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Ruth McQuillan

The Complete MacDiarmid



My first reaction on buying Hugh MacDiarmid's *Complete Poems*¹ at Christmas 1978 for what now seems the incredibly low price of £15 was one of disappointment.

Disappointment first that Dr. Aitken, whom the poet long ago appointed as his "bibliographer and rembrancer," and whom he had chosen to edit in company with Michael Grieve the definitive edition of his published work, had included no bibliographical notes. And secondly disappointment because of the technical defects of Martin Brian & O'Keefe's production. The title-page is creased in the binding (though I am assured other early purchasers were luckier than I); ink is regrettably scarce on several pages of the *Sangschaw* poems, and again in sections of *In Memoriam James Joyce*; and the type-setting of the page-heading "Hitherto Uncollected Poems" is not well aligned or spaced. And yet the fly leaf bears the proud boast: "Printed in Scotland by Robert MacLehose & Co. Ltd., Printers to the University of Glasgow"!

But disappointment was soon forgotten in the full realization that here was the long-awaited and most welcome miracle--virtually the entire corpus of MacDiarmid's work once more in print. A straightforward facsimile reprint of *To Circumjack Cencrastus* would alone have been worth all of £15 to any serious student of MacDiarmid's work.

As for the bibliographical material, I was not quite unreasonable in expecting this: in a letter dated 11 August 1976 (his 84th birthday) Dr. Grieve told me the text of his *Complete Poems* "...is now in the hands of the printers at Verona,² and will be published in two volumes. Also contains complete bibliography, and all the poems have been thoroughly read and previous typographic and other errors corrected."³ But meanwhile (and it would be wrong to suppose the contradiction had anything to do with increasing age; when was contradiction *not* one of the hallmarks of MacDiarmid's style?) he was writing to Dr. Aitken: "There should be a glossary (conflated from those I supplied for the separate books drawn upon) and no additional explanatory annotations and/or elucidations at all. For various reasons I am against bottom of page glosses rather than a general glossary at the end, but I certainly do not want any scholarly notes etc. anywhere."⁴ And I understand that, more specifically, Dr. Grieve was opposed to any inclusion of bibliographical material.

Scholars may feel (the general reader will be less inconvenienced) that in one particular the editors might reasonably have been contumacious enough to disregard the poet's instructions: whereas poems which previously appeared in one of MacDiarmid's many published books (even prose works like *The Islands of Scotland* or *Lucky Poet*) have *that* provenance, though not the details of any earlier publication, clearly indicated in the list of contents, when one turns to the 212 "Hitherto Uncollected Poems Contributed to Books and Periodicals (1920-1976)" retrieved at great labour from, we are told, "more than forty different periodicals,"⁵ the year of publication is all that we are given. For instance (and I choose this instance because I happen to know--mostly I do not and would like to), it would be good to be told not just that "The Crown of Rock" (p. 1241) was published in 1924 but that it was published in *The New Age* on 25 September 1924, in Vol. XXXV, No. 22, p. 257. Information of this kind would not have spoiled the edition, would not appreciably have lengthened the volumes, and would not have put a heavier burden on the editors, who must *know* where they found these poems. And how we cheer when Dr. Aitken does slip in a square bracketed scholarly note on p. 1234 in the section for 1923. Though he does not tell us that "Braid Scots: An Inventory and Appraisal"⁶ first appeared in *Scottish Chapbook* in the autumn of that year, he explains:

The poem "Gairmscoile" (see pp. 72-75), printed in *Penny Wheep* (1926), is a revision of the Prologue, Section I, and all but the last stanzas of Section II of this frag-

ment of a long poem which was to have contained twelve Sections, each consisting of four or five eight- or ten-line verses, with a Prologue and an Epilogue.

Dissatisfaction is stilled, however, when one reads again Dr. Aitken's insistence "that the edition now published is very much the poet's own. Indeed, it was the original intention that the editorial work in the edition should be undertaken anonymously: we were merely doing for the poet what he might have done for himself."⁷ After that, what can one say? Except that MacDiarmid *could* not, even thirty years ago, have done what Dr. Aitken has done. One man's gifts are not another's, and it should detract in no way from the poet's extraordinary genius to acknowledge this.

Dr. Aitken's skill is quietest and most conscientious in his correction of "typographic and other errors." It was a relief on page 423 to find that what was "Dietic," or sometimes "Diectic," is shown at last as "Deictic" (though I wish that, four pages later, the editors had as silently removed that intrusive comma which long ago crept into "millya hellya"). But, from so many instances where in editing his text Dr. Aitken has remedied the defects of earlier proof reading, I must quote the most delightful. When *The Battle Continues* was published in 1957, it included a passage which had ten years earlier concluded a poem called "Glasgow." Twice therefore MacDiarmid's readers had been puzzled by the line "The journalists go by like a tygendis of magpies." And twice now (pp. 956 and 1339 in the *Complete Poems*) his bibliographer has restored the sense and also the play on "tydinges," the old spelling of an old word for a congregation of magpies (as, for example, a charm of goldfinches and a murmuration of starlings), and an old word also for news. The whole story is a scholarly reference and some day Dr. Aitken will tell it.

As for the lack of excellence in printing and binding, one gets these days what one pays for, and we have been spoiled in the past, readers of MacDiarmid's work, because though he was never so lucky in his editors as he finally was in calling upon Dr. Aitken MacDiarmid was, by all modern standards, amazingly lucky in his publishers. One thinks at once of the beautiful special editions: the Duval/Hamilton/Mardersteig editions of the *Direadh* poems (Frenich, Foss 1974) and of *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (Falkland 1969) and their first edition (Edinburgh 1961) of *The Kind of Poetry I Want*. Then there are the many finely produced limited editions, which were labours of Duncan Glen's love for the poet, as the edition done by his students of *On a Raised Beach* (Preston 1967). As for William MacLellan's first edition of *In Memoriam James*

Joyce (Glasgow 1955), perhaps its beauty was most sincerely appreciated by the Librarian and his staff at Cambridge University Library in England. In the late sixties it used to amuse me to find that *Lucky Poet* (then very difficult to come by) was on the open shelves in the stacks and I could borrow it from one quarter day to the next except when Roderick Watson, the only other MacDiarmid scholar in town, claimed it; but *To Circumjack Cencrastus* had to be ordered in the Reading Room and I needed special permission to borrow it overnight, and Mr. MacLellan's lovely *In Memoriam* was categorized as a Rare Book which could be handled only in the Anderson Room (then still at the height of its glory)--at a time when the second impression was quite inexpensively available in many English bookshops! The *Complete Poems* I suspect never will become a collector's item. It is a working copy, and none the worse for that.

But no publishing house ever did so much for MacDiarmid's work as the old firm of William Blackwood & Sons of Edinburgh. The whole appearance of their books, the heavy paper and clear and beautiful type, belongs to the nineteenth rather than the twentieth century and their standard of courtesy and service also was the inheritance which a family firm could preserve from a vanished age.

George Ogilvie, who had been MacDiarmid's English master at the Junior Student Centre in Broughton Higher Grade School, found himself in December 1930 without an address for his old pupil in Liverpool. On the 14th of that month he asked Messrs. Blackwood to forward a letter and, with a sense of what was due which younger and later admirers of MacDiarmid's work have not always shared, added:

May I take this opportunity of paying my "respects" to you for publishing Grieve's poetry? These volumes cannot have been a "business proposition" but it moves and stirs one to know that there is a house which knows great poetry when it sees it and is willing to lose for its sake. Yours is an honourable record and your adoption of Grieve is in your own fine tradition.

