully since the cutting about of the original means that unless I watch the transitions carefully this volume will be hopelessly lacunous and disjointed, I am glad publication is to be later. I'll need all the time.

I am of course busy too with my Faroes book – a sort of companion volume to my book on the Scottish Islands.²⁸⁰

We've had a very long trying winter here but are all fairly fit. All join in kindest love to you. My best wishes also to your father and mother and all your family. Write soon again and I'll try to respond with a less scrappy reply.

Yours, Chris

64. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, ff 43r-47r)

Sig. S. Maclean 2331381

15 June 1941

Room 7, 2 Coy. 1st Holding Battn.

Loos Lines, Catterick Camp

Yorks

My dear Chris,

I have not written to you for a very long time because for the last seven weeks or so I have been on draft for abroad, somewhere tropical – and I have

²⁸⁰ "This book was never finished." See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 191.

been expecting to leave here any day for that period. That I have not yet gone, however, makes me think that I may be in the country for a while yet, but I may be leaving any day.

How are things with you? Here I am so cut off from Scottish things that I hear little. I am very glad to hear that in America you are getting some recognition of a tangible kind. That *Times Lit.* review of *The Golden Treasury* was pretty good in many ways. I wonder who did it. I did not see any references in the Scottish Press but of course I never see any of the Scottish papers. I did, however, see Douglas Young's review in *The Scots Independent*. As to my own stuff Young and MacDonald, Gaelic Readers in Aberdeen, are trying to get some of it published. What the chances are I don't know but I have left revised and corrected copies with them.²⁸¹ The news that I was going abroad stirred me to some activity that I would not otherwise have been stirred to.

²⁸¹ On the 11 February 1941, Douglas Young wrote to MacLean: "I shall tonight give [John] Macdonald your own book of mss. to keep; he is an accurate scholar, to judge from his edition of the Gaelic Homer, and would edit it properly if it was left to him. When my bound copy of yourself and *Deòrsa* is fully corrected and amplified, I thought of committing it to John MacKechnie, although he is liable to have his papers searched by the Police (his *Iain Lom* was purloined and some valuable researches lost); or J.L. Campbell, whom I once knew slightly and have corresponded with; or Carmichael Watson, whom I don't actually know" See Young qtd. in Whyte, *Dàin do Eimhir* 170-71.

The potential custodians of MacLean's papers to whom Young refers included several prominent Gaelic scholars. "John Macdonald (1886-1970), Lecturer and Reader in Celtic at the University of Aberdeen 1922-1956, and first editor of *Scottish Gaelic Studies*." "Revd John MacKechnie (1897-1977), minister in Glasgow and Reader in Celtic at the University of Aberdeen." "John Lorne Campbell of Cana (1906-1996), indefatigable collector of Gaelic oral tradition, author and editor of many works on aspects of Scottish Gaelic language and literature." "James Carmichael Watson (1910-1942) [who] succeeded his father in the Chair of Celtic at the University of Edinburgh, and edited volumes 4 and 5

You may have heard that Hay has had at least ten days in Saughton jail. I have not heard what has happened to him since as there has been a recent break in my correspondence with Young. I hope he is not too badly treated and I hope that Young himself is still untouched. I know he has been officially visited but that did not at all disturb him, but Young never fusses and is never disturbed. I have never met one of such an aristocratic mind and temperament as Young's.

Give my best regards to Valda and Mike. I hope they are both well. How I wish I could see you all sometime in the not too distant future! Calum is still in Ireland having had now almost two years there – and from all his accounts a very great two years. He will be very sorry ever to leave it but I expect he will come home in September or October. John is still teaching in Edinburgh and Alasdair²⁸² is finishing his medical course in Dundee, while Norman has just finished his first year in medicine in Edinburgh. The two girls²⁸³ are at Portree School and don't get home much now with the curtailment of the steamer services. I have been at home twice in the last two months – the second time, five weeks ago, on embarkation leave. The woods are being rapidly cut down in Raasay, which has changed the look of the place considerably.²⁸⁴

of *Carmina Gadelica*, material his grandfather had collected” Ultimately, it was MacKechnie who would correct the Gaelic proofs of MacLean's work for *Dàin do Eimhir*. See Whyte, *Dàin do Eimhir* 170-71; 33-37.

²⁸² MacLean's third brother. See Black, *An Tuil* 764.

²⁸³ MacLean's younger sisters, Ishbel and Mary. See Black, *An Tuil* 764.

²⁸⁴ In his introduction to *O Choille gu Bearradh / From Wood to Ridge*, MacLean writes: “Up to the Second World War, there were in Raasay many of the native birches, hazels, rowans, elders and planted conifers of many kinds, and also a

Having sent all the books I had with me to Edinburgh when I was first on draft, I do not much reading now as anything worth reading is pretty difficult to get here[,] but I do find time to go over most of my ideas on poetry and clarify them somewhat without, however, writing them down. But poetry itself is not coming now but then it comes with me only in bursts and very occasionally. I cannot imagine anything more calculated to exasperate one with boredom and [a] sense of futility and countless minor irritations than the British army. Whatever the political and industrial and journalist rulers of Britain are as psychologists, the army authorities are unbelievable fools who do almost everything that can annoy the army and lower its morale. Their sheer stupidity is in itself a powerful Fifth Column.

I hope to hear from you sometime before I go abroad if I am here some time yet. When I am definitely going to leave Catterick I shall try to let you know. Of course once I leave Catterick my movements will be totally unknown beforehand by myself[,] but I think the chances are that I shall be here some time yet. Meanwhile all the best.

Somhairle.

relatively large area of deciduous trees, beeches, chestnuts, elms, ash, oaks, thujas, aspens – even eucalyptus, planted by a wealthy English family of landlords from 1875 onwards. With the War they were nearly all cut down, and replaced with quick-growing conifers.” His love for these woods is evident in his poem “*Coilltean Ratharsair / The Woods of Raasay*” written in 1940. See MacLean, *O Choille gu Bearradh / From Wood to Ridge* xv; 170-83.

65. To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)
(SML MS 2954.13, ff 48r-55r)

Sig. S. Maclean 2331381

23 February [1942]

No. 1 Squadron,
7th Armoured Divisional Signals,
Middle East Forces

Dear Chris,

It is now a very long time since I had direct news of you, but I always wonder how you are and hope that things are going well with yourself and Valda and Mike. I did write you last June but perhaps the letter failed to reach you. At any rate I have had no reply from you and between June and December my movements were so uncertain that I stopped writing almost everybody because I did not know when I was to leave. When I was in London in July and early August and again in September I had news of you from MacColl with whom I had some very pleasant meetings. I hope your American publications have come off or will shortly if they haven't already, and I hope that you are working as well as ever. I am now in Egypt in a tank division and my movements are such that I can take very few books along with me but I have as yet managed to cling to the *Drunk Man* and MacMillan's *Selections* and on the strength of those two I manage to persuade any intelligent Scots I fall in with, that there is living in Scotland a greater [poet] than Burns. In my sojourn in the army I have come

across one remarkable man, a Glasgow cattle salesman called Keith, who has been a professional singer in opera and a member of Sir Hugh's choir.²⁸⁵ He had not known your poetry before I met him but now he quotes whole lyrics from the *Selections* in letters to his wife and he goes for the best too. He has shown me many things in them that I had not noticed and in short is about the most fervent devotee of your lyrics that I have known. Incidentally[,] he has as striking an ear for what is best in Yeats and Shakespeare. He is still with me and brightens life for me very much. As for my own stuff, I have not done anything since September or October and I know now that if I am ever to write any more verse, it will be very different from what I have written, that it must be less subjective, more thoughtful, less content with its own music, and above all that I must transcend the shameful weaknesses of petty egoism and doubts and lack of single-mindedness that now disgusts me in much of my own stuff. Terrible things happened to me between 1939 and 1941 and my poetry was a desperate effort to overcome them and that left its marks.²⁸⁶ But now I think I have overcome all that and if I survive this fracas, I will certainly cut away everything that deters me from a complete devotion to my political beliefs, which are now more uncompromising and far more single-minded than ever. I shall try to do what I

²⁸⁵ Reference to Sir Hugh Robertson (1874-1952), conductor of the renowned Glasgow Orpheus Choir. See Philip L. Scowcroft, "Some British Conductor-Composers," *Classical Music on the Web*.

²⁸⁶ An allusion to the various romantic entanglements between 1936 and 1941 – to varying degrees unreciprocated – which influenced the construction of the *Eimhir* persona in the *Dàin do Eimhir* poems. See Whyte, *Dàin do Eimhir* 11-16.

can to follow as closely after your single-mindedness and disinterestedness in those two things as I can.

Why I did not write you again between June and Dec, although I did not get a reply to my June letter, I don't very well know. I did expect you to write me in answer but now I sometimes think that I may have promised to write you again and tell you of any changes in my address before I expected you to write me. And when I went to London I had always fresh news of you from MacColl. But all the same I am terribly sorry I did not myself keep in touch with you. I have also lost touch with Davie, who has not answered my last letter and of whom Douglas Young and Sydney Smith had heard nothing when I saw them in November. I wonder where he is. Caird is in Scotland in the educational corps and Hood, I hear, is in Persia. I have, of course, heard nothing from anyone since I left Britain in December but I expect to hear from Young and John[,] my brother[,] any day now. Incidentally[,] I met David Orr for a few minutes in Edinburgh in November[,] but I was in a hurry at the time and saw little of him, to my great regret. I have read Sydney's book *Skail Wind*²⁸⁷ and have been very much attracted by his more recent pieces in Scots and some of his shorter things in English or Scots-tipped English. I thought they marked a very great advance on his earlier stuff which was so influenced by the contemptible verse of the Auden clique and the (to me) unsuccessful aspirations of Dylan Thomas and his followers of the surrealist or near-surrealist type. I learned much from my

²⁸⁷ *Skail Wind*, Sydney Goodsir Smith's first book of poetry, was published by Douglas Young's Chalmers Press. See Sydney Goodsir Smith, *Skail Wind* (Edinburgh: Chalmers Press, 1941).

delightful meetings with MacColl whom I got to know properly. My friendship with him I consider, along with my friendship with you, as one of the two or three greatest things in my life. Just now I am bitterly sorry that my own carelessness since last June (or May) has interrupted my hearing from you.

I am afraid this will have to suffice or the letter will be too heavy for the regulations but I'll write you again very shortly and hope you will find time sometime to write me. Meanwhile kindest regards to Valda and Mike and all the best to you all there.

Yours sincerely, Sam.

66. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid) (EUL MISSING)*²⁸⁸

15 March 1942

67. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid) (EUL MISSING)*

30 March 1942

²⁸⁸ Although in her essay "The Man and His Work" Joy Hendry refers to three letters from MacLean to CMG dated 15 March 1942, 30 March 1942, and 16 January 1946, her foot-note reference to their location simply states "Edinburgh University Library" without specifying any MS or account number. There is no bibliography for her essay to provide assistance in accessing these letters, and there were no copies of letters for these dates among EUL's MS 2954.13, ff 1-90. See Hendry, "The Man and His Work" 36-37. See also Sheila Noble, email 3 July 2007, and Sally Pagan, email 12 July 2007.

68. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid) (EUL MISSING)*

16 January 1946

69. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, f 56r)

2 Atholl Place, Edinburgh

22 August 1948

Dear Chris,

Could you send me the paper on "Gaelic Poetry of the Clearances" as the Gaelic Society of Inverness want it very soon for publication.²⁸⁹

Hope to see you on Saturday.

Yours, Sam.

70. *To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, ff 42r-45r; NSL)*

Brownsbank, Candymill, Biggar, Lanarkshire²⁹⁰

4 December 1962

²⁸⁹ Possibly a reference to MacLean's paper "The Poetry of the Clearances", which he had delivered to the Gaelic Society of Inverness in the 1930s. See Gillies 199.

²⁹⁰ No address is given for CMG in the transcription of this letter in *MacDiarmid: New Selected Letters*. Of all the previously published letters from MacDiarmid, this contains the most variations from the original held in the MacLean MS. That

Somhairle Maclean, Esq.

Dear Sorley,

It is a long time (far too long!) since I was in touch with you. I hope this note finds Renée and yourself, and the children (hardly children now – they must be well grown up) in the best of health.²⁹¹

The occasion for my writing is this. An Irish friend of mine, resident in Barcelona, (his name is Pearce [sic] Hutchinson)²⁹² has just written me a long letter in the course of which he says: “You may or not have seen a 1956 number of the *London Magazine* with three poems I translated from the Catalan of Salvadore [sic] Espriu. One of them, “*Assaig de Càntic en el Temple*”, has become, here and elsewhere, his best-known poem. Partly because it’s about

said, the discrepancies are minor. In the second paragraph of the letter where MacDiarmid is sharing Hutchinson’s remarks on Espriu’s poetry the changes are as follows: first, Pearce Hutchinson’s Christian name is spelt with a “c” in the original and with an “s” in the *NSL*. Where it reads “And partly because it says some of the last words possible,” the *NSL* version reads “And partly because it says [one] of the last words possible. . . .” In the same paragraph, where it reads “including an English one and an Irish one,” the *NLS* text reads “[my].” Finally, the *NLS* text changes the second and third instances of Santiago Albertó’s surname in the letter to “Albert[i].”