Ogilvie's judgment of the matter remains, I believe, true for all time; but I am going too fast: even the loyal partiality of an old teacher could not have recognized Grieve's work as great poetry until he had, almost simultaneously, discovered with the Scots language his own distinctive voice and adopted the famous pseudonym of Hugh MacDiarmid. (The more correct, and more modern, form of MacDiarmid was not generally used till much later.)

Hugh MacDiarmid was not his first nor, for much of his life, Grieve's only *nom-de-plume*. Duncan Glen in his monograph *The Literary Masks of Hugh MacDiarmid* (Glasgow 1964) traces several such names. And the habit of literary disguise was begun early. On 25 November 1908, during the first school term that the young Grieve spent in Edinburgh, away from home, he published in *The Eskdale and Liddesdale Advertiser* over the signature Alister K. Laidlaw a homesick and remarkably promising poem called "Memories of Langholm."⁸ The pen-name (Laidlaw is a Langholm name and was the name of the cousins with whom Grieve was all his life most intimate) was later abbreviated to A.K. Laidlaw, or just A.K.L. Like his other masks, all save the one most famous, it was worn to present journalism, ephemera, and "occasional" writing of various sorts, as for instance A.K.L.'s "Mrs. Grundy at Savoy Hill" ("It is like the plot of an early Victorian novel and not an actual circumstance of the post-war years; but employees of the B.B.C. must not have any domestic complications--or they are sacked on the spot"⁹), or the syndicated articles by "Mountboy" or "Special Correspondent."

In an undated letter to his cousin John Laidlaw,¹⁰ but written after the publication of the second series of the anthology *Northern Numbers* and therefore in 1921 or later, Grieve wrote: "If you get *Edin^r Evening News* 'A.K.L.' is my old *nom-de-guerre*. I have had a variety of letters, poems and articles in there lately." Some of the items are easily found and unsurprisingly, on 20 August and 1 September 1921, A.K.L. was concerned to boost C.M. Grieve's "Scottish group poetry annual," *Northern Numbers*. "I question if any country in Europe to-day could put forward a more distinguished company of eighteen writers than those associated, under the editorship of Mr. C.M. Grieve, with the forthcoming second series of this publication..." These were the days also when Grieve was first deeply involved in the Home Rule movement in Scotland, which A.K.L. called "the Scottish Free State movement,"¹¹ and both he and Lewis Spence, to whom A.K.L. wrote a sonnet,¹² were associated with the growth of Nationalism in Scotland, and appeared in the columns of the *Edinburgh Evening News*. Many of A.K.L.'s contributions are on patriotic themes, but it must be his verses which interest us most. Who could not enjoy his "The Yellow Bride"?¹³

Her sheaf of yellow irises,
 Those flames of love, were vain,
 And vain the hue's devices
 In flowing veil and train;
 The colour made too much ado--
 Her face was yellow, too!

But what should be our reaction to "Scotland Calls"?¹⁴ I give only the last of the six verses, which surely must be more than enough.

Young men to Scotland's standard rally,
No more debate and dilly-dally;
A lady waits on horseback with drawn sword
At Edinburgh's cross--Up, friends, with one accord.

If A.K.L. on this occasion really is C.M. Grieve, and one feels some indignant comment might have come down to us if he were not, why does this verse, which might be part of Grieve's juvenilia, shock us more than the following penultimate verse of a poem entitled "The Chinese Genius Wakes Up" on p. 1412 of the *Complete Poems* in the 1962 "Hitherto Uncollected" Section?

In the dawn of history the Chinese
With their arts and inventions glorified Man.
Now at this crisis in human affairs
It's good to see them again in the van.

Or what about this verse from a poem first collected in 1935?

You believe in your ancestors' teaching,
"I am the master and you the serf,"
And you regard being master as an honour,
A special privilege you inherit and deserve.¹⁵

At least the pseudonymous young poet of 1922 had a conventional respect for the iambic foot. By 1962 though, even by 1935, it was generally accepted that MacDiarmid was expansive and extensive in range. He told George Bruce "It would not have suited my book at all to be faultless. My job, as I see it, has never been to lay a tit's egg, but to erupt like a volcano, emitting not only flame but a lot of rubbish."¹⁶ In Kenneth Buthlay's judgment his poetry "is of the very highest quality in some instances and awesomely bad in others."¹⁷ A *Complete Poems* must of course include the whole range of a man's work and there was no room for value judgments on the part of the editors. But in the early 1920s none of this was yet true: Grieve had touched neither the highest nor the lowest. The "Sonnets of the Highland Hills" and other English poems from *Northern Numbers* (included in the *Complete Poems* on pp. 1197 *et seq.*) and those included in *Annals of the Five Senses* which now open the *Complete Poems*, were written with a conscious care, and were very often submitted to George Ogilvie the English master before they appeared in cold print. And, it is

important to note, they were all written by C.M. Grieve. Similarly, I cannot doubt that it was Grieve and no other who submitted work to J.C. Squire of the *London Mercury* soon after the end of the Great War.¹⁸

Grieve however was a journalist. The productions in the *Edinburgh Evening News*, like so much more of his pseudonymous writing, were pure journalism, intended to be read and then disposed of. The *News* was a paper which had provided a market for his articles since he sent reports to them from Wales in 1911, and he knew well the kind of verses that would find favour there. The fee may well have been a half guinea; what better reason for sending out a pot-boiler?

In 1922, on 30 September, that two poems appeared, not just pseudonymously but anonymously, in Grieve's column in the *Dunfermline Press*. So far as is yet known, they were the first two poems he had written in Scots, and it was one of the more rewarding moments of literary research when Duncan Glen came upon the poems--and recognized one of them.¹⁹ Both had been written by a "friend" who had stayed with Grieve and read his copy, ignored till then, of Sir James Wilson's *Lowland Scotch as Spoken in the Lower Strathearn District of Perthshire*.²⁰ "They serve a useful purpose, I think," Grieve wrote, "in rescuing from oblivion and restoring to literary use forgotten words that have a descriptive potency otherwise unobtainable. Not only so, but apart from that philological interest they have, in my opinion, some genuine poetic merit too." "The Blaward and the Skelly," which is reproduced on p. 1212 of the *Complete Poems*, has no poetic merit whatsoever, and is somewhat inferior to "The Yellow Bride" (who may indeed have shared that mustard-yellow hair colour with the unfortunate Nelly). It is also noteworthy that, though "blaward" (blaewort in a Lower Strathearn disguise) and "skelly" (charlock or wild mustard) did come from Sir James Wilson, the poem is not really in Scots at all. The other poem, "The Watergaw," reproduced on p. 17, was a very different matter. Much has been written about this lyric and the way in which its Scots vocabulary derives from Wilson, notably by Kenneth Buthlay who called it "that most mysterious and most famous" of MacDiarmid's early poems.²¹ The heart of the mystery so far as the poetry is concerned has been explained by MacDiarmid himself as adequately as a mystery by its very nature well can be: "It was like a revelation when I wrote my first poem in Scots ...I must have tapped some source deep in myself."²²

But the revelation, I suspect, grew more slowly than he suggests. For, when next "The Watergaw" appeared ("The Blaward and the Skelly" having been left in its quiet Dunfermline anonymity to await Duncan Glen), it was a few weeks later in

Scottish Chapbook (Vol. I No. 3, October 1922) where it was no longer anonymous, neither was it owned by the *Chapbook's* editor, C.M. Grieve; it appeared instead over the signature of Hugh MacDiarmid, a name which happened to be conveniently to hand, since Grieve had used it for a prose sketch in the same journal's first and second issues. It is, I believe, mostly chance that the literary histories of Europe and America now all include the old Highland name of MacDiarmid rather than the old Scots Border name of Laidlaw, or some quite other name. But a more interesting question is why "The Watergaw" and therefore ultimately the two volumes of the poet's *Complete Poems* should bear the name Hugh MacDiarmid, rather than C.M. Grieve. It might be argued that Grieve could not very well be the author of poems in Scots without eating his earlier words. A.K.L. had written of the *Northern Numbers* poets: "What criticism can reasonably be founded on the fact that the majority of them...prefer to express themselves in that English which is no monopoly of the Sassenach? Have they not chosen the better way and do they not represent the real tendency of modern Scottish literature? Edinburgh discerns them as her own without need of shibboleths: and knows that the highest traditions of Scottish nationality are perfectly safe in hands such as these--whatever the pedantic patriots of London, who would seemingly surrender their birthright for a mess of uncouth and obsolete synonyms, may say."²³

The pedantic patriots were the Vernacular Circle Committee of the London Burns Club against whom Grieve in his own name had been conducting what he himself described as "guerilla warfare."²⁴ In November 1921 he believed that "the English language is an immensely superior medium of expression," and that "'braid Scots' is, and will remain, the special preserve of the *tour de force*, the *jeu d'esprit*--a backwater of the true river of Scottish national expression."²⁵

But no small-minded fear of contradicting himself had ever any place in Grieve's make-up and when the first issue of *Scottish Chapbook* appeared in August 1922 some of the journal's "principal aims and objects" were:

To report, support, and stimulate, in particular, the activities of the Franco-Scottish, Scottish Italian, and kindred Associations; the campaign of the Vernacular Circle of the London Burns Club for the revival of the Doric; the movement towards a Scots National Theatre; and the "Northern Numbers" movement in contemporary Scottish poetry.

Neither do I think the adoption of a pseudonym was a simple

case of "becoming two people," as Buthlay puts it,²⁶ though of course it did have that effect, so that, in much the same way as A.K.L. had praised C.M. Grieve and *Northern Numbers*, Hugh MacDiarmid was able to suggest to Messrs. Blackwood that they might consider the publication of a "small quarterly devoted to Scottish letters, Art and Music, entitled 'Scots Art'" and that one of the contributors to the quarterly should be C.M. Grieve, "Author of 'Annals of the Five Senses,' member of PEN Club, present literary critic of 'New Age,' contributor to 'Les Nouvelles Littéraires' etc. His 'Contemporary Scottish Studies' are to be published next year...";²⁷ more tellingly, C.M. Grieve was able to present Hugh MacDiarmid to the literary world:

The work of Mr. Hugh McDiarmid...is peculiarly interesting because he is, I think, the first Scottish writer who has addressed himself to the question of the extendability (without psychological violence) of the vernacular to embrace the whole range of modern culture; or, in other words, tried to make up the leeway of the language. It is an excessively difficult task and I envy him his enthusiasm.²⁸

It may also be argued that Grieve did not want to be seen monopolizing the pages of his own monthly publication--and therefore had already invented a contributor called Hugh MacDiarmid and had given A.K. Laidlaw employment as *Chapbook's* Advertisement Manager--Laidlaw who later submitted one of his own poems to the journal. Grieve wrote to John Laidlaw: "Glad the 'Chapbook' continues to interest you...You will observe that rude half-relation of yours and half-MacConachie of mine --A.K. to wit, of the clan--has been abominably rude again in the current issue. He's a wild chap."²⁹ He certainly was; the poem was "Your Immortal Memory, Burns!"³⁰ which is such rumbustious doggerel, and so very funny, that Hugh MacDiarmid claimed it for himself in his 1926 collection, *Penny Wheep*; it therefore has reached the *Complete Poems* (p. 77).

It may even be argued that Grieve was anxious to preserve the fiction of the anonymous "friend" he had introduced in the *Dunfermline Press*. In this he succeeded for at least a year or so: when Fionn MacColla, who was himself to become a major figure of the twentieth century Scottish Renaissance, read in the issues of *Chapbook* the Scots lyrics which amazed and delighted him, he had no idea, he told me, that they had been written by Mr. Grieve, a near neighbour in Links Avenue, Montrose.

Above all, however, I believe that Grieve was reluctant to

put his own name to "The Watergaw," not because it was a pot-boiler like A.K.L.'s more appalling productions but because he saw it, precisely and in his own terms, as a *jeu d'esprit*. I suggest that for some months to come he simply did not know what he had in that lyric and its successors, and was happy to let the mysterious McDiarmid take full responsibility for his experimental work in Scots. C.M. Grieve at the same time was ready to own "The Litany of the Blessed Virgin" (p. 1216)--a true *jeu d'esprit* and attractive piece of juvenilia, making play on a run of five titles of the Blessed Virgin Mary and including an example of creative mistranslation worthy of Ezra Pound--and he continued to publish English poems, including a number of rather dated sonnets, almost none of which was ever collected till Michael Grieve and Dr. Aitken collected them.

Meanwhile in the *Chapbook* Hugh MacDiarmid was publishing the results of his deepening experiment with the Scots language, and was finding in more exhaustive lexicons than Wilson's (particularly of course Jamieson's *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language*) that purely verbal impulse on which his imagination so distinctively thrived. By 13 April 1926 Grieve was sufficiently sure of himself to write to the young poet, J.K. Annand:

Any success I am having in Scots is due to my development of a flair for discovering the inherent and otherwise unsuspected capabilities of Scots terms for readaptions to vital uses--a knack of hitting upon ways of utilising them which is somehow indefinably but very clearly in accordance with their own nature. Mere wrenching...or the inartistic employment of them (that is to say any use of them which does not justify itself completely in the result and make them somehow the inevitable media of whatever is affected through them) is hopeless. It is wonderful what a weight of out-of-the-way terminology one can carry along successfully in the current of a genuine poetic impulse or overcome by sheer concentration of effort towards finding its ideal use. It is along these lines and no other that Scots can be profitably used and no one should attempt to use it unless he finds English incapable of expressing what he wishes to express.

But by then Hugh MacDiarmid had been so encouraged by the critical reception of his Scots work that he made his first, and historic, approach to the firm of Blackwood.

On 16 April 1925 he sent the publishers a copy of an article by Alexander McGill which had appeared in the *Glasgow Herald* a fortnight before:

He has discarded the regular newspaper dialects, and out of a great and thorough knowledge of Scots words and idioms he has fabricated, wilfully, a Scottish literary language which is rooted in old Scots and in the un-sleeping soul of the Scottish nation. He has eschewed merely Burnsian Scots and gone back to the language spoken and written by the makars before the decay set in.³¹

Alluding also to critical articles by Dr. George Kitchin, Mr. D. Cleghorn and Prof. Denis Saurat (although Kenneth Buthlay points out that the poet had already complained that Kitchin simply copied Saurat),³² he went on:

It seems curious that so much interest should have been aroused as I have only so far published a few of them in various now-defunct periodicals.