²⁹¹ MacLean married Renée Cameron on 24 July 1946; “they raised a family of three daughters, Ishbel, Mary and Catriona (who predeceased him).” See Black, *An Tuil* 765. Ishbel, called after one of MacLean’s sisters, eventually married the television reporter Alan Mackay. Mary, named after MacLean’s other sister, married David Ross, a reporter for the Glasgow *Herald*. “The late Catriona, also known as ‘Rosebud’ by the pupils she taught at Portree High School, was a lovely person in nature and countenance and a wonderful singer.” See Rebecca Mackay, email 04 June 2007.

²⁹² Pearse Hutchinson (b.1927-), Irish poet, broadcaster, and translator.

the only one he's written that isn't in any way at all obscure. And partly because it says some of the last words possible about loving and hating a country. I believe it's a great poem, as I believe, with a growing number of people, both here and in other places, that Espriu is the best Spanish poet alive – or, certainly, in Spain. His last book, *La Pell de Brau* (i.e. *The Bull's Hide*) 1961, which is a 54-poem sequence, and which I've just finished translating – we're now negotiating with the only decent publishers in Ireland, the Dolmen Press,²⁹³ to see will they handle it – is not only almost beyond dispute the finest poetry written in Spain since the Civil War, but has quickly become a rallying-point, a home, a hope, for every young or red creature here with life and spirit left or in sight. It's a very angry poem and a very disciplined one. I read six poems from it at the British Institute here in March. The Catalans and the Irish came in force, but the Director (he's an "educationist") couldn't come to meet the poets; he was taking some visiting doctors golfing! . . . Now, the point is: a young publisher, called Santiago Albertó, is bringing out, as soon as possible, the *Collected Poems* of Espriu – all, including his last book, are out of print. And as a kind of appendix he's doing some twelve or so versions, each in a different language of the "Assaig de Càntic" – including an English one and an Irish one I printed in *Comhar* in 1958. (Espriu, by the way, said he didn't give a toss about being turned into English, but into Irish warmed his heart.) And Albertó asked could I

²⁹³ Irish press founded in 1951 by Liam Miller and dedicated to publishing the work of Irish poets. It was operated by Miller from 1951-88. See the University of Victoria's Special Collections file SC034 Dolmen Press Dolmen Press fonds. 1951-64.

rustle up some other tongues. So I at once thought of you to put Lallans on it.
And Somhairle MacGill-Eain for Scots Gaelic?"²⁹⁴

Hutchinson goes on to say: "The thing has only been sanctioned at the last minute and Albertó wants to get it out for Christmas if possible."²⁹⁵

So the matter is urgent. I hope to do the Lallans version tomorrow or by Thursday at latest, and send it off to Hutchinson by air-mail.

I hope you will make a Scottish Gaelic rendering. Short and lucid tho' the poem is, translating from a language one doesn't know is a very chancy and questionable business, but as a help I enclose three other versions (in addition to Hutchinson's English one), viz. Castilian by José Agustín Goytisolo,²⁹⁶ French by Jordi Sarsanedas,²⁹⁷ and Espriu's Catalan original.

Pearce [sic] Hutchinson's address is
en Casa de Sra. Soques,
Nilo Fabra 12-2-2,

²⁹⁴ This compilation of translations of Espriu's poetry was never finished. Some of the poems which Pearce Hutchinson had translated later appeared in Pearce Hutchinson, *Done Into English: Collected Translations* (Dublin, The Gallery Press, 2003). See "Pearce Hutchinson", *The Concise Oxford Companion to Irish Literature*, online edition.

²⁹⁵ "Salvador Espriu, *Obra Poetica* (Barcelona: S Alberti, 1963)." See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 378.

²⁹⁶ José Agustín Goytisolo (1928-99), Catalan poet. See Arthur Terry, *A Companion to Catalan Literature* (London: Tamesis, 2003). See also Arthur Terry, *A Literary History of Spain: Catalan Literature*. (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1972).

²⁹⁷ Jordi Sarsanedas (b.1924), Catalan poet, narrator, and translator. See Terry, *A Companion to Catalan Literature*, and Terry, *A Literary History of Spain: Catalan Literature*.

Barcelona 12

Spain

All the best.

Yours, Chris

71. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, ff 67r-67v)

51 Morningside Road, Edinburgh²⁹⁸

28 April 1975

Dear Chris,

I am terribly sorry that circumstances, and the lateness of the invitation, prevented me from going to Cumbernauld on Friday, but I wrote the Town Clerk a letter congratulating the burgh on what they were doing, by recognizing the man who “must be the greatest poet living in Europe” and as far as I know “the greatest this century.” He should have got the letter in time, and I was hoping he would read it, or somebody would, if he were reading letters of apology.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁸ This letter is written on stationary which reads, “University of Edinburgh, Department of English Literature, David Hume Tower, George Square, Edinburgh, EH8 9JX Tel: 031-667 1011 EXT. 6227.” Sorley MacLean was Writer in Residence at the University of Edinburgh’s Department of English from 1973-75. See Black, *An Tuil* 766.

²⁹⁹ This was a ceremony during which CMG was given the “Freedom” of Cumbernauld. See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 492.

All the best letter writing does not come easily to me, but I think of you a great deal and talk a good deal about you, especially to my students here and to the staff also.

Kindest regards to Valda and yourself.

Yours ever, Sam MacLean.

72. *To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, f 46r)*

Brownsbank, Candymill, Biggar

1 May 1975

Sorley Maclean, Esq.

Dear Sorley,

How kind of you to write to me. Valda and I were very sorry you could not come to Cumbernauld. It was a great occasion which I am sure you would have enjoyed. The Cumbernauld Council and friends certainly did me proud.³⁰⁰

But I hope to see you soon. At least I believe you and I both are to take part in a Poetry Reading in St. Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh, on behalf of Oxfam, at 7:30 p.m. on Friday, 6th June.

With best regards to Renée and yourself from Valda and I.

³⁰⁰ In a letter to Ruth McQuinllan, dated 12 May 1975, MacDiarmid writes "The Cumbernauld Freedom ceremony went off splendidly. They certainly did me proud . . . but I don't know what has happened to reports, photos, etc. They promised to send me copies of the local weekly, a representative of which tape-recorded the speeches, but that has not been received. Apart from the paragraph in *The Scotsman* I do not think there was anything in any of the other papers." See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 492.

Yours, Chris.

73. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, ff 58r-59v)

5 Peinnachorrain, Braes, Skye

16 January 1977

Dear Christopher,

A few days ago, when I phoned, Valda told me you were to go into hospital again on Saturday 15th (yesterday), and I hope your stay there will be short and successful. At this time my own sins of omission are coming home to me painfully, and among them my failure so often to write letters even to people for whom I have always had the greatest admiration and affection.

I write you just now to put on paper something that is to me very necessary to put on paper. I have evidence, but not proof, that there is being circulated a ridiculous and vicious lie about myself, namely that I said that I was the "greatest poet living in Europe." As if I would say that with Hugh MacDiarmid alive; as if I would say its like even with Hugh MacDiarmid dead!

Late in 1972 John MacInnes,³⁰¹ speaking in Scottish Gaelic to introduce visiting Irish Gaelic poets, said that S.M. was, as far as he could judge, the “greatest poet living in Europe.” Early in 1975 MacInnes offended me terribly by telling me that my brother Calum died of cancer because he was so bitter.³⁰² That made me so angry that, after that, I quoted MacInnes’s “greatest poet” judgment to several people, always sarcastically. I am now afraid that some prat has twisted the story to make the words seem my own or meeting with my approval.

I have said privately and publicly again and again, and I repeat it now, that in my opinion, and as far as I know, there is no poet living in the Islands called British who is in the same class as Hugh MacDiarmid; and I would be greatly astonished if it were demonstrated to me that there is in Europe.

All the very best to yourself, Valda, Michael and the rest. Although I am an awful letter writer even to you, I am always thinking of you.

Yours ever, Sorley MacLean.

³⁰¹ John MacInnes (b.1930), a native Gaelic speaker from Lewis, Scottish academic with the School of Scottish Studies, Edinburgh University, and contributor to *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays*. See Thomson, *Companion* 174. See also Joy Hendry and Raymond J. Ross, eds., “Contributors.” *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press Ltd., 1986).

³⁰² MacLean’s brother Calum had stayed in Ireland for most of his career, working for the Irish Folklore Commission. See Sorley Maclean, “Foreword” to *The Highlands*, by Calum I. Maclean (Edinburgh; London: Mainstream, 2006) 9-12. See also Seán Ó Súilleabhain, “Memoir”, *The Highlands*, by Calum I. Maclean (Edinburgh; London: Mainstream, 2006) 13-25.

74. To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, ff 47r-50v; LHM)

Brownsbank, Candymill, by Biggar, Lanarkshire

23 January 1977

Dear Sorley,

Many thanks for your letter. You have always been over-indulgent about my poetry and too modest about your own. There is, I think, no doubt about you and I being the two best poets in Scotland today, but it is all nonsense of course to go further than that. Poets cannot be put in a list with a betting figure attached to each. By definition every good poet does something that is *sui generis* – something that is his alone and couldn't be done by anyone else. Like can only be compared with like. Your work and mine is utterly different, so it is rubbish to say – or try to say – which of us is greater.

[. . .]³⁰³

There is no question, I think, but that you'd have had much greater international recognition if you'd written in a language accessible to a greater readership. I have had certain advantages, i.e. in being more controversial, but all that amounts to is that a vast deal of claptrap has been and is being written about me. But only a tiny part of it is of real critical account at all. Already things

³⁰³ This letter was written on lined foolscap paper. At this point in the letter, 1 ½ lines which begin a new paragraph have been crossed out in thick black marker, rendering them completely illegible. Then the letter continues on an unnumbered page for several lines, the next full page being numbered as page 2. This would seem to indicate that these comments were edited and later reinserted into the letter by MacDiarmid rather than by Maclean.

seem to be piling up fearsomely for my 85th birthday next August. I know of 3 books about me due out before then. Eddie Morgan³⁰⁴ has done a comprehensive essay on all my poetry for the Writers and Their Work series published by Longman's for the British Council. Then there is Gordon Wright's illustrated biography, and Norman Wilson tells me he is including a book about me in the series about great Scots which already includes Knox, Hume, etc. But he does not tell me who has written it.³⁰⁵

And I understand a full-dress Omnibus programme about me has been filmed by Granada TV for production on the great occasion.³⁰⁶ I also know that my daughter Christine and all my Canadian grandchildren are proposing to come over for the event, and no doubt I'll be beset with hordes of other visitors. I really can't cope with it and wish I could go into hiding on some remote island.

I should have gone into hospital³⁰⁷ again on 15th inst, but we've been snowed up with all roads blocked. The lane from our cottage to the main road

³⁰⁴ Edwin Morgan (b.1920-), Scottish poet and translator, named as "the first Scottish national poet: the Scots Makar" in 2004. See Douglas Dunn, "Morgan, Edwin," *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry in English*.

³⁰⁵ "MacDiarmid is referring to Edwin Morgan's *Hugh MacDiarmid* (1976), Gordon Wright's *MacDiarmid: An Illustrated Biography* (1977) and *John Knox* (1976) – a book published by Norman Wilson's Ramsay Head Press and containing essays by a Roman Catholic (Anthony Ross), a Church of Scotland Minister (Campbell MacLean) and MacDiarmid." See Bold, *LHM* 613.

³⁰⁶ "*The Hammer and Thistle* (1977), a film by Murray Grigor and Gus MacDonald." See Bold, *LHM* 613.

³⁰⁷ Again, these comments from "Granada TV" to "hospital" comprise several lines written on foolscap paper and inserted into the letter before page 3, which begins with the words "again on 15th last".

has just been cleared, so I hope to go in tomorrow. I also hope I won't need to be there long but it is impossible to tell. I think they'll decide I need to have another operation for [a] rectal ulcer. Though I am very easily tired I am on the whole not too bad. Valda has been having the worst of it having to do all sorts of chores I'd normally be doing or helping with.

Hope you are in good fettle yourself, also Renée and your family. Love to you all.

Yours, Christopher Grieve.³⁰⁸

75. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, ff 60r-60v)

5 Peinnachorrain, Braes, Skye

21 March 1978

Dear Chris,

I was in Edinburgh for a day or two on my return from Canada³⁰⁹ and I phoned again and again but could get only an engaged sound, and I failed to get Norman or Isabel in when I phoned them to hear news of you.³¹⁰

³⁰⁸ Immediately following this letter, there are copies of pages 1 and 2 in Maclean's MSS with an annotation by Maclean at the bottom of the first page which reads, "This is a copy of part of a letter Grieve sent me in reply to a letter of mine telling him that there was a story going round that I myself had said that I was a better poet than he. S.M."