There is obviously a demand for a volume...May I ask if your firm would consider the publication of quite a small volume containing some 25 of my best poems--of each of which very flattering things have been said by competent and well-known critics?

At Blackwood's request, copy for the book (then to be called "Penny Wheep") was sent on 20 April, and matters thereafter moved with a speed which more recent authors (and also the editors of these *Complete Poems*) well may envy. On 28 April Blackwoods agreed to include the volume in their autumn list, at a selling price of 5/-; MacDiarmid was to receive royalties of 10% on the first 750, 15% for 750 to 1,500 copies, and 20% beyond 1,500. They added: "We should also make the proviso that you would offer us your next two volumes on similar terms..." Proofs of what was by then called *Sangschaw* were despatched to MacDiarmid in mid-May and returned by him on 1 June 1925, with certain deletions and additions. By 6 August he was to approve the binding and select a colour of cloth, and the volume appeared on 9 September.

On 12 February 1926 MacDiarmid wrote to his publishers: "In accordance with our arrangement that you should have the option on my next two volumes I propose to submit for favour of your consideration two new collections of my poems." One was *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, "...a long poem of over 600 lines: but divided into several sections, and having within the sections a great variety of manners and measures of verse, including lyrics, humorous and satirical verse, translations from the French and the Russian etc." He suggested an autumn publication date for the book, although he was anxious to keep the manuscript for a little while "for final revision," but

asked if the other volume could be included in Blackwoods' spring list. That other book was *Penny Wheep*. Hugh MacDiarmid was ever reluctant to let a good title go: "A Kist of Whistles," which originally was a series of poems in *Scottish Chapbook*, later appeared as the title of a collection in 1947.

One can only marvel at Blackwoods' speed of execution: though the manuscript of *Penny Wheep* was not sent to them till 3 March 1926, the book appeared on 16 June. On 9 July MacDiarmid was apologizing for not having supplied the manuscript of *A Drunk Man*, "...but I am very conscious, if I may say so without immodesty, that this is or has all the makings of being one of the biggest things in the whole range of Scottish literature and I am determined not to let it out of my hands until I am absolutely certain that I can make no more of it." MacDiarmid was not usually so afraid of immodesty and he was indeed engaged in one of the most heroic creative struggles of his life. After many anxious apologies and promises he sent the manuscript (now prodigiously grown to more than 2,500 lines) by registered post on 28 August. Since, by the poet's own account, Francis George Scott "...was not long in seizing on the essentials and urging the ruthless discarding of the unessentials,"³³ which amounted to "at least a third more"³⁴ than the poem's published size, one wonders just how much MacDiarmid wrote in total in those six or seven epic months.

From then on the picture becomes less clear. It is clouded by the shadowy existence of collections proposed but never published, and in some cases work that was never completed at all. But this was not new. In Greece during the Great War Grieve had planned two very full series of essays--Scots Art Essays and Scots Church Essays. One or two, such as "Neo-Catholicism's Debt to Sir Walter Scott," were actually said to be completed.³⁵ Eighteen months later he had "committed to paper in rough draft...two one act plays, some seventy poems, and the first volume of a trilogy of autobiographical novels..."³⁶ which apparently ran to more than 200,000 words. So it was to be for much of his life: books are planned then seem to disappear without trace. No doubt, as with large sections of *Lucky Poet*, manuscripts often did exist which failed to achieve publication, but it is also possible that C.M. Grieve, good and professional journalist that he was, really needed the promise of publication and the spur of an editor's deadline actually to get the teeming creations of his mind coherently on to paper. There are hints of how that tremendous mind did work:

In saying...that all my plans for the future are cut and dried I should have qualified myself. What I meant is

that my life-work is really done--that various books exist complete and unchangeable in my mind--what remains is only to do the actual writing.³⁷

and, when a rare quarrel threatened between George Ogilvie and Grieve, there came the petulant "I need not write. I can dream my books and enjoy them in my head."³⁸ Considering that perfectly ordinary people often enough can write their letters in this way, without ever getting down to the physical business of paper and ink, this was probably no more than the truth.

Most of all we must regret the almost total loss of those seventy poems. Some presumably were included in "...the little collection 'A Voice from Macedonia'" which Grieve offered Erskine MacDonald³⁹ and which may have been identical with the "Salonika Poems" later to be offered to Messrs. Lane.⁴⁰ Of the poems intended for this collection only two may have survived: "La Belle Terre sans Merci" (p. 1197) and possibly "Beyond Exile." This latter poem was first published in *The Broughton Magazine* in the summer of 1919 and superscribed "Salonika 1917." Dated "Salonika 1916" it was reprinted in *Northern Numbers* First Series and again in *First Hymn to Lenin and Other Poems* (1931); it is in this latter context that it has reached the *Complete Poems* (p. 305). The bibliographer's lot is a hard one.

Another sequence of poems of which only two remain was the "set of verses" Grieve wrote on a walking holiday in the Basque country of the Pyrenees.⁴¹ These are, or may be, "Mountain Measure" and "To a French Girl Friend" (pp. 1201 and 1202). And what of his earlier sequence, "quite a body (some thirty poems in all) of anti-English verse, not dissimilar to certain products of Irish revival"?⁴² This appears--though discoveries may yet be made--to have disappeared without trace. Duncan Glen, it is true, believes that some lines in "Alliance" (p. 1200) suggest that Grieve was already a Scottish Nationalist before his demobilization,⁴³ but the poem, which was "written on the Mediterranean," is hardly an anti-English one, much more a simple poem of homesickness.

If the loss of more than a hundred poems written by C.M. Grieve earlier than almost all the work in these *Complete Poems* is a melancholy possibility, the probability that there are poems by Hugh MacDiarmid which have never yet been found is more serious. On 30 January 1928 the poet told George Ogilvie that *To Circumjack Cencrastus* was shaping all right, but he was busy also with other poetry:

I am simultaneously working away at several volumes of lyrics--"Dimidium Anima Mea" [sic] (love lyrics), "Maidenkirk to John o' Groats" (purely objective lyrics--like "Country Life"...) and "Songs for Christine"--on the model of "Hungry Waters."

I have also been writing a number of lyrics in English.

The "Songs for Christine" must have been started almost two years before, since two of them appeared in *Penny Wheep* (pp. 70 and 71 of the *Complete Poems*) and are fine enough lyrics to make us regret very much the loss of what others there may have been. "Dimidium Anima Meae" was the proposed title of Book III of the unfinished, autobiographical poem, "Clann Albann" (of which I shall have more to say), while "Maidenkirk to John o' Groats" was a phrase associated with Book II of that projected work:

The second book, "Fier Comme Un Ecosais," is concerned with my widening knowledge of Scotland and its history and literature...It covers the whole country from Maiden-kirk to John o' Groats...⁴⁴

Once the twentieth century Blackwood archive became available to readers in the National Library of Scotland, it was possible to trace exactly what books, of prose as well as poetry, Hugh MacDiarmid offered his publisher between 1925 and 1932. On 25 November 1926 he had "begun to put together in final form...a volume of biographical and critical studies." The book, to be called *At the Sign of the Thistle*, would not have been the book of the same name, published by Stanley Nott in 1934; MacDiarmid's thriftiness with titles can mislead. Also in November 1926 he had a novel in preparation but could not say when he would be in a position to complete it. Blackwoods were interested in this news and interested too six months later to hear that he had almost ready a collection of short stories.⁴⁵ However, they rejected that book, called *The Muckle Toon* (a title to be given later to Book I of "Clann Albann"), which almost certainly contained some of the stories in Scots which were appearing in newspapers and magazines in 1927 and '28, of which four at least were eventually collected in *The Uncanny Scot*⁴⁶ (a name once intended for Book IV of Clann Albann). MacDiarmid's immediate response (and it was typical of the fighting spirit which sustained him through all the pain and difficulty of his life) was to suggest an anthology of "The Hundred Best Scots Poems."⁴⁷

By 7 February 1929 he was planning a compilation called "Towards a Scottish Renaissance 1919-29." Of much greater

interest, however, is the book forwarded to Blackwoods in August of that year. He was still working on *To Circumjack Cencrastus*, but meanwhile:

I enclose herewith for favour of your kind consideration MSS for a new volume of poems entitled "Fier Comme Un Ecosais." As you will see, it consists of some 36 poems, mainly short, like those in "Sangschaw" and "Penny Wheep": and one long poem not dissimilar in technique to "The Drunk Man."⁴⁸

It is tempting--but probably rash--to conclude that these poems, or some of them, were already written as part of the "Maidenkirk to John o' Groats" sequence in January 1928.

Blackwoods' rejection of the book as being "too slight to make a volume"⁴⁹ seems to have been one of the bitterest disappointments MacDiarmid had yet suffered. Advised to wait till he had a larger collection of work to draw on, he replied: "From this I have ventured to hope that you meant that you would be prepared to consider other work from me, and that I need not conclude that my connection with your firm, which I value so highly, is at an end."⁵⁰ Although *Cencrastus* was by then nearing completion, he suggested they might publish a selection of his poems, drawn from his previous books and from "Fier Comme Un Ecosais." Mr. Blackwood responded by return with the hope that *Cencrastus* "...might do to make up the next volume which we look forward to publishing for you with some of the other poems that we saw recently..."

Plainly the publishers had in mind a collection rather than a single long poem, and in a sense a collection is what they finally published on 29 October 1930. The reappearance of "A Moment in Eternity" is one example of *Cencrastus* as anthology--and therefore that poem is printed on both pages 3 and 276 of the *Complete Poems*, with very few differences besides the setting of the second version of the poem in italics, indicating, as with other lyrics within *Cencrastus*, the sound of another voice than that of the book's principal persona. It seems unlikely we will ever know if the twenty poems between pages 262 and 274 of the *Complete Poems* were once meant for "Fier Comme Un Ecosais"--and it would be the wildest of speculation to suggest that some of the "unessentials" which Francis George Scott had urged MacDiarmid to discard from *A Drunk Man* may have found their way into *Cencrastus*.

It was Scott who, having once rendered the kind of friendly service that Ezra Pound gave to T.S. Eliot (service which MacDiarmid was always glad to acknowledge), later was responsible for some confusing rumours. Not only did he claim to have

played a greater part in the construction of *A Drunk Man* than was at all probable, but when the letter to Maurice Lindsay in which he made these claims was displayed in an exhibition of the National Library of Scotland in 1980, students of MacDiarmid's work first became aware of another and quite unknown section of the letter. Scott had had a cry for help from Grieve "before the 'Cencrastus' MS was sent off to Blackwoods. Again I went through to Montrose," he declared--unaware it seems that no manuscript intended for that book reached Blackwoods till nine months after the Grieve family had left Montrose for good--"but he was very disappointed when the MS was returned to him. I know that for some months after this he was very unsettled and gladly went off to London...He pattered on with the 'Cencrastus' MS for a few months and it finally appeared in 1930, but Blackwoods dropped him I fancy after completing their contract..."⁵¹ I find it very difficult to make any sense out of this confused account. Though Blackwoods, when they published *A Drunk Man* in 1926, announced that a new book called *To Circumjack Cencrastus* was "in preparation," that can hardly be taken as a promise to publish a work they had not seen--certainly the indications are that MacDiarmid himself did not so interpret it--and his earlier contract with Blackwoods, which had been completed with the publication of *A Drunk Man*, was binding on himself not his publishers. Furthermore, there is no evidence at all to suggest that the manuscript of *Cencrastus* ever was returned to the poet. Surely what Scott is really describing is the rejection of "Fier Comme Un Ecossois," with its "one long poem not dissimilar in technique to 'The Drunk Man,'" at about the time Grieve moved to London; and the germ of truth which must be somewhere here (because I do not believe Scott ever had any deliberate intention to mislead) may be that this long poem had been discussed with Scott and eventually found its way into the completed *Cencrastus*, following Mr. Blackwood's own broad hint that this was a possibility.

But Blackwoods did in effect "drop" MacDiarmid--in that *Cencrastus* was the last of his books to appear on their lists. Throughout 1932 in particular there was correspondence between the poet and his publisher regarding future books, including a volume of essays to be called (of course) *At the Sign of the Thistle*. On 27 January 1932 he told Blackwoods "...I have now in hand a new volume of poems to be entitled 'Alone with the Alone.' This will consist for the main of a single long poem, prefaced by a prelude of some fifteen lyrics, the whole to be slightly smaller than 'A Drunk Man Looks at The Thistle.' The fifteen lyrics in question I have now got and could send for your consideration as soon as you care. The long poem I have

on the stocks but, if I can concentrate on it...I can complete before the end of February." He hoped this would be in time enough for Blackwoods to issue the book that spring and went on to explain: "I am sure that you will appreciate that just as in the case of 'The Lucky Bag' (Porpoise Press) the fact that I had 'The First Hymn to Lenin' published otherwise than by your firm was simply because I regarded it as an interim work instead of a substantive production and felt that your firm had already done so much for me that it was to our mutual advantage in regard to minor works to divide the responsibility to some extent." But the proposed collection was more truly an interim work than *First Hymn to Lenin and Other Poems* (published in 1931 by the Unicorn Press, of which Grieve was briefly and unfortunately a director).

The long title poem "Alone with the Alone" seems not to have survived and may never have been written at all. The Prelude (called "The Hydra") was finally to have consisted of 32 short poems and we have precise information about 30 of them. In what was meant to be his "Author's Note" to the collection MacDiarmid wrote:

A few of the poems in the Prelude to this volume are recent work, but over twenty of them date back to 1920-22. It has seemed well to me to bring them together in this way, not only because they have not appeared in any of my previous volumes, but because, arranged in the order I have here given them, they seem to manifest in sequence or, sometimes, alternation some of the rather conflicting phases I passed through before arriving at the position I now hold and have sought to express in the substantive work that follows, or, in other words, to represent in a measure the aspects of experience and efforts towards expression I have abandoned (or, it may only be, suppressed) or ceased to value in the course of my development as a poet.

"Alone with the Alone" is an entirely new work.⁵²

In actual fact 23 of the Prelude poems dated from the early 1920s, though some of them had been first published as "late" as 1923 or '24. Of the remaining eight poems, four are now well known--including the long work "Second Hymn to Lenin" (p. 323 in the *Complete Poems*) and "By Wauchopeside" (p. 1083), a "Clann Albann" poem which presaged much. Among the remaining four poems, "The Mouse That Bit The Cat" was too good to be so long lost, with its grim final lines:

Man's destiny when it meets Creation's, fegs,
Is unco like the moose that bit the cat.