You were greatly missed in Canada but they kept your name on the programmes they issued up to the end of the Symposium, I suppose to act as a draw. There were some excellent papers at the Symposium and some rather middling.

I don't know when I'll manage to get to Edinburgh again, but I hope I will fairly soon.

All the best to Valda and to Michael and his family.

Yours ever, Sam MacLean.

76. *To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, ff 51r-51v; NSL)*

Brownsbank, Candymill, by Biggar³¹¹

27 March 1978

³⁰⁹ Sorley and Renée MacLean attended the Canadian symposium, "The Celtic Consciousness", held in February 1978 at St. Michael's College, University of Toronto. MacLean presented the paper "Some Gaelic and non-Gaelic Influences on Myself", as well as reading some of his poetry. See John Kelly, Foreword to *The Celtic Consciousness*, ed. Robert O'Driscoll (New York: George Braziller, 1982) x. See also Sorley MacLean, "Some Gaelic and non-Gaelic Influences on Myself," *The Celtic Consciousness*, 499-502. Hugh MacDiarmid had also been invited to the conference, but ill health prevented him from going. His response to the invitation was, "If I am still here I will be there and even if I am not still here I will still be there." See Ann Dooley, "Report."

³¹⁰ The poet Norman MacCaig and his wife Isabel had a home near MacDiarmid's Brownsbank Cottage. See Junor, 226.

³¹¹ No address is given for CMG in the transcription of this letter in Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL*.

Dear Sorley,

Many thanks for your letter of 21st. I am sorry you had difficulty in trying to 'phone us. I only got out of hospital on Saturday after two very trying and painful operations. These are supposed to have put an end to the main source of my trouble. I certainly hope so. I have no vitality left and am near the end of my tether.

I was very sorry indeed to miss the Toronto Symposium. I heard it degenerated into a battle-royal between Conor Cruise O'Brien³¹² and Sean MacBride³¹³ and an old friend – Professor Barker Fairley³¹⁴ – regretted my absence as he was sure if I had been there I'd have shifted the debate on to other lines.

I do hope I may see you when you are next in Edinburgh. You'll have heard Dublin University are giving me the Litt. D. on 6th July. I'll do my utmost to be there as they do not confer Hon. Degrees *in absentia*.³¹⁵

³¹² Conor Cruise O'Brien (1917-) Irish writer, politician, and academic. See "'O'Brien, Conor Cruise." *The Concise Oxford Companion to Irish Literature*.

³¹³ "Sean MacBride (1904-88), son of Maud Gonne, a founder member of Amnesty International, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize (1974)." See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 524.

³¹⁴ "FAIRLEY, Barker (1887-1986). German scholar. Lecturer in German, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada, 1910-15. Professor of German, University of Toronto 1915-32, then Professor of German, Victoria University of Manchester 1932-6, then University of Toronto, 1936-57." See Grieve, Edwards, and Riach, *NSL* 541. See also Bold, *MacDiarmid* 351; 426.

³¹⁵ Sorley MacLean was similarly honored by the National University of Ireland, Galway which gave him an honorary degree at the Celtic Congress held there in 1979. See Ann Dooley, "Report."

Every kind regard to Renée and your good self, and your family, from
Valda and I.

Yours, Christopher Grieve

77. *To Christopher Murray Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid)*

(SML MS 2954.13, ff 61r-62v)

5 Peinnachorrain, Braes, Skye

1 April 1978

Dear Chris,

When I wrote you and phoned I did not know that Trinity College Dublin was giving you the Litt. D. The first I did hear of it was in a letter from Gordon Wright,³¹⁶ but a day or two later Terence McCaughey³¹⁷ came to see me (his wife is from Skye) and told me all about it. I am terribly glad. I am delighted to hear it

³¹⁶ Gordon Wright (b.1942), Scottish photographer, poet, and publisher. See Gordon Wright, *MacDiarmid: An Illustrated Biography* (Edinburgh: Gordon Wright Publishing, 1977).

³¹⁷ Terence McCaughey, Irish scholar. The list of contributors to *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays* states, "Terence McCaughey worked on the Linguistic Survey of Scotland for 3 years and since 1964 has taught in the Irish Department of Trinity College, Dublin, and recently in its School of Biblical and Theological Studies." See Joy Hendry and Raymond J. Ross, eds., "Contributors." *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays*.

and I hope you will be able to go, but surely they will give it *in absentia* if you can't go!

Actually the Symposium had some excellent things, from people like MacCana,³¹⁸ Wagner,³¹⁹ Seán Ó Tuama,³²⁰ John MacQueen,³²¹ Jarman,³²² etc. etc., and the MacBride – O'Brien row was a very small part of it,³²³ and MacBride's part came only at the Banquet at the end. He was not at the Symposium at all. The mistake was to have O'Brien without having someone of authority on Irish politics to counter him during the actual Symposium. John Montague³²⁴ did his best, but what could he do not being behind the scenes in

³¹⁸ Proinsias MacCana (1926-2004), Irish scholar. MacCana gave a paper entitled "Mythology in Early Irish Literature" at the symposium. See O'Driscoll, 143-54.

³¹⁹ Heinrich Wagner (1923-88), Celtic scholar. Wagner gave a paper entitled "Near Eastern and African Connections with the Celtic World" at the symposium. See O'Driscoll, 51-68.

³²⁰ Seán Ó Tuama (1926-2006), Irish scholar. Ó Tuama presented a paper entitled "The Lineage of Gaelic Love-Poetry from the Earliest Times" at the conference. See O'Driscoll, ed. 289-306.

³²¹ John MacQueen, Scottish scholar. MacQueen presented a paper entitled "Roman and Celt in Southern Scotland." See O'Driscoll, 185-95.

³²² A.O.H. Jarman, Welsh scholar. Jarman presented a paper entitled "The Heroic View of Life in Early Welsh Verse." See O'Driscoll, 161-68. See also Meic Stephens, "Obituary: Professor A.O.H. Jarman", *The Independent*.

³²³ O'Brien had presented a paper entitled "Revolution and the Shaping of Modern Ireland" and MacBride had responded in a paper entitled "Declaring the Irish Republic: a Reply to Conor Cruise O'Brien." See O'Driscoll, 427-34; 440-42.

³²⁴ John Montague (b.1929), Irish poet and scholar. Montague had also responded to O'Brien's paper in an essay entitled "Revolution and the Shaping of Modern Ireland: a Reply to Conor Cruise O'Brien." See O'Driscoll, 435-38.

Irish politics at the time in question. Neil Munro was good on it in the *West Highland Free Press*, but he said little about the scholars such as MacCana, Ó Tuama, Wagner, MacQueen, and Jarman and Connor Cruise's wife, who were all excellent. I was particularly sorry that MacCana was away before Renée and I started getting the signatures. He is a rare man: having been Professor of Welsh at Dublin (UCD), he is now Professor of Old Irish. Still, if you had been there, no doubt there would have been a general broadside that would have done a lot.

I have been asked to go to Rotterdam. I had been asked in 1973, but was unwell at the time and unable to go. I am surprised they asked me again. I think you were there in 1973.³²⁵ Valda must have thought it strange that I did not mention the Dublin degree when I was on the phone. I knew nothing about it till Gordon Wright mentioned it in a letter.

I am going to the New University of Ulster towards the end of April. There is to be a kind of symposium, or something like it, about my verse. I was to have gone last year, but was told not to come because of a strike. I only wish the time would coincide with your Dublin visit, and I would try to make both. This, however, must be early in the University term, before they get down to exams.

All the best, and especially for the 6th July,³²⁶ and to Valda, Mike, and his family.³²⁷

³²⁵ In June 1973 CMG and Valda attended the Rotterdam Poetry Festival. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 429.

³²⁶ This was the date MacDiarmid was to receive his honorary doctorate from Trinity College, the University of Dublin.

Yours, Sam MacLean.

78. To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, ff 52r-52v; LHM)

Brownsbank, by Biggar.

12 July 1978

Dear Sorley,

I am sorry I've been unable to write you sooner to ask about your daughter. I don't hear well by 'phone, but I do hope your daughter's injury was not serious and has healed quickly.³²⁸ It was a dreadful thing to happen.

The Dublin ceremony went off splendidly.³²⁹ I was shaking in my shoes and afraid I might collapse at any moment. But the authorities were most understanding and had posted a stalwart 6-foot graduate at my elbow, alert to see I didn't stumble and giving me a helping hand whenever I had occasion to move.

³²⁷ James Michael Trevlyn Grieve (1932-95). "CMG's son by Valda Trevlyn Rowland. . . . Edited HMacD's *Complete Poems* with W.R. Aitken." Married Deirdre (née Chapman) in 1958. They had three sons: "Christopher (*b.*1960), Lucien (*b.*1964) and Dorian (*b.*1973)." See Grieve, Edward, and Riach, *NSL* 543.

³²⁸ "MacLean's daughter Ishbel had fallen through a window but there were no permanent injuries." See Bold, *LHM* 614.

³²⁹ "On 6 July 1978 MacDiarmid received his Honorary Litt.D. at Trinity College Dublin." See Bold, *LHM* 614.

Despite the flatteries of the Public Orator, I am afraid my fearful reputation is too well known. At any rate the Irish poets had taken flight. John Montague was away in Galway. Seamus Heaney³³⁰ had had to go off to Belfast early that morning, but sent me a nice letter explaining.

I kept a very low profile but tho' tired out enjoyed the occasion, as did Valda. Needless to say the kindness, courtesy, and helpfulness of the Irish left nothing to be desired. I've had to rest since I got home and have had a fearful lot of pain, but I do not think my going to Dublin tho' a great risk did me any real harm.

Yes, I got the card with the many signatures but most of them were unknown to me and I'd have been glad to have your comments on just who and what they are.

I hope you and Renée are none the worse of your Dutch and German travels and the terrible worry your daughter's accident must have been causing you.

Hope we may meet again somewhere ere too long. In the meantime thanks again for your kindness. Valda joins me in love and best wishes to you all.

Yours, Christopher.

³³⁰ Seamus Heaney (*b.*1939), Irish poet and winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1995.

79. To Christopher Murray Grieve (*Hugh MacDiarmid*)
(SML MS 2954.13, ff 63r-64r)

5 Peinnachorrain, Braes, Skye

Sunday, 23 July 1978

Dear Chris,

I have just been phoning you but got no answer. I hope you are feeling better than you were when you wrote me ten days ago after your return from Ireland. Ishbel is quite all right now and indeed the accident wasn't as bad as we feared although it did prevent us going out to see you. It is very good of you to be so solicitous about her.

I now forget all who signed the card to you, but as well as Dutch poets there were some of the organizers of the Festival,³³¹ who all remembered you from 1973 and spoke most cordially of you. Among the Dutch poets were Bert Shierbeek [sic] and his wife Thea,³³² Kees Budding,³³³ Rein Bloem,³³⁴ Gerrit

³³¹ The Rotterdam Poetry Festival. See Letter 77, dated 1 April 1978.

³³² Lambertus Roelof (Bert) Schierbeek (1918-96), Dutch poet. See "Schierbeek Bert", *Les Écrivains d'Expression Néerlandaise*.

³³³ Unidentified.

³³⁴ Rein Bloem (b.1947), Dutch poet. See "Rein Bloem", *Literature in Context*.

Krol,³³⁵ Remco Campert[,]³³⁶ and among the organizers were Martin Mooing and his wife and Van der Staag.³³⁷

I have found a spare copy of the programme and it will save me writing out the names. Most of them were unknown to me as poets but I got to know Bartra,³³⁸ an elderly man who had been in exile from 1939 until the death of Franco[,], and his young friend Vallverdú,³³⁹ a splendid chap. I got to know Albertí too,³⁴⁰ and the American [Robert] Bly,³⁴¹ who was delighted to be asked to sign the card. Pierre Emmanuel³⁴² put in no appearance except when he was reading himself and I don't think any of the other foreign poets met him.

I don't know when I can manage to come to Edinburgh as we have a lot of visitors, relatives chiefly.

³³⁵ Gerrit Krol (b.1934), Dutch poet. See "Gerrit Krol", *The Netherlands – Poetry International Web*.

³³⁶ Remco Campert (b.1929), Dutch poet. See "Remco Campert", *The Netherlands – Poetry International Web*.

³³⁷ Unidentified.

³³⁸ Agustí Bartra (1908-82), Catalan poet. See Terry, *A Companion to Catalan Literature*, and Terry, *A Literary History of Spain: Catalan Literature*.