But, whatever its merits, Blackwoods turned down "Alone with the Alone" before seeing any of its contents; the book never did find a publisher and the collection may quite soon have been mislaid since it was ultimately purchased by the University of Delaware, in whose Library it remains, along with a number of other MacDiarmid poems and prose manuscripts dating from the same period. Several of these poems have been published (some of them in the First Hymn collection) but there are seven short poems which, so far as I can discover, never have been published yet. One, "The Heel Tap," opens: "Whisky has fallen on evil days"; but so had Hugh MacDiarmid. If the most embarrassing poem consists of a few unremarkable lines occasioned by the poet's divorce in 1932, and the funniest verses are those written "On Receiving a Copy of Gogarty's Splendid Poem on Leda, typed on paper most dubious in colour and texture, and suggestive in length," the worst poem here must surely be "The Hidden Scotland." Its rhyme scheme alone derives from the "Clann Albann" stanza and the "Clann Albann" mentioned in its closing lines may well be the political movement (which came to little) rather than the long poem of the same name. The verses, in fact, are disturbingly reminiscent of Laidlaw's "Scotland Calls."

Blackwoods, however, had seen none of this work and, in an economic climate not dissimilar to that in which publishers of the eighties struggle to survive, seem to have been unwilling to make any addition to their spring list; it appears to have been financial caution above all which prevented them from discovering that 1932, after some very difficult years, was to be a kind of *annus mirabilis* for Hugh MacDiarmid, whose "By Wauchopeside" (first printed in *The Modern Scot* for April 1932) marked a very significant new movement in his poetry. Just as "Fier Comme Un Ecosais" had been apparently intended as a stop-gap while he struggled with his conception of what *Cencrastus* might be, "Alone with the Alone" could have been a minor collection put together while MacDiarmid was turning to something quite new. Blackwoods were aware of this proposed new major work. Early in May 1931 C.M. Grieve had a talk with Mr. Blackwood in his office and told him of a new poem, "by far the biggest thing"⁵³ he had yet attempted. Almost certainly this was "Clann Albann," the opening section of which was published in *The Modern Scot* for July 1931. This section of the work (which begins on p. 1147 of the *Complete Poems*) is autobiographical in a fairly pedestrian way, and gives no hint of what the same memories of childhood, often enough couched

in the same stanza form, really could inspire in the poems intended for the first volume of "Clann Albann"--"The Muckle Toon."⁵⁴

Inspiration, however, can be neither measured nor examined. It has sometimes been hazarded that MacDiarmid's best poems (meaning the poems up to and including *A Drunk Man*) were inspired by his first wife. But, to the extent that one believes a woman can have that kind of effect on great literature, one surely has to acknowledge that his second wife too made a world for him in which he once wrote some of his very finest work. So far as "Clann Albann" is concerned, much of this writing is contained in *Scots Unbound and Other Poems* which, when it appeared in 1932 in a limited edition published by Eneas Mackay of Stirling, carried the note: "The poems in this volume, like those in my *First Hymn to Lenin and Other Poems* (Unicorn Press 1931) and *Second Hymn to Lenin* (Valda Trevlyn, Thakeham, 1932) are separable items from the first volume of my long poem 'Clann Albann' now in preparation."

But he first of all offered that book, *Scots Unbound*, to Blackwoods. On 16 July 1932 he told them (almost certainly he exaggerated): "...during the past year I have written very considerably more poetry than all my previous work put together...It is all part of a huge scheme which I am steadily working out but I am not yet in a position to seek publication even for the first volume of this although that already amounts to over 8,000 lines. I am anxious however to issue a small book containing the very best of the short separable items from this mass of writing this autumn and I should be extremely glad if you are prepared to consider publishing it." Recognizing that Blackwoods almost certainly would not have handled a book of which the title poem was a Hymn to Lenin, he assured them that "all these poems are free from political and other questionable matters." He promised to send the complete MSS as soon as Blackwoods indicated a desire to see them, and added as an afterthought cuttings of two of the poems intended for the book. Four days later, alas, the publishers replied: "We are sorry to have to say that we feel very doubtful about the small book which you have in view and which you wish published this autumn. We do not think we could make a success of the undertaking and under present very unsatisfactory trade conditions we are not able to embark on the venture. It is disappointing to us to have to come to this adverse decision after having taken up your previous books with which unfortunately we have not made the success we had hoped for by this time." Returning the specimen poems, Mr. Blackwood continued: "If we may say so, we feel that with the majority of readers they would be too difficult to follow, and that this would not

encourage the sale." It is possible that one of the poems was "Tarras," published in the *Free Man* for 25 June 1932 and on p. 337 of the *Complete Poems*, and certainly this is not the only poem of the collection which could be described by a reader used to verse in the Burnsian mode as "difficult to follow." In fact the poems represented a different way of handling language from anything in Mr. Blackwood's experience--a method already implicit in the lexical construction of "The Watergaw," an intense verbal delight which, in the books MacDiarmid had previously published, was most clearly foreshadowed in "Gairmscoile." However, I doubt if the real reason for the final breach between MacDiarmid and Blackwoods was linguistic, or even political. Though critics now agree that *A Drunk Man* is a great poem, while *Cenchrastus* was in many ways a disappointing successor,⁵⁵ from a publisher's viewpoint in the early thirties none of MacDiarmid's books was successful. He made virtually nothing from them, but even Blackwoods received a very modest return for their outlay: during 1926 they sold 106 copies of *Sangschaw*, 117 copies of *Penny Wheep* and did only slightly better with *A Drunk Man*, selling 99 copies in November and December of that year;⁵⁶ MacDiarmid retained his copyright, the books stayed quietly in print for decades, and all was as it should be with an old-established Scots publishing house which had lingered on from the nineteenth century to find its name associated with one of the twentieth century's greatest poets.

This is all very fine, looking back on the faded and courteous charm of 50 years ago. At the time the break was desperately hard on Hugh MacDiarmid who by then could find no job, and was living in very real poverty. For literature also it may be seen as tragic that Blackwoods lacked the money and the adventurous faith which would have let them give their backing to the "Clann Albann" scheme. For those poems of the *Scots Unbound* collection do represent the unbinding of a power and a beauty which until then were latent in MacDiarmid's work and, with the right encouragement, what might then have come? Though "Clann Albann" had originally been seen as "predominantly of a non-lyrical character...,"⁵⁷ the *Scots Unbound* collection includes the singing rhythms of "Water Music" (p. 333) and the poem which, MacDiarmid said, "...I regard as far and away my best short lyric,"⁵⁸ "Milk-Wort and Bog-Cotton" (p. 331), in the "Clann Albann" stanza but with somewhere behind it the pale English ghost of that sonnet form which the young Grieve had tried so hard to master.

Hugh MacDiarmid, in his "Author's Note" to these *Complete Poems* (p. vi), speaks of the once awaited long poem *Impavidi Progrediamur*: "the poem is still unpublished: I have simply

abandoned the whole project." Michael Grieve, Dr. Aitken tells us, "...had greatly hoped that it might be possible in these volumes to assemble in their proper order what his father might have called the *dissecta membra* of the long poem, *Impavidi Progrediamur*, which had been published only in fragments--but here again the poet's attitude was unequivocal... However, he did sanction the device of including in the Index of Titles an entry for *Impavidi Progrediamur* and of listing under that heading the titles of the more important poems that at one time or another he had attributed to that 'unpublished' poem."⁵⁹ But as to his other "unpublished" work, MacDiarmid's Note continued: "Other large-scale projects, such as 'Clann Albann'...and the complete 'Cornish Heroic Song for Valda Trevlyn' were either abandoned or subsumed in other works, and are not recorded here." That is a pity. I regret that the editors were unable to persuade the author to sanction also for the Index a listing of the poems once intended for "Clann Albann" (there would have been more of them, it seems, than is the case with *Impavidi Progrediamur*).