³³⁹ Francesc Vallverdú (b.1935), Catalan poet. See Terry, *A Companion to Catalan Literature*, and Terry, *A Literary History of Spain: Catalan Literature*.

³⁴⁰ Rafael Albertí (1902-99), Catalan poet and painter. See Terry, *A Companion to Catalan Literature*, and Terry, *A Literary History of Spain: Catalan Literature*.

³⁴¹ Robert Bly (b.1926), American poet and author. See Peter Stitt, "Bly, Robert", *The Oxford Companion to Twentieth-Century Poetry in English*.

³⁴² Pierre Emmanuel (Noël Mathieu) (1916-84). French Poet. See "Pierre Emmanuel", *Academie-française*.

It was splendid that you got to Dublin and I hope it did not take too much out of you.

All the best to yourself and Valda and to Michael and his family, from Renee and myself, and I do hope to be able to see you soon.

Yours ever, Sorley MacLean.

80. *To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, f 59r)*

[Biggar]

[October 1985]³⁴³

Dear Sorley,

Many happy returns – I meant to have written you ages ago – to thank you for the splendid address you gave at the unveiling of the sculpture³⁴⁴ – I didn't manage to catch up with you –

I found the TV programme very interesting and the Radio programme a bit on the late side for most people – ³⁴⁵

Enjoy yourself! Valda

³⁴³ This undated letter from Valda Grieve was likely sent in October 1985 as MacLean's birthday was October 26th. See Black, *An Tuil* 764.

³⁴⁴ A bronze memorial sculpture of Hugh MacDiarmid by Scottish artist Jake Harvey was erected, after much controversy, in 1985 near Langholm in the Scottish Borders, where MacDiarmid was born and is buried. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 438.

³⁴⁵ Unidentified.

81. *To Sorley MacLean (GL MS 29533, f60r)*

Valda Grieve

Brownsbank, Candymill, By Biggar.

[Late Autumn 1985]³⁴⁶

08 996 255

Dear Sam,

It is more than 50 years since I first published a poem by Christopher –
now to keep old age at bay – I've tried a second time.

Yours aye Valda Grieve

³⁴⁶ MacDiarmid saw the galleys of his *Complete Poems* before he died on 9 September 1978. However, the collection edited by his son, Michael, and his friend, W.R. Aitken, was not published until 1985. See Bold, *MacDiarmid* 431; 469. See also Hugh MacDiarmid, *Complete Poems: 1920-1976*, ed. Michael Grieve and W.R. Aitken, 2 vols. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985).

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Appendix A

‘Scots steel tempered wi’ Irish fire’

comhrá le

SOMHAIRLE MACGILL-EAIN

Dún Éideann, 18 Iúil 1986

Le Michael Davitt agus Somhairle MacGill-Eain

Innti: *An ndéarfá rud éigin linn i dtosach maidir le do chúlra, do mhuintir, d’óige.*

Somhairle MacGill-Eain: Rugadh mé sa bhliain 1911, in oileán beag darb ainm Ratharsair, idir Sgitheanach agus móirthír na hAlban. Tá Ratharsair timpeall trí mhíle go leith ar leithead sa chuid is leithne. Díreach lastuaidh di tá oileán eile darb ainm Rònaidh atá timpeall cúig mhíle ar fhaid agus laistiar di tá Fladaidh. Bhí daoine ina gcónaí iontu seo an uair sin ach níl iontu anois ach tithe saoire. Bhí talamh mhaith innilte i Ratharsair, mar gheall ar an aolchloch is dócha, agus sa seansaol thugtaí “Eilean nam Fear Móra” air. Bhí cáil ar Ratharsair riamh de bharr feabhas agus toirt a chuid caorach agus a chuid fianna. Bhuel, chuaigh an t-oileán go léir leis an *Free Church* i 1843 agus tháinig Cailvíneachas docht bunúsach i réim ann. Ach i 1893 cuireadh an *Free Presbyterian Church* ar bun, ag a raibh teagasc níba dhéine fós ná an *Free Church of Scotland* agus *Westminster Confession* 1643 mar bhonn lena theagasc. Mar sin bhí eaglais i réim i Ratharsair ag a raibh drochmheas ar aon chineál ceoil, amhránaíochta nó rince. An t-aon chineál amhráin a cheadaítí ná leithéid ‘Sailm Dhaithí’ agus duanta eile eaglasta. Ó Uidhist a Tuaidh a tháinig mo shinsir go Ratharsair i

dtosach, sin muintir MhicGill-Eain. Ach Mathúnach ab ea máthair m'athar. MacNeacail as Sgitheanach ab ea mo mháthair, sloinne mór de chuid an oileáin sin, rud a fhágann go bhfuil go leor gaolta agam i gceantar Bhràighe in oirthear an oileáin. Duine an-údarásach ab ea máthair m'athar agus chuir sí iachall air dul le táilliúireacht – cailleadh a fear céile agus gan m'athair ach a naoi nó a deich de bhlianta. Bhí croit (*croft*) againn agus an-fhear farraige ab ea m'athair, an-iascaire. Duine de thriúr iníonacha Shomhairle Mhóir Mhic Neacail – fear a raibh neart uafásach ann – ab ea mo mháthair. Anois, toisc gurbh as Bràighe ó dhúchas do mo bheirt sheanmháithreacha ar an dá thaobh agus do mo sheanathair ar thaobh amháin, is mó de bhlas Bhràighe ná Ratharsair atá ar mo chuidse Gàidhlig, cé gur i Ratharsair a rugadh agus a tógadh mé. Agus tá difríochtaí suntasacha idir an dá áit. I mBràighe baintear fad as na gutaí, go háirithe as an “à” fada bíonn sé glan, leathan acu. Tá claonadh i Ratharsair an “à” a chaolú. Ina theannta sin labhraíonn muintir Bhràighe an-mhall ar fad. Leis an bhfirinne a dhéanamh, deir go leor daoine go sínim go chuid gutaí amach i bhfad an ionmarca agus mo chuid véarsaí á léamh agam, ach b'fhéidir nach dtuigeann said gurb in é an cineál Gàidhlig a fuair mé le hoidhreacht ón dá thaobh.

Ba mé an dara duine de sheachtar. Ba é John an duine ba shine, tá sé caillte anois. Scoláire mór clasaiceach a bhí ann, duine as an ngnáthach ar fad. Bhí leabhair iomlána le Hóiméar de ghlanmheabhair aige agus bhí eolas as cuimse aige ar an bPíobrach – thioctadh leis suas le seachto Píobrach a aithint ar thrí nóta. B'é Calum an tríú duine. Bhí sé ag obair leis an gCoimisiún

Béaloideas in Éirinn – tá seisean caillte chomh maith. Ansin bhí Alasdair, atá ina bheatha fós, chuaigh sé le dochtúireacht. Chaith sé tríocha éigin bliain ina dochtúir in Uidhist a Deas agus bhailigh sé an t-uafás amhrán Gàidhlig. Ansin bhí Norman atá ina dhochtúir fresin i Wakefield agus ansin bhí Iseabal agus an té ab óige, Mary, ar léi an teach ina bhfuilimid faoi láthair.

Píobaire ab ea m'athair, agus John, Calum agus Norman chomh maith, agus bhí gach aon duine sa chlann in ann amhrán a chasadh ach amháin mo mháthair, aisteach go leor, agus mé féin. Ach tháinig dúil m'anama agam sna sean-amhráin a théann siar go lár an tséú haois déag – más féidir dáta a chur orthu – agus mhothaínn cineál éagumasach nach rabhas féin in ann iad a ghábháil, gí go raibh an-chluas orm chun rithime agus ama agus bhí ar mo chumas na botúin ba lú a thabhairt faoi deara.

Dealraíonn sé go raibh rath éigin mar sin ar an traidisiún amhránaíochta agus ceoil i Ratharsair in ainneoin theagasc piúratánach an Free Presbyterian Church.

Ní mór cuimhneamh, as gach céad duine a fhreastalaíonn ar an *Free Presbyterian Church* nach comaoineoirí ach cúigear agus san am sin ní bheadh aon bhaint acusan le ceol, rince ná le hamhráin. Ach bheadh an nócha cúig eile ag athrú chomh maith agus ar bhealach níor maraíodh na hamhráin riamh ach chuadar faoi thalamh, mar a déarfá, agus choinnigh teaghlaigh áirithe beo iad. Nuair is deich gcinn de theaghlaigh a choinneodh an traidisiún beo i gceantar in Éirinn Chaitliceach, ní bhfaighfeá ach teaghlach amháin b'fhéidir i gceantar *Free*

Presbyterian nó *Free Church* in Albain. Ach an grá a bheadh ag an teaghlach sin do na hamhráin, grá dochreidte.

Is sa traidisiún saibhir béil agus cluaise seo, mar sin, a céadchuireadh síol na filíochta ionat féin?

'Sea, ar na cuimhní is sia siar i mo cheann, táim im shuí cois tine ag éisteacht le mo shean-mháthair ag gabháil fhoinn, agus an-phíobaire agus amhránaí ab ea m'athair agus bhí an-eolas aige ar fhilíocht na Gàidhlig chomh maith. Is cuimhin liom é féin agus deartháir mo mháthar, Alasdair, bheith go síoraí ag caint is ag áiteamh faoin mbardacht agus cérbh iad na baird ab fhearr, daoine mar Dhonnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir, Rob Dall agus Uilliam Ros. Bhí an-chluas ar m'athair chun canúintí. I gceann mo chúig bliana déag bhí mé nuair a thosaigh mé ag breacadh dánta grinn agus aoir. Sula raibh mé trí bliana déag cuireadh go meánscoil Phort Rìgh i Sgitheanach mé agus bhí Laidin, Fraincis agus Gàidhlig mar ábhair agam chomh maith leis an mBéarla. Ansin tharraing mé céim onórach sa Bhéarla in Ollscoil Dhún Éideann. Faoin am seo bhí mé tagtha ar an tuiscint nach raibh sa stuif a bhí á scríobh agam i mBéarla ach lagaithris ar Eliot agus ar Phound agus nach mé féin a bhí ann ar chor ar bith. Mar sin, nuair a bhí mé fiche bliain d'aois scríobh mé dán darb ainm "A" Chorra-Ghrìdheach" (An Corr-Éisc) agus thuigeas láithreach gurbh fhearr go mór é ná aon rud dá raibh scríofa i mBéarla agam. Duine a thug ardmholadh don dán, Edwin Muir, cé nach bhféadfadh sé ach an t-aistriúchán a léamh. Faoin am seo freisin bhí cathú

ag teacht orm gur sa Bhéarla a bhí mo chéim bainte amach agam agus theastaigh uaim dhá bhliain bhreise a chaitheamh san ollscoil chun céim a tharraingt sa Ghàidhlig ach níorbh acmhainn dom. Bhí gnó táilliúireachta m'athar gan bheith ar fónamh agus bhí aimsir an chruatain chugainnn i dtosach na dtríochaidí. Ach tar éis dom bliain a chaitheamh i Moray House faoi oiliúint don mhúinteoireacht, d'fhill mé ar Sgitheanach i bhfómhar 1934 chun Béarla a mhúineadh i meánscoil Phort Rìgh. Idir sin agus 1940, an bhliain a ndeachaigh mé isteach san arm, rinne mé iarracht dhá dtrian de mo thuarastal a thabhairt uaim chun cuidiú le mo mhuintir a bhí ar an ngannchuid.

Cén aois a bhí tú nuair a cuireadh síol an tsóisialachais ionat?

Sula raibh mé dhá bhliain déag d'aois bhí an t-uafás staire léite agam. Nuair a deirim an t-uafás, is é atá i gceist agam gach a raibh fáil air i Ratharsair, mar shampla Réabhlóid na Fraince ina iomláine agus *The History of England* le Greene agus leabhair éagsúla faoi stair na hAlban. Ach céard a bhí á léamh agam gan amhras ach stair impiriúil na Breataine. Is cuimhin go maith liom bheith ag iascaireacht lá le duine de dheartháireacha mo mháthar agus thosaíomar ag caint faoin stair. Thosaigh mé féin ag moladh is ag móradh Disraeli agus na *Tories* agus an Impireacht in aimsir Victoria agus is dóigh liom gur i mBéarla a dúirt sé: *“The bloody Tories who did the clearances.”* Chuir sé sin deireadh leis an gcineál sin léitheoireachta. An dtuigeann tú, is cuimhin liomsa an t-am nuair ba iad an cine nó an náisiún ba mhó a mbeadh an ghráin ag

an bpobal coitianta orthu ná iadsan ba ghráiniúla ar luigh bróg na hImpireachta orthu – na Sínigh. Léigh mé le déanaí go ndúirt Gladstone: “*Will God ever forgive this country for what we did to China?*” Agus is cuimhin liom an t-am nuair a bhí De Valera ar na *bogey men*. Agus roimhe sin Traolach Mac Suibhne, Ard-Mhéara Chorcaí, agus mar sin de. Ní mór cuimhneamh chomh maith go raibh an *An Land League* an-láidir i mBràighe agus cé nár bhain Michael Davitt an áit amach, tháinig sé fad le Stròn sa bhliain 1882. Bhí an *Land League* san fhuil ag mo mháthair agus ag máthair m’athar.