A principal reason for the poet's desertion of his "Clann Albann" scheme, apart from the difficulties with publication, was the complete break in his life which culminated in his departure with his new family for the island of Whalsay in Shetland. Associated with this move is the tenacious fiction that Hugh MacDiarmid gave up writing in Scots and turned to English. The *Complete Poems*, I hope, has disposed for ever of the myth that MacDiarmid abandoned the Scots language. Latterly, his worst poems were written in English (they always had been! English was the language of Laidlaw at his most irreverently careless); among the "Other Poems" of the full *Second Hymn* volume⁶⁰ there are some fairly depressing examples of the later MacDiarmid's determination to publish the very bad as well as the very good. But he continued to write (or at any rate to publish) work in Scots till well into old age, and a misleading impression was corrected when the Castle Wynd reprint (1956) of *Stony Limits and Scots Unbound and Other Poems* reinstated two poems which had been omitted by Gollancz, nervous of the obscenity laws, from the first edition (1934) of *Stony Limits and Other Poems*. They were the long "Ode to All Rebels" (p. 487) and the lovely "Harry Semen" (p. 483), both apparently written soon after MacDiarmid arrived in Whalsay in 1933, and both were in Scots. In fact the Shetland poems of Hugh MacDiarmid are more various than anything in his earlier work. They explore many modes, and two languages. But the more interesting truth is that, from 1933 on, and for the first time, some of MacDiarmid's best work was *not* written in Scots. As I have argued elsewhere,⁶¹ that verbal delight which had found a

lexical limit in "Water Music" was transferred now to "English" or a more cosmopolitan language.

When he was first in Scotland, Grieve wrote to Neil Gunn: "I cannot even yet move about with any confidence, or produce effective work, in this new world of my spirit. But I am gradually finding myself--a new self...I am rowing about on lonely waters; lying brooding on uninhabited islands..."⁶² A month later he told Gunn: "I...have now completed a body of new poetry...while the bulk of my work is up to my usual standard and similar in kind--or kinds...But it is that first category--which are new in kind and form--I am concerned about."⁶³ Several of the finest poems of that "first category," including the very famous "On a Raised Beach" (p. 422), are included with the poems of the *Stony Limits* collection and their language of course is also new.

A glance at the Index of the *Complete Poems* will show MacDiarmid's major collections after 1935 and will inevitably mislead. The very great difficulty he found in achieving publication in the late thirties, and during and after the Second World War, has given rather a false impression of the date at which his "later poems" were written--or at least begun.

Though *A Kist of Whistles* was not published till 1947 the title and one or two of the poems belonged to the twenties, and some of the other poems had been written more than ten years before they were collected. "Off the Coast of Fiedeland" (p. 723) is said to have been written aboard the *Valkyrie* in June 1936 and the days and nights at the Herring Fishing which it describes cannot have taken place much later because the *Valkyrie* was broken after that season, and the very last of the Shetland sail drifters, the *Gracie Brown*, sailed just one more year.⁶⁴ "The Divided Bird" contains (on p. 716) the line:

Yet the bird is no more most itself
In fleeting moments we seize than a man is of course.

Which, despite the inherent and not untypical contradiction, seems to relate to:

Birds are most themselves
In fleeting moments like men.
How can language seize the life of a bird

in the manuscript version of "On a Raised Beach,"⁶⁵ written in 1933.

As for *In Memoriam James Joyce*, not only its publication

date in 1955 but the date of James Joyce's death would seem to put the conception of that book into the Second World War or later. It comes as something of a shock to find that the work was planned and probably well begun while Joyce was still alive. As early as 23 February 1936 MacDiarmid (as C.M. Grieve) wrote to John Purves, Reader in Italian in the University of Edinburgh: "You would gather of course that what interests a synthetic Scots poet is what Vossler calls Folengo's 'improvisation of his own "gibberish" out of Latin, Italian, and Mantuan,' and you may be interested to know that I have written what I consider one of my best poems surveying the whole field, Occidental and Oriental, of linguistic experimentation and interaction--an *In Memoriam Teofilo Folengo* running to three or four hundred multilinguistic lines." That was a promise well kept: the poem did recognizably appear, much increased in length and retitled.

Lucky Poet, published in 1943, was ready in 1939, and it is well known that two large sections were deleted from the book because of the war-time restrictions on paper. What may not be realized is the very large body of poetry which that book (usually regarded as one of MacDiarmid's more monumental achievements in prose) actually contained; at first glance it accounts for no less than 65 pages of the *Complete Poems*; and considerably more in fact, since the two latter "Direadh" poems are not included in the *Lucky Poet* section (they appear instead at pp. 1174-1193); nor are those passages which belong now to *In Memoriam James Joyce*; nor those sections of *The Kind of Poetry I Want* which were printed in the book of that title when it appeared in 1961.

I believe somebody made an error of judgment in avoiding repetition here. What appears as "Further Passages from 'The Kind of Poetry I Want'" (rather confusingly since we have to turn to the second volume of the *Complete Poems* to find the poem proper) seems a worse and a slighter piece of writing than it ought to. It is true that MacDiarmid explains in his "Author's Note": "...a poem may not be printed here in its original context if it appears elsewhere in a different setting" (p. v). Nevertheless there are a number of occasions where repetition does, quite inevitably, occur. For example, "To Those of My Old School who fell in the Second World War" (p. 1119) concludes with lines which had almost identically appeared on pp. 979-80, in *The Battle Continues*. The "Three Poems for Austin Clarke" in 1966 pay him the great tribute of repeating some of the finest lines from *Cenocrastus*--a poem indebted to Irish scholarship--but only the first and third are shown in the Index as having a double entry, because the second was a Scots poem now appearing in English. But how can I

hope to chronicle all this? I mention only a few examples of editorial difficulties to show what Mr. Grieve and Dr. Aitken had to contend with. MacDiarmid, who never had any need to exaggerate, spoke truly enough when he wrote to Dr. Aitken, "I know I am a bibliographer's nightmare."⁶⁶

Since the groundwork for much of the later poetry was prepared by the early years of the Second World War--and in fact a large proportion of MacDiarmid's total work (I speak only of poetry) was written in just 20 of his 86 years--one must ask what he might have achieved had the disruption of war-work in Glasgow not occurred, nor the distraction of searching for a permanent home through the 1940s and beyond.