‘Sea bhí mo choinsias polaitiúil á fhorbairt fiú sular bhaineas na déaga amach. Agus ní i ndán mo mhuintire féin amháin a bhí mo shuim ach i gcúrsaí ó dheas freisin. Is cuimhin liom a bheith go mór i bhfábhar stailc na mianadóirí i 1926.

Ach is dócha go raibh dearcadh níos coimeádaí i measc do phobail féin?

Cuirfidh mé mar seo é, ciorcail inmhéanacha na n-eaglaisí, is é sin na Ministéirí, na Seanóirí agus formhór na gcomaoineoirí, b’fhéidir, rinne *Tories* díobh go hoifigiúil ag an am go ndearna Gladstone iarracht *Home Rule* a thabhairt d’Éirinn. Ach rud thar a bheith spéisiúil, tromlach mór a bpobail féin a ghéill dá dteagasc ó thaobh na diagachta de – an Cailvíneachas docht bunúsach – níor thugadar mórán aird orthu ó thaobh na polaitíochta. Faoi na naoi déag fichidí thugainn a lán de sin faoi deara go háirithe i mBràighe, agus i Ratharsair go pointe áirithe.

Ar chláraigh tú mar bhall de pháirtí ar bith?

Ní go dtí go ndeachaigh mé go dtí an Ollscoil. Chláraigh mé i gcraobh na hOllscoile den *Labour Party*. Ní raibh aon pháirtí náisiúnach san Ollscoil an uair sin, an dtuigeann tú. D'fhéadfá sóisialach daonlathach a thabhairt orm ach ba náisiúnaí mé chomh maith. Bhí mé i mo *realist* riamh, sílim, ó thaobh na polaitíochta de. Ní bhíonn mórán foighne agam leis na *armchair theoreticians* a deireann gur cheart seo agus siúd a dhéanamh. Bhí an ceart ar fad ag an té a dúirt gurb é atá sa pholaitíocht ná *the art of the possible*. Caithfidh tú a thuiscint cad é mar bhagairt a bhí ar an Eoraip go léir sna blianta sin. Bhí Mussolini i gcumhacht san Iodáil ó 1922. Ghlac Hitler ceannas ar an nGearmáin i 1933. Bhí leath na hEorpa faoi dheachtóirí faisisteacha nó ar a son. Ansin cuireadh Rialtas Náisiúnta ar bun sa Bhreatain i 1931. Bhí sé sin go léir do mo bhrú níos faide ar chlé mar shóisialach gan baint in aon bhealach le mo sheasamh náisiúnach. Anois nuair a dúirt na *Nazis* gurbh é a bhí uathu An Eoraip a rialú go ceann míle bliain tháinig deireadh le cibé comhbhá a bhí agam leis an nGearmáin láithreach agus d'iompaigh mé i dtreo na Fraince a shíleas roimhe sin a bheith éirithe *reactionary*. Ach tá an ceangal maoithneach traidisiúnta i gcónaí ann idir Albain agus An Fhrainc. Sa bhliain dheireanach agam san Ollscoil chuir mé aithne ar Malcolm Macmillan a bhí ina bhall den *Labour Party* – bhí sé le suíochán a ghnóthú i Westminster i 1935, an chéad duine riamh a bhuaigh suíochán do *Labour* i gceantar neamhthionsclaíoch áit ar bith sa

Bhreatain. Uidhisteach ab ea é, fear a rinne go leor ar son na Gàidhlig. Is cuimhin liom bualadh leis i 1936 tar éis do Hitler dul isteach sa Rhineland agus tar éis do Rialtas na Breataine diúltú tacaíocht dioplomáideach fiú a thabhairt don Fhrainc. Is cuimhin liom go ndúirt mé le Macmillan, *“you’re a set of bloody fools, wait till you see what’s coming”*, agus an bhfuil a fhios agat cad dúirt sé liom? *“That’s exactly what Randolph Churchill is telling us privately.”*

I 1936 a bhris an Cogadh Cathardha amach sa Spáinn. An fíor gur chúrsa éigin grá a choinnigh ó dhul leis an mBriogáid Idirnáisiúnta tú?

Bhí an-chara agam i bPort Righ, Jack Stewart, a cailleadh den ailse i 1972, bhí sé ar na daoine is breátha dár chuir mé aithne riamh orthu. Bhuel mhol sé sin go rachaimis isteach sa Bhriogáid Idirnáisiúnta. Chinn mé gan dul agus ní raibh baint ag aon bhean leis an gcinneadh. Is toisc go raibh mo mhuintir ag brath orm nach ndeachaigh mé chun na Spáinne. An dtuigeann tú, dá rachfá isteach san arm agus dá marófaí thar lear thú, gheobhadh do mhuintir ag baile cúnamh airgid dá dheasca; níorbh amhlaidh i gcás na Briogáide Idirnáisiúnta.

Ba i 1937 a casadh an bhean Éireannach seo orm. Caitliceach ab ea í gan amhras, agus cé go rabhas riamh an-mhór ar son na hÉireann, ní bhím i gcónaí ar son na gCaitliceach, an dtuigeann tú é sin? *(Ag gáire)*. Ó a Dhia, má thit éinne i ngrá riamh, thit mé i ngrá léise. An fear a chuir in aithne dom í, dlúthchara de mo chuid, theastaigh uaidhsean í a phósadh agus b’in cúis amháin dom fanacht siar. Go luath ina dhiaidh sin chuala mé go raibh sí geallta, nó geall

le bheith, le fear eile ar fad, Éireannach. Agus b'in é a phós sí sa deireadh.

Anois, dúirt mé liom féin mura mbeadh na cúiseanna teaghlaigh úd, agus dá mbeadh sé ina rogha agam idir an bhean seo agus an Bhriogáid, gur bhaolach gurbh í an bhean a thógfainn. Rinne mé sraith dánta dise agus do bhean eile a casadh orm níos luaithe agus foilsíodh le chéile i 1943 iad faoin teideal *Dàin do Eimhir*. Ina measc bhí “Gaoir na hEorpa” and “An Roghainn”.

AN ROGHAINN

Choisich mi cuid ri mo thuigse

a-muigh ri taobh a'chuain;

bha sinn còmhla ach bha ise

a'fuireach tiotan bhuam.

An sin thionndaidh i ag ràdha:

a bheil e fìor gun cual

thus gu bheil do ghaol geal àlainn

a'pòsadh tràth Di-luain?

Bhac mi'n cridhe bha'g éirigh

'nam bhroilleach reubte luath

is thubhairt mi: tha mi cinnteach;

carson bu bhriage e bhuam?

Ciamar a smaoinichinn gun glacainn

an rionnag leugach òir,
 gum beirinn oirre's cuirinn i
 gu ciallach 'na mo phòc?

Cha d'ghabh mise bàs croinn-ceusaidh
 ann an éiginn chruaidh na Spàinn
 is ciamar sin bhiodh dùil agam
 ri aon duais ùir an dàin?

Cha do lean mi ach an t-slige chrìon
 bheag ìosal thioram thlàth,
 is ciamar sin a choinnichinn
 ri beithir-theine ghràidh?

Ach nan robh 'n roghainn rithist dhomh
 's mi'm sheasamh air an àird,
 leumainn á neamh no iutharna
 le spiorad 's cridhe slàn.

*As na cúrsaí grá seo a d'eascair cuid de na dánta is diamhra agat. An dtabharfá
 "fear ban" ort féin?*

Déarfainn gur dócha gur tháinig mé go mór faoi dhraíocht na mban, go háirithe ó thaobh scéimh ghnúise de. Ach gach aon bhean ar thug mé taitneamh dá scéimh níor thaitin sí liom ar bhealaí eile, cuid den am ar a laghad. Déarfainn gur tréith í sin a bhain lenár gclann-na. Nílim chun a lán samplaí eile a lua, ach tóg an deartháir ba shine agam, John. I 1938 phós sé bean darbh ainm Moire MacDonald a bhí ag fáil bháis den eitinn. Bhí sí dochreidte dathúil ach níor mhair sí ach cúig mhí dhéag tar éis a bpósta.

An draíocht seo a chuireann scéimh mná ort, cé acu rud gnéasach nó aestéitiúil é?

An dá rud, is dóigh liom. Deirtear i dtaobh an chéad bheirt Sheoirse a bhí ina ríthe ar Shasana gur roghnaigh siad a gcuid máistreás ar a gcorp seachas ar scéimh a ngnúise. Fágann sé sin is dócha gur *sensualists* ab ea an bheirt Sheoirse. Ní dóigh liom dáiríre gur *sensualist* a bhí riamh ionam – bhíos an-idéalach.

Ar casadh an bhean Éireannach úd ort ó phós sí?

Chuala mé gur phós sí timpeall aimsir na Nollag 1939. Bhí Calum in Éirinn ag an am agus is eisean a thug an scéal dom . . . Ó sea, casadh go minic. Bhí mé ag caint léi nuair a bhíos in Éirinn cúpla mí ó shin.

Agus an bhean eile a ndearna tú dánta di sa tsraith Dàin do Eimhir?

D'fheicinn ó am go chéile í ach i gcónaí i lúb chuideachta, idir 1930 agus 1933, ach níor labhair mé léi. Ach casadh arís orm í i nDún-Éideann, ar a rabhas tar éis filleadh i mbun múinteoireachta, i 1939, agus mo cheann fós lán go barr den bhean Éireannach. Ní dheachaigh an bhean Albanach i bhfeidhm a bheag ná a mhór orm i dtosach ach ansin thug sí cuireadh dearfa dom í a thabhairt amach. Rinne mé sin san am ar bhris an Cogadh amach. Thosaigh sí ag caint liom i dtaobh í bheith, ag staid éigin, gar do lámh a chur ina bás féin agus is cuimhin liom mé a bheith idir dhá aigne cé acu ag iarraidh mé a mhealladh chuici nó a ruaigeadh uaithi a bhí sí. Dúirt mé léi go raibh mé i ngrá léi agus dúirt sí rud éigin an-aisteach liom. Trí bliana roimhe sin (agus cuimhnigh nach bhfacasa idir '34 agus '39 í), a dúirt sí, bhí sí ag siúl amach leis an bhfear seo, mac léinn, agus thug sí a ainm dom. Ní raibh aon aithne agam air. *"Since then,"* a dúirt sí, *"I have just been dried up."* Cúpla oíche ina dhiaidh sin a scríobh mé "Coin is Madaidhean-allaidh". D'éirigh mé ara an trí ar maidin agus chuir mé díom in aon racht amháin é.

COIN IS MADDAIDHEAN-ALLAIDH

Thar na sìorruidheachd, thar a sneachda,
 chì mi mo dhàin neo-dheachdte,
 chì mi lorgan an spòg a'breacadh
 gile shuaimhneach an t-sneachda;

calg air bhoile, teanga fala,
 gadhair chaola 's madaidhean-allaidh
 a' leum thar mullaichean nan gàradh
 a' ruith fo sgàil nan craobhan fàsail
 ag gabhail cumhang nan caol-ghleann
 a' sireadh caisead nan gaoth-bheann;
 an langan gallanach a' sianail
 thar loman cruaidhe nan àm cinail,
 an comhartaich bhiothbhuan na mo chluasan
 an deann-ruith ag gabhail mo bhuadhan:
 réis nam madadh 's nan con iargalt
 luath air tòrachd an fhiadhaich
 troimh na coilltean gun fhiaradh,
 thar mullaichean nam beann gun shiaradh;
 coin chiùine caothaich na bàrdachd,
 madaidhean air tòir na h-àilleachd,
 àilleachd an anama 's an aodainn,
 fiadh geal thar bheann is raointean,
 fiadh do bhòidhche ciùine gaolaich,
 fiadhach gun sgur gun fhaochadh.

Mheasas-sa go raibh gné éigin pholaitiúil sa dán sin, i.e. an Cogadh a bheith ag bagairt.

Ó ní raibh.

Ach ní léir aon cheangal ann leis an gcúlra ar labhair tú faoi ó chianaibh.

Ach tá. An dtuigeann tú, níorbh é an cineál mise a rachadh ag fuarchaoineadh i ndiaidh mná ná a ligfeadh do arraingeacha an diúltaithe dul in ainseal orm. Ach mar sin féin d'fhéadfainn cúrsaí a thiomáint chun gealtachais. An bhfuil a fhios agat céard a bheartaigh mé a dhéanamh? Mo dhánta go léir a thiomnú di, idir ainm agus shloinne, imeacht ag troid sa Chogadh, agus bás a fháil . . .