But these *Complete Poems* are confined to published work only, and all that may be said of his later work must be to some extent provisional. When Hugh MacDiarmid "abandoned the whole project" of *Impavidi Progrediamur* (at one time re-named "Haud Forrit") did he leave manuscripts which have yet to be published? And what of the other two long and unpublished poems we were promised, "Mature Art" and the "Cornish Heroic Song for Valda Trevlyn"? The latter was, with "Clann Albann," one of the "large-scale projects" which were "either abandoned or subsumed in other works." Yet it was once said to be "an immensely-long as-yet-unpublished poem" of some 60,000 lines.⁶⁷

When *In Memoriam James Joyce* was finally published, it came "From a Vision Of World Language," whereas it had earlier been regarded as the first volume of "Mature Art." In February 1938 "Good-Bye Twilight," which appears on p. 1124 of the *Complete Poems* and seems to belong to no particular larger work, was "part of a very long poem--about double 'Cencrastus' --I'm just having typed out to send to Eliot." Three months later MacDiarmid reported: "...I have at last completed and sent off an enormous poem--over 10,000 lines (i.e. thrice the size of Cencrastus) and, including preface, notes, etc., amounting to over 100,000 words." Another two months and "Eliot found 'Mature Art' 'very interesting and individual and indeed a very remarkable work' which 'undoubtedly ought to be published'--but came to the conclusion that it was outside the scope of his firm..."⁶⁸ By March 1940, "Mature Art" was advertised as being 20,000 lines long,⁶⁹ i.e. more than three times the length of *In Memoriam*, its first volume.

Mr. Grieve and Dr. Aitken clear up one unanswered question when they firmly state that *The Kind of Poetry I Want* was volume two of that "huge poem" which, whatever its title, must represent for us the mature art of Hugh MacDiarmid, and that *Impavidi Progrediamur* was meant to have been volume three.⁷⁰ In the last years of MacDiarmid's life his admirers were very curious indeed to see this completed work which had grown, in

the public imagination at least, to heroic proportions. The *Complete Poems*, naturally enough, gives us nothing that had not been previously published. But it comes as something of a surprise to find only sixteen poems listed in the Index as intended for the unpublished poem--and most of these had previously appeared in one or other of MacDiarmid's books and are therefore well known. Can this be all? Probably not; but, even in his published work gathered in these two volumes, there are tantalizing glimpses of the underlying shape of MacDiarmid's last poem.

"Once in a Cornish Garden," which is listed with the *Impavidi Progrediamur* poems, and which first appeared in 1951,⁷¹ dedicated "For Valda" as if it were part of the "Cornish Heroic Song," ends (on p. 1109 of the *Complete Poems*) with the lines:

Clear thought is the quintessence of human life.
 In the end its acid power will disintegrate
 All the force and flummery of current passions and pretences,
 Eat the life out of every false loyalty and craven creed,
 And bite its way through to a world of light and truth.

But those are the lines which, two years earlier,⁷² had appeared as the first stanza of "The Terrible Crystal," reproduced on p. 1094 of the *Complete Poems*. It would seem reasonable to infer that there was at some time one long poem which proceeded through "Once in a Cornish Garden" and straight into "The Terrible Crystal"--reasonable except that "The Terrible Crystal" is *not* listed as an *Impavidi Progrediamur* poem, and the inclusion of "Once in a Cornish Garden" in that list seems to be based on the 1962 so-called *Collected Poems*, whose extract from "Once in a Cornish Garden" however was comparatively brief and stopped well short of the lines quoted above. The poem was printed in its present length and form five years later in *A Lap of Honour*, but in that collection it was not, nor was "The Terrible Crystal," allotted any place in any final scheme of work.

The *Collected Poems*⁷³ in fact, which might have been expected to help, was responsible for much of the confusion. A selection not a collection and deliberately pruned by the publishers, it gives parts only of many of MacDiarmid's longer poems. The selection from *Lucky Poet* includes "Direadh III"; but under *Impavidi Progrediamur* (which is shown in the Table of Contents as if it were a published book like any other) we find "Scotland Small"? This short poem (which was also in *Lucky Poet*) is part of "Direadh I," which of course was earli-

er attributed to the "Cornish Heroic Song for Valda Trevlyn."⁷⁴ Kenneth Buthlay long ago pointed out this contradiction,⁷⁵ which has now been partly resolved in perhaps the only possible compromise: the lines are restored to "Direadh I" but there is a separate reference in the Index, under *Impavidi Progrediamur*, for this short extract which appears on p. 1170 of the *Complete Poems*.

After all, there is nothing unusual in a verse or complete poem appearing in one of MacDiarmid's books, and then turning up again years later in quite a different work. The inclusion of "A Moment in Eternity" in *To Circumjack Cencrastus* is rather a famous case in point. Then, from *Stony Limits and Other Poems*, the 18-line section II of "In the Caledonian Forest" on p. 392 of the *Complete Poems* reappears with slightly altered punctuation and a welcome improvement in grammar on p. 758 as part of *In Memoriam James Joyce*. It is instructive to consider how far the change of context alters our perception of a poem.

In justification of all this there is really no need to invoke (though of course MacDiarmid did) the patterning and repetition of *motifs* in Celtic art, nor did Francis George Scott need to urge him (though he once did) to turn from "lyrical things" to an epic seriousness; to the "monumental--sculptural and scriptural."⁷⁶ The fact is that this was more and more the way that MacDiarmid came to write, and where it succeeds his method needs no justification. Painstakingly he built up a whole edifice, a corpus of poetry in which some details might be discarded, others used again and yet again. He quoted, often without acknowledgement, from other writers; he is even more interesting when he quotes himself.

Hugh Kenner said of Yeats: "he was an architect, not a decorator; he didn't accumulate poems, he wrote books."⁷⁷ Hugh MacDiarmid, especially the older, post-1935 MacDiarmid, wrote not individual books but a life's work, and it is entirely suitable that the margins of his unpublished, and even his published volumes should remain blurred, one book shading into another, as in *In Memoriam* he frequently postulates the kind of poetry he wants--which is the governing theme of the volume that apparently succeeds this book.

The *Collected Poems* was followed by selections with the ingenious titles of *A Lap of Honour* (1967) and *A Clyack Sheaf* (1969), containing poems which had been excluded from or only partially included in the *Collected Poems*. *A Lap of Honour* gave us some very fine work indeed but *A Clyack Sheaf* was a slighter volume; the one poem of major significance collected there being "Direadh II," rather confusingly retitled "In Berkshire Again." In this latter book MacDiarmid explained

that "A Clyack Sheaf, or Maiden, is the last handful of wheat cut down by the reapers on a farm..." He had called the book "...a Clyack Sheaf--not *The Clyack Sheaf*--simply because there are other fields of my poet's farm not yet harvested, the present yield being for the most part gleaned from the same acres as my *Collected Poems*."⁷⁸ The straw was not ready for burning on those stubble acres till the following year when the same publisher (MacGibbon & Kee of London) brought out *More Collected Poems*--an appalling edition. There seems to have been an attempt made to include there all that was worthwhile in *Cenrastus* and *In Memoriam* which had been omitted from the *Collected Poems*. This in itself meant that the sequence of poems must be distorted as compared with their original publication; with *Cenrastus* however the order is much more seriously altered than it need have been and while MacDiarmid's work may lend itself to creative re-arrangement (especially by himself) what scholars needed, God help them, was an accurate text. One of my most vivid memories of the old chaotic days before the Grieve/Aitken edition is of bringing the Cambridge University Library copy of *Cenrastus* to my own copies of the *Collected Poems* and *More Collected Poems* and trying to chart through them the mazy meanderings of the snake.

All four of these collections or selections, like the Penguin *Selected Poems*⁷⁹ and the *Hugh MacDiarmid Anthology*⁸⁰ which are straightforward selections and respectable of their kind, contained poems not previously collected between a book's covers and therefore all are permanently recorded among the Contents of the *Complete Poems*.

Is this two-volume work really *complete*, then? Of course not. What major poet could (or would) oversee in his lifetime the editing of a book that could truly be said to hold his complete