Mar thoradh ar an gcúrsa sin tá sraith dánta in *An Tràigh Thathaich*. Sílim go mbrúnn na dánta sin an grá rómánsúil chomh fada sin nach grá rómánsúil níos mó é.

Ach is í Renee Camaron a phós tú sa deireadh agus bhí triúr iníon agaibh. Cén áit ar casadh ise ort?

Aibreán 1944 i stáisiún traenach Inbhir Nis díreach tar éis dom teacht abhaile ón arm. Dúradh liom go raibh sí geallta. Ach bliain ina dhiaidh sin fuair mé amach nach ise ach a colceathrar a bhí geallta. Gortaíodh go dona sa Chogadh mé, an dtuigeann tú, agus chaith mé ocht nó naoi mí san ospidéal. Bhí orm dul ar ais go Dún Éideann ag múineadh i 1943. Phós mé Renee i mí Iúil 1946. Bhí cónaí orainn i nDún Éideann as sin go 1956. Chuireamar fúinn ar feadh tamaill in

árásán i mbarr theach Sydney Smith, an file, duine de na daoine is greannmhaire dár bhuail mé riamh leo. Fuair mé post ansin mar phríomhoide ar mheánscoil Plockton i Wester Ross agus d'fhan mé ansin go dtí 1972. Chuamar as sin ar ais go Sgitheanach mar a bhfuil cónaí orainn ó shin.

Ar mhiste leat labhairt ar feadh tamaill faoi Hugh MacDiarmid. Cén bharúil a bheadh agat de mar file?

Níor léigh mé aon líne le MacDiarmid go dtí aimsir na Cásca 1933. George Davie agus James Caird a chuir me ina threo mé. Caird a mhol dom liricí luatha MacDiarmid a léamh, *Sangschaw* agus *Penny Wheep* agus ansin *The Drunk Man Looks at the [T]histle*. Ba mhillteach an creathadh a bhain said asam agus neartaigh siad mo chreideamh sa lirc mar bhuaicfhoirm na filíochta. Ansin léigh mé *To Circumjack Cencrastus* agus *Scots Unbo[u]nd*. Bhí mé ag staidéar i Morray House nuair a cuireadh in aithne do MacDiarmid mé in earrach na bliana 1934. Bhí sé ag iarraidh roinnt filíochta a aistriú ón nGàidhlig. Bhí an-spéis aige in Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, bard Seacaibíteach de chuid an ochtú céad déag. Is beag Gàidhlig a bhí aige féin. D'iarr sé orm aistriúchán liteartha a dhéanamh ar “Ben Dorain” le Duncan Bàn Mac an t-Saoir agus “Moladh Móraig” agus “Birlinn” le hAlasdair mar aon le nótaí fairsinge ar na méadair agus dathanna na bhfocal agus mar sin de. Sílim gur fhoilsigh sé iad gan iad a thaispeáint dom. D'éirigh go maith leis le “Birlinn”. Ní raibh a leagan de “Ben

Dorain” rómhaith toisc go bhfuil méadar an dáin bunaithe ar an bpíobrach agus tá sé geall le dodhéanta an mianach sin a aistriú go Béarla.

Faoin am seo bhí ainm MacDiarmid in airde. Caitheadh amach as an bPáirtí Cumannach é mar gheall ar a dhearcadh náisiúnach agus caitheadh amach as an bPáirtí Náisiúnach é mar gheall ar a dhearcadh cumannach! Ach ní mór an tionchar polaitiúil a d’imir sé orm, sílim. Ní raibh mórán muiníne agam as a bhreithiúnas polaitiúil. Bhí an iomarca den *realist* ionamsa.

An ndéarfá go raibh cairdeas mór eadraibh?

“ . . . rud a chuireann as dom i measc a lán eile ná mórán de shinsir na bProtastúnach seo i dTuaisceart na hÉireann gur cuireadh iachall orthu dul ann.”

Déarfainn go raibh. Is ar éigean a bhí aon aighneas riamh eadrainn ach amháin gur éiríomar saghas patuar lena chéile ar feadh tamaill i ndiaidh an chogaidh. Ach thaitin sé riamh liom mar dhuine. Ach níor aontaigh mé leis faoi go leor rudaí. Níor mhór an meas a bhí agam ar a chuid *Poetry of Wisdom* mar shampla.

Ar bhraith tú riamh faoina scáil ó thaobh aitheantais idirnáisiúnta de – agus tú féin ag saothrú na Gàidhlig?

Níor bhraith. Chun na fírinne a rá is beag iad na huaimhianta liteartha atá agam. Agus sin í an fhírinne ghlan. Ar chuala tú riamh gur scaipeadh scéal mar gheall orm uair, go raibh mar mhaíomh agam a bheith ar an bhfile ab fhearr san Eoraip. Is é sin le rá go ndúirt mé é sin fúm féin! Dúirt an scoláire Gàidhlig mór le rá seo faoi dhó go poiblí agus scata uaire go príobháideach gur mé an file ab fhearr san Eoraip. Anois, le barr aineolais nó le barr mioscaise, scaip duine éigin an scéal gur mé féin a dúirt é. Nár mhillteach an rud é sin? An bhfuil aon ní is mó a tharraingeodh droch-chlú ar dhuine ná a leithéid sin a mhaíomh. Tá sé ráite arís is aríst eile ag an té a dúirt é go ndéarfadh sé go poiblí gurb é féin a dúirt, ach ní dhearna sé riamh. Is beag ar fad an *literary vanity* atá ionam ach cuireann sé an-olc orm nuair a chloisim an scéal sin ag dul thart.

An bhfuil tú buartha faoi thodhchaí na Gàidhlig?

Cuireann cúlú na bhfíorchainteoirí dúchais inní orm. Ach is dóigh liom go mairfidh an Ghàidhlig in Albain, ar chaoi éigin ar a laghad ar bith. Shíl mé riamh gurb é dóchas mór na Gàidhlig go mbainfeadh Albain *Home Rule* amach. Ach is beag an seans go dtarlóidh sé sin ar bhonn náisiúnach amháin. Formhór mór na ndaoine a thacódh le hathrú raidiceach in Albain, tugann siad a vóta do *Labour*. Agus ní féidir liom Páirtí Náisiúnach na hAlban a shamhlú ag dul thar an staid go mbeadh cothrom na cumhachta acu.

An gcuireann sé ionadh ort nach bhfuil aon rath mór ar theanga na Gaelige in Éirinn agus féinriail i bhfeidhm le breis is trí scór bliain?

Deir tusa nach bhfuil aon rath uirthi ach ar an taobh eile tá go leor bainte amach. Tá líon substaintiúil de mhuintir na hÉireann a d'fhoghlaim Gaeilge ar scoil, cé nach mbaineann a lán díobh mórán úsáide aisti nuair a fhágann siad an scoil. Ach féach an méid a bhaineann. Ní dhéanfainnse beag den méid atá déanta ar chor ar bith. Caithfidh go bhfuil milliún duine nach mór in Éirinn a bhfuil léamh na Gaeilge acu? An bhfuil? Bhuel sin rud mór. Agus as an líon sin nach bhfuil labhairt na teanga go réasúnta ag a lán?

Nuair a théann tú sall go hÉirinn, an mbraitheann tú go bhfuil droichead éigin fós ann idir an Ghàidhlig agus an Ghaeilge nó idir an dá chultúr?

Is aon teanga amháin iad go bunúsach. Is beag dua mar shampla a thugann prós na Gaeilge domsa ach ní mór dom aistriúchán a bheith agam leis an bhfilíocht. Tá croí i bhfad níos mó agam d'Éirinn ná atá d'aon tír eile seachas Albain. Ach briseann tragóid chúrsaí an tuaiscirt mo chroí. Is ionadh liom an bhinb agus an foréigean atá a léiriú ag na Protastúnaigh i gcoinne an Chomhaontaithe Angla-Éireannaigh. Agus rud a chuireann as dom i measc a lán eile ná mórán de shinsir na bProtastúnach seo i dTuaisceart na hÉireann gur cuireadh iachall orthu dul ann. Is uafásach an rud é bheith ag iarraidh éagóir mhór stairiúil a chur ina cheart. Cuireann scéal na Sé Chontae in Éirinn an-

éadóchas orm. Ach tá grá mór agam d'Éirinn agus fiú nuair nach n-aontaím leis an rialtas ó am go chéile, bíonn sé ar nós a bheith ag easaontú le duine muinteartha leat. Tá na *Commonwealth Games* ar siúl anseo faoi láthair agus tá *Commonwealth Writers' Conference* ann chomh maith, ach cé go mbeadh an-chomhbhá agam le muintir Zimbabwe, abair, agus le ceantair Ghaelacha Cheanada, rud eile ar fad é Albanach a dhul go hÉirinn. Ní hamhlaidh atáim frith-Shasanach – tá daoine i gcodanna de Shasana a bhfuilim an-cheanúil orthu. Mar shampla, d'éirigh mé an-cheanúil ar lucht Tyneside agus mé san arm.

An dóigh leat gur féidir athbheochan Cheilteach a thabhairt i gcríoch – is é sin, go n-aontódh na tíortha Ceilteacha chun a gcomhaitheantas cultúrtha a chur in iúl agus a chaomhnú. Nó an caint san aer nó cur i gcéill na cúrsaí sin, dar leat?

Ní hea. Creidim an-mhór gur féidir. Go háirithe i gcás na hAlban agus na hÉireann, toisc go bhfuil an dá theanga chomh cóngarach dá chéile. Nuair a théimidne go hÉirinn bíonn sé ar nós bheith ag dul abhaile.

Tá oiread aithne anois in Éirinn ort is atá in Albain – i measc na nGael ar a laghad. Ach ba mhaith liom fiafraí díot conas a fheiceann tú forbairt do chuid filíochta ó thaobh na feidhme atá aici i measc an phobail.

Níor chuireas romham riamh aon chineál pleanála a dhéanamh ó thaobh na filíochta de. Agus níorbh fhile leanúnach seasta riamh mé. I mbabhtaí a tháinig

an fhilíocht chugam. Agus mar is eol duit féin is é a ghin cuid mhaith di ná rudaí fíochmhara foréigneacha, mar a déarfá, i stair mo chine agus rudaí uafásacha i mo shaol féin. Táim cinnte i dtaobh ruda amháin, nach d'aonturas a chuaigh mé i mbun na filíochta riamh, seachas an cúpla dán a rinne mé do Chumann Gaedhalach Inbhir Nis. Dá bhrí sin ní bhaineann forbairt léi. Tugaim faoi deara go bhfáiltíonn daoine éagsúla roimh dhánta difriúla de mo chuid. Is fearr le cuid acu “Hallaig” ná aon cheann eile agus is fearr le cuid eile “Coilltean Ratharsair” agus tá sé ráite ag go leor daoine liom gur fearr leo an caoineadh a rinne mé ar mo dheartháir, “Cumha Chalaim Iain MhicGill-Eain”; déarfadh daoine eile fós “Coin is Madaidhean-Allaidh” agus chuir sé ionadh orm a mhéid a thaitin an dán fada a rinne mé le déanaí leo, “Uamha an Óir”. Sna dánta i *Dàin do Eimhir* a thagann roimh an ngrúpa *An Tràigh Thathaich* tá a lán coimhlinte. Ach i *An Tràigh Thathaich* féin tá idéalachas rómánsúil á bhrú go dtí an pointe nach bhfuil sé rómánsúil níos mó. Chum mé an tsraith sin agus cuid den dán fada “Coilltean Ratharsair” i samhradh na bliana '40 díreach sula ndeachaigh mé san arm. Ach deir na léirmheastóirí is báidhiúla ar mo chuid nach bhfuil aon tábhacht leis an machnamh mura bhfuil gabháil déanta ag an bpaisean air. Ach b'fhéidir é sin a rá faoin bhfilíocht i gcoitinne.

A Shomhairle go raibh míle maith agat as labhairt linn, mòran taing.

THE WEAPON

Scots steel tempered wi' Irish fire

Is the weapon that I desire.

-- Hugh MacDiarmid

Source

Davitt, Michael. "‘Scots steel tempered wi’ Irish fire’: *comhra le Somhairle MacGill-Eain, Dun Eideann, 18 Iuil 1986.*" *Innti*. 10: Nollaig, 1986. 29-40.

'Scots steel tempered wi' Irish fire'¹

An Interview with

SOMHAIRLE MACGILL-EAIN

Edinburgh, 18 July 1986

Translated by Susan Wilson and Louis De Paor

Innti: *To begin with, tell us something regarding your background, your people, your youth.*

Somhairle MacGill-Eain: I was born in the year 1911, on a small island named Raasay, between Skye and mainland Scotland. Raasay is about three and a half miles broad at its widest point. It is directly to the north of another island named Rona which is about five miles long and on the west side of it is Fladaidh. There were people living [on Raasay] at that time but now there is nothing there but empty houses. The land in Raasay was fertile/well-cultivated, probably on account of the limestone, and in former times it was known as/called "the island of the big men." Raasay always had an excellent reputation for the quality and size of its sheep and deer. Well, the entire island went with the Free Church in 1843 and a rigid Calvinism flourished there. But in 1893 the Free Presbyterian Church was established, and its doctrine, based on the Westminster Confession of 1643 was even more severe than that of the Free Church of Scotland. So the

¹ This couplet is taken from MacDiarmid's poem *To Circumjack Cencrastus* published in 1930. See Hugh MacDiarmid, "To Circumjack Cencrastus," in *Complete Poems: Volume 1*, ed. Michael Grieve and W.R. Aitken (Manchester: Carcanet, 1993) 263.

church that flourished in Raasay was contemptuous of any kind of music, singing, or dancing. The only kinds of song permitted were things like the psalms of David and other hymns. My forbears, the MacLeans, originally came from North Uist to Raasay. But my father's mother was a Matheson. My mother's people were Nicolsons from Skye, a famous surname on that island, which means I am related to many in the district of the Braes on the eastern part of the island. My father's mother was an imposing/authoritative woman and she made him take up tailoring – she lost her husband when my father was just nine or ten years old. We had a croft and my father was a man of the sea, a fisherman. My mother was one of three daughters of “Big Sorley Nicolson” - a man of terrific strength. Now, because my two grandmothers on both sides and my grandfather on one side were from Braes, the accent of my Gaidhlig is more that of the Braes than of Raasay, although I was born in Raasay and grew up there. And there are noticeable differences between the two places. In the Braes the vowels are lengthened, particularly the long “a”. The tendency in Raasay is to slenderize the “a” which is clear and long among speakers there. Moreover, the people in the Braes speak very slowly. To tell you the truth, many people say that I extend my vowels too much when I read my verse, but perhaps they don't understand that I have inherited that type of Gaidhlig from both sides of the family.

I was the second of seven children. John was the eldest, he is dead now. He was a great classical scholar, a most unusual man. He knew all the books of Homer by heart and had an extraordinary knowledge of piping – he could identify up to seventy pibroch from just three notes. Calum was the third child. He

worked with the Folklore Commission in Ireland – he's gone now as well. Then there was Alasdair, who is still living, he studied medicine. He spent some thirty years as a doctor in South Uist and he was a terrific collector of Gaidhlig songs. Then there was Norman who was also a doctor in Wakefield and then there was Iseabal and the youngest, Mary, it's her house we're in at present.

My father was a piper, as were John, Calum, and Norman as well, and everyone in the family sang except my mother, surprisingly, and myself. But I got a terrible fondness for the old songs that go back to the middle of the sixteenth century – as far as one can date them – and I felt a kind of impotence that I couldn't sing them myself, even though I had a good ear for rhythm and time and could detect the smallest mistakes.*

It appears that traditional singing and music thrived in Raasay in spite of the puritanical doctrine of the Free Presbyterian Church.

You must remember that of every hundred people who attend the Free Presbyterian Church, only five are communicants and at that time these five would have nothing to do with music, dancing or singing. But the other ninety-five would be changing as well and in a way the songs never died out but went underground, as one might say, and certain families kept them alive. For every ten families in an area that kept the tradition alive in Catholic Ireland, there was perhaps one family doing so in a Free Presbyterian or Free Church area in Scotland. But such families had an incredible love for those songs.

Was it this rich oral tradition that planted the seed of poetry in you?

Yes. In my earliest memories I am sitting beside the fire, listening to my grand-mother singing. My father was a great piper and singer and he had a wonderful knowledge of the Gaelic poets. I remember him, and my mother's brother, Alasdair, forever arguing about poetry and which poet was better, poets like Duncan Bàn Macintyre, Rob Dall, and William Ross. My father had a great ear for dialects. When I was fifteen, I began to write humorous poems and satire. Before I was thirteen, I was sent to Portree Secondary School in Skye, where I studied Latin, French, and Gaelic, as well as English. Then I progressed to an honours degree in English at Edinburgh University. At this time, I began to discern that the stuff I wrote in English were only weak imitations of Eliot and Pound, and had nothing of myself in them. So, when I was twenty I wrote a poem called "*A Chorra-Ghrìdheach* / The Heron", and I knew immediately that this was much better than anything I had written in English. Edwin Muir praised the poem, though he only read it in translation. Also during this time I began to regret that I had taken my degree in English. I wanted to spend an additional two years at university to take a degree in Gaelic, but was not in a position to do so. My father's tailoring business was not doing well and it was the time of the Great Depression in the early 30's. So after a year of teacher training at Moray House, I returned to Skye in the autumn of 1934 to teach English at Portree Secondary

School. Between then and 1940, the year I joined the army, I tried to give up two thirds of my salary to help my family who weren't well off.

How old were you when the seeds of socialism were planted in you?

Before I was twelve years old I had read a considerable amount of history. When I say a considerable amount, I mean all that was available in Raasay, the French Revolution in its entirety, for example, and *The History of England* by Greene and different books on the history of Scotland. But of course what I was reading was the history of the British Empire. I remember well one day when I was fishing with one of my mother's brothers and we began talking about history. I was praising and extolling the virtues of Disraeli and the Tories and the empire in the reign of Victoria and he said, in English, I think: "The bloody Tories who did the clearances." That put an end to that kind of reading. You see, I remember a time when the people, or nation, most hated by ordinary people were those who had suffered most at the hands of empire - the Chinese. I read recently that Gladstone said: "Will God ever forgive this country for what we did to China?" And I remember when De Valera was one of the bogey men. And before that, Terence McSwiny, Lord Mayor of Cork, and so on. You must remember that the Land League was very strong in Braes and although Michael Davitt never visited there, he did come as far as Stron in 1882. The Land League was in my mother's blood and my father's mother's blood.

Yes, my political conscience was developing even before my teens. And I was interested not only in the history of my people, but in events in the south as well. I remember being strongly in favour of the miners' strike of 1926.

But presumably there was a more conservative attitude among your own people?

I would put it like this: the inner circles of the church, the Ministers and Elders and the majority of the communicants, perhaps, became officially Tories at the time Gladstone proposed Home Rule for Ireland. But what was interesting was that although the vast majority of these people obeyed them in matters of religious doctrine – a rigid fundamentalist Calvinism – they didn't pay them much attention when it came to politics. By the 1920s I noticed a lot of that, particularly in Braes, and in Raasay to a certain extent.

Were you a member of any political party?

No, not until I went to university where I signed up with university branch of the Labour Party. There was no nationalist party at the university at that time, you understand. You could say I was a democratic socialist, but I was a nationalist also. I was always a realist, I think, in terms of politics. I don't have a lot of patience with the "armchair theoreticians" who say this or that should be done. The person who said that politics is "the art of the possible" was right. You must understand how the whole of Europe was under threat during these years? Mussolini was in power in Italy from 1922 onwards. Hitler seized control

of Germany in 1933. Half of Europe was under the control of fascist dictators or on their side. Then the National Government was established in Britain in 1931. All of this pushed me more to the left as a socialist without affecting my position as a nationalist. Now when the Nazis said they wished to rule Europe for a thousand years, I lost whatever sympathy I had for Germany immediately and turned towards France which, before that, I felt had become previously “reactionary.” But traditionally, there was always a sentimental tie/bond between Scotland and France. During my last year at university I met Malcolm Macmillan, who was a member of the Labour Party – he won a seat at Westminster in 1935, the first person ever to win a seat for Labour in a non-industrial area in Britain. He was from Uidhist, a man who did a lot for Gaidhlig. I remember meeting him in 1936 after Hitler had entered the Rhineland and after the British Government had refused to give even diplomatic support to France. I remember saying to Macmillan, “you’re a set of bloody fools, wait till you see what’s coming,” and do you know what he said to me? “That’s exactly what Randolph Churchill is telling us privately.”

In 1936 the Civil War broke out in Spain. Is it true that a love affair kept you from joining the International Brigade?

There was a good friend of mine in Portree, Jack Stewart, who died of cancer in 1972, one of the finest people I ever knew. Well, he suggested we join the International Brigade. I decided not to go and it had nothing to do with a

woman. I didn't go to Spain because my family was dependent on me. You see, if you joined the army and were killed overseas, your family at home would receive financial assistance; there was no such provision with the International Brigade.

I met this Irish woman in 1937. She was Catholic, of course, and though I was always a supporter of Ireland, I don't always support the Catholics, you know. (Laughing.) Oh my God, if anyone ever fell in love, I fell in love with her. The man who introduced her to me, a close friend, wanted to marry her, and that was one of the reasons I stayed back. Soon after I heard that she was engaged, or as good as, to another man altogether, an Irishman. And it was him she married in the end. Now, I said to myself, if it were not for the family's situation, and if it was a choice between this woman and the Brigade, I'm afraid I would have chosen the woman. I wrote a series of poems to/for her and another woman I had met earlier and they were published together in 1943 under the title *Dàin do Eimhir*. Among these were "*Gaoir na hEorpa* / The Cry of Europe" and "*An Roghainn* / The Choice."

AN ROGHAINN

Choisich mi cuid ri mo thuigse
a-muigh ri taobh a'chuain;
bha sin còmhla ach bha ise
a'fuireach tiotan bhuam.

THE CHOICE

I walked with my reason
out beside the sea.
We were together but it was
keeping a little distance from me.

An sin thionndaidh I ag ràdha
a bheil e fìor gun cual
thu gu bheil do ghaol geal àlainn
a'pòsadh tràth Di-luain?

Then it turned saying:
is it true you heard
that your beautiful white love
is getting married early on Monday?

Bhac mi 'n cridhe bha'g éirigh
'nam bhroilleach reubte luath
is thubhairt mi: tha mi cinnteach;
carson bu bhriag e bhuam?

I checked the heart that was rising
in my torn swift breast
and I said: most likely;
why should I lie about it?

Ciamar a smaoinichin gun glacainn
an rionnag leugach òir,
gum beirinn oirre 's gun cuirinn i
gu ciallach 'na mo phòc?

How should I think that I would grab
the radiant golden star,
that I would catch it and put it
prudently in my pocket?

Cha d' ghabh mise bàs croinn-
Ceusaidh
an éiginn chruaidh na Spàinn
is ciamar sin bhiodh dùil agam
ri aon duais ùir an dàin?

I did not take a cross's death
in the hard extremity of Spain
and how then should I expect
the one new prize of fate?

Cha do lean mi ach an t-slighe chrìon

I followed only a way

Bheag ìosal thioram thlàth,	that was small, mean, low, dry,
	lukewarm,
is ciamar sin a choinnichinn	and how then should I meet
ri beithir-theine ghràidh?	the thunderbolt of love?

Ach nan robh 'n roghainn rithist dhomh	But if I had the choice again
's mi 'm sheasamh air an àird,	and stood on that headland,
Leumainn á neamh no iutharna	I would leap from heaven or hell
Le spiorad 's cridhe slàn.	with a whole spirit and heart.

Some of your darkest poems emerged from these love affairs. Would you describe yourself as a 'lady's man'?

I would say it's likely I was enchanted by women, certainly in terms of the beauty of their faces. But every woman I admired for her beauty, there were other things I didn't like about her, some of the time at least. I would say this was characteristic of my family. I won't mention many other examples, but take my eldest brother John. In 1938 he married a woman name Moire MacDonald who was dying of consumption. She was incredibly beautiful but only lived for fifteen months after he married her.

This enchantment with women's beauty, was it something sexual or was it aesthetic?

Both, I think. People said of the first two Georges who were Kings of England that they chose their mistresses because of their bodies rather than for the beauty of their faces. I suppose that means they were sensualists. I don't think I was ever a sensualist – I was very idealistic.

Did you ever meet the Irish woman after she married?

I heard that she had married at Christmas 1939. Calum was in Ireland at the time, and I heard the story from him . . . Oh yes, I often met her. I spoke with her when I was in Ireland a couple of months ago.

And the other woman you wrote poems for in the series Dàin do Eimhir?

I used to see her from time to time, but always in company, between 1930 and 1933, but I never spoke with her. But I met her again in Edinburgh, after I returned to teach there, in 1939, and my head was still full of the Irish woman. Initially, the Scottish woman did not make any impression on me, but then she specifically invited me to take her out. I did that when the War broke out. She began to talk to me about being on the verge of suicide and I remember I was of two minds as to whether she was trying to seduce me or to drive me away from her. I told her I was in love with her and she said something very strange to me. Three years before this (and remember I hadn't seen her between '34 and '39),

she said, she had been going out with this man, a student, and she told me his name. I did not know him. "Since then," she said, "I have just been dried up." A couple of nights after that I wrote "*Coin is Madaidhean-allaidh* / Dogs and Wolves." I got up until three in the morning and wrote it in a single rush.

COIN IS MADAIIDHEAN-ALLAIDH

DOGS AND WOLVES

Thar na sìorruidheachd, thar a
sneachda,

Across eternity, across its snows,

chì mi mo dhàin neo-dheachdte,

I see my unwritten poems,

chì mi lorgan an spòg a'breacadh

I see the spoor of their paws dappling

gile shuaimhneach an t-sneachda:

the untroubled whiteness of the snow:

calg air ghoile, teanga fala,

bristles raging, bloody-tongued,

gadhair chaola 's madaidhean-allaidh

lean greyhounds and wolves

a'leum thar mullaichean nan gàrradh,

leaping over the tops of dykes,

a'ruith fo sgàil nan craobhan fàsail,

running under the shade of the trees

of the wilderness,

a'ghabhail cumhang nan caol-ghleann,

taking the defile of narrow glens,

a'sireadh caisead nan gaoth-bheann;

making for the steepness of the windy

mountains;

an langan gallanach a'sianail

their baying yell shrieking

thar loman cruaidhe nan àm cianail,

across the hard barenesses of the

terrible times,

an comhartaich bhiothbhusn na mo	their everlasting barking in my ears,
chluasan,	
an deann-ruith a'gabhail mo bhuadhan:	their onrush seizing my mind:
réis nam madadh 's nan con iargalt	career of wolves and eerie dogs
luath air tòrachd an fhiadhaich	swift in pursuit of the quarry,
troimh na coilltean gun fhiaradh,	through the forests without veering,
thar mullaichean nam bean gun	over the mountain tops without
shiaradh;	sheering;
coin chiùine caothaich na bardachd,	the mild mad dogs of poetry,
madaidhean air tòir na h-àilleachd,	wolves in chase of beauty,
àilleachd an anama 's an aodainn,	beauty of soul and face,
fiadh geal thar bheann is raointean,	a white deer over hills and plains,
fiadh do bhòidhche ciùine gaolaich,	the deer of your gentle beloved beauty,
fiadhach gun sgur gun fhaochadh.	a hunt without halt, without respite.

I thought there was a political element in that poem, i.e. that War was threatening?

Oh no.

But there is no obvious connection between the poem and the background you mentioned just now?

Bu there is. You see, I wasn't the kind to go whimpering after a woman or to let the pain of rejection get the better of me. But just the same, I was capable of becoming obsessed. Do you know what I decided to do? To dedicate all of my poems to her by name and surname, go off to fight in the war, and die ...

There is a sequence of poems in *An Tràigh Thathaich / The Haunted Ebb* that came out of all that. I think those poems push romantic love to the point where it is no longer romantic love.

But it was Renée Cameron you eventually married and you have three daughters. Where did you meet her?

April 1944 in the Inverness train station, after I came home from the army. I was told that she was engaged. But a year later I learned it was not she but her first cousin who was engaged. I was badly wounded in the War, you see, and spent eight or nine months in hospital. I had to go back to Edinburgh teaching in 1943. I married Renée in July 1946. We lived in Edinburgh from then until 1956. For a while we lived in an apartment at the top of Sydney Smith's house; he was a poet, one of the most amusing people I have ever met. Then I got a post as principal of Plockton High School in Wester Ross and I stayed there until 1972. After that we returned to Skye which has been our home ever since.

Can you tell me a bit about Hugh MacDiarmid. What was your opinion of him as a poet?

I had not read a single line of MacDiarmid until Easter 1933. George Davie and James Caird introduced me to his work. Caird had said I should read MacDiarmid's early lyrics, *Sangshaw* and *Penny Wheep* and then *The Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*. They had an enormous impact on me and they strengthened my belief in the lyric as the highest form of poetry. Then I read *To Circumjack Cencrastus* and *Scots Unbound*. I was studying at Moray House when I was introduced to MacDiarmid in the spring of 1934. He was trying to translate a selection of poetry from Gaidhlig. He was especially interested in Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, a Jacobite poet of the 18th century. He had little Gaidhlig himself. He asked me to make literal translations of "Ben Dorain" by Duncan Bàn Macintyre and "*Moladh Móraig* / In Praise of Morag" and "The Birlinn" by Alasdair, along with extensive notes on the meter and the colour of the words, and so on. I think he published them without showing them to me. He did well with the "Birlinn." His rendition of "Ben Dorain" was not as successful because the meter of the poem is based on the *Píobrach* / Piping, and it is almost impossible to translate such material into English.

By that time MacDiarmid was well known. He was thrown out of the Communist Party on account of his nationalist views, and he was thrown out of the Nationalist Party because of his communism! But I don't think he had a great influence on me politically. I didn't have much confidence in his political judgement. I was too much of a realist.

Would you say there was a great friendship between you?

“ . . . one of the many thing that bothers me is that many of the ancestors of the Protestants in Northern Ireland were forced to go there.”

I would say there was. We hardly ever argued, but we became cool towards one another for a while after the war. But I liked him as a person. But I disagreed with him on many things. I didn't think much of his *Poetry of Wisdom*,² for example.

Did you ever feel you were under his shadow in terms of international reputation because you were writing in Gaidhlig?

No. To tell the truth, I have little literary ambition. And that's the complete truth. Did you ever hear the rumour that was spread about me, that I had boasted that I was the best poet in Europe? I was supposed to have said this about myself! An important Gaelic scholar said twice publicly and on many occasions privately that I was the best poet in Europe. Now, whether through ignorance or malice, someone spread the story that I had said this myself. Wasn't that a terrible thing? Is there anything more certain to give one a bad

² This is the term applied to MacDiarmid's later poetry written in "synthetic English." See Duncan Glen, *Hugh MacDiarmid and the Scottish Renaissance* (Edinburgh: W. & R. Chambers Ltd., 1964) 154.

reputation than that kind of bragging? Again and again the person who said this swore he would publicly take responsibility for it, but he never did. I have very little literary vanity, but it makes me very angry when I hear this story going around.

Are you concerned about the future of Gaidhlig?

The reduction in the numbers of genuine native speakers worries me. But I think Gaidhlig will survive in Scotland somehow, in some fashion at least. I always believed that there would be great hope for Gaidhlig if Scotland won Home Rule. But there is little chance of that happening solely on a national basis. The vast majority of people who would support radical change in Scotland, vote for Labour. And I can't imagine the National Party of Scotland in a position where they would have anything more than the balance of power.

Are you surprised at the lack of any major progress for the Irish language in Ireland in spite of our having self-government for more than sixty years?

You say there has been no progress in the language but on the other hand a great deal has been achieved. A substantial number of Irish people have learned Irish in school although many of them don't use it very much once they have left school. But look at the number of people who do. I would not make little of what has been achieved at all. There must be almost a million people in

Ireland who are able to read Irish? Are there? Well, that's a great thing. And of that number, don't many of them speak the language reasonably well?

When you come over to Ireland, do you notice there is still a connection of sorts between Scottish Gaelic and Irish, or between the two cultures?

Basically, they are the same language. For example, I have little trouble reading prose in Irish, but I need translations to read the poetry. Ireland has more of my heart than any other country except Scotland. But the tragedy of events in the North breaks my heart. I am surprised by the viciousness and the violence of the reaction by Protestants to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. And one of the many things that bothers me is that many of the ancestors of the Protestants in Northern Ireland were forced to go there. It's a terrible thing trying to correct a great historical injustice. I find the story of the Six Counties of Ireland very depressing. But I have a great love for Ireland, and even when I disagree with the government from time to time, it is usually like disagreeing with a friend. The Commonwealth Games are taking place here right now and the Commonwealth Writers' Conference as well, but although I would have a great deal of empathy with the people of Zimbabwe, say, and with the Gaelic communities in Canada; it's another matter altogether to be a Scotsman going to Ireland. It's not that I am anti-English – there are people in parts of England I am very fond of. For example, I became very fond of the people of Tyneside when I was in the army.

Do you think it's possible that a Celtic revival may finally come about – that the Celtic countries would unite in order to articulate and preserve their cultural identity? Or does this seem to you to be either nonsense or pretence?

No. I strongly believe it's possible. Especially in the case of Scotland and Ireland because of the similarity between the two languages. When I go to Ireland, it's like going home.

You are now as well known in Ireland as in Scotland – at least among the Gaels. But I would like to ask how you view the development of your poetry in terms of its function among the community.

I've never laid out any plan to follow in terms of poetry. And I've never been continuous or fulltime as a poet. Poetry came to me periodically. And as you know yourself, it was provoked by ferocious and violent events, as one might say, in the history of my people and horrible things in my own life. I'm certain about one thing: I never consciously set out to write poetry, other than a couple of poems I wrote for the Gaelic Society of Inverness. For that reason there is no development. I notice that different people like different poems. Some like "Hallaig" more than anything else, and others prefer "*Coilltean Ratharsair* / The Woods of Raasay," and many people have said to me they prefer the elegy I wrote for my brother, "*Cumha Ahalaim Iain MhicGill-Eain* / Elegy for Calum Iain MacLean"; still others would say "*Coin is Madaidhean-Allaidh* / Dogs and

Wolves” and I am surprised at how much people like the long poem I wrote recently, “*Uamha an Óir / The Cave of Gold*.” The poems in *Dàin do Eimhir* that come before the series *An Tràigh Thathaich / The Haunted Ebb* are full of conflict. But in *An Tràigh Thathaich / The Haunted Ebb* romantic idealism is being pushed to the point that it is no longer romantic. I wrote that sequence and part of the long poem “*Coilltean Ratharsair / The Woods of Raasay*” in the summer of '40 just before I joined the army. But the most sympathetic critics of my work say that intellect is unimportant unless it is connected to passionate feeling. But maybe this can be said about poetry in general.

Somhairle, many thanks for speaking with us, all the best.

THE WEAPON

Scots steel tempered wi' Irish fire

Is the weapon that I desire.

-- Hugh MacDiarmid

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Appendix B

Review of MacDiarmid's translation of

The Birlinn of Clanranald

as published in *The Times Literary Supplement*

4 January 1936, page 17

THE BIRLINN OF CLANRANALD (Birlinn Chlann-Raghnaill). By ALEXANDER MACDONALD. Translated from the Scots Gaelic of Alasdair MacMhaigstir Alasdair by Hugh MacDiarmid. St. Andrews: Abbey Bookshop. 10s. 6d.

The "Birlinn," which today is frequently read and recited by the seafaring Gaelic-speakers of the Southern Outer Hebrides, where the author is well remembered in local tradition, describes the blessing of Clanranald's galley and of the arms of his men, the manning of the ship with the assignation of various duties to the different members of the crew, and the subsequent voyage from Loch Eynort, in the South Uist, to Carrickfergus through a severe storm. It is the longest poem in modern Scottish Gaelic, extending to 566 lines. The language of the original is vigorous, rugged and effective; at times there is a tendency to hyperbole, as when the fury of the storm is described as driving the trough of the waves down to the sea bed so that the galley nearly scrapes her keel on the bottom; but as a descriptive sea-poem it possesses considerable merit, and is free from the instances of bathos which so often mar modern Gaelic poetry.

Several attempts have been made at translating either the whole or parts of this poem into English; this one is undoubtedly the most successful so far, but

in some ways it is not entirely satisfactory. Although Mr. MacDiarmid in his preface tends to minimize the difficulties involved in translating Gaelic into English verse, it cannot be said that he has entirely overcome them. For example, “lean ship” for *caolbhàrc* (p. 8, line 11) does not convey the idea of graceful slenderness contained in the original; compound words of this kind are very common in Gaelic poetry, and are almost impossible to translate. In some passages, such as that on page 18 referring to “the teller of the waters,” the translation is very effective; but some of the expressions used by the translator elsewhere will probably jar on readers who are acquainted with the original, but not with the translator’s own highly individual style. Incidentally, lines 3-6 on page 21 do not seem to correspond to anything in the Gaelic original; but the translator does not state the source of his text. The book is well produced, but there are three misprints on page 7 of the preface, including “interval” for “internal” in the second line of the page. The translator’s remarks on the metres used in the original are confused and misleading, for MacDonald does not attempt anywhere to follow the strict rules of *dán díreach*, with which MacDiarmid himself can hardly be acquainted, since he defines *uaithne* as “*aichill* influenced by the penultimate stress.” The space that is given to the metres would have been much better used to describe the rigging and appearance of the galley that is the subject of the poem, since this type of vessel is not likely to be familiar to the modern reader any more than the classical Gaelic metres are to Mr. MacDiarmid.

Source

Rev. of *The Birlinn of Clanranald (Birlinn Chlann-Raghnaill)*. By Alexander MacDonald. Translated from the Scots Gaelic of Alasdair MacMhaigstir Alasdair by Hugh MacDiarmid. *Times Literary Supplement* 1770 (4 Jan. 1936): 17. *Times Literary Supplement Centenary Archive Online* 29 Dec. 2007 < <http://www.tls.psmedia.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/member.asp>>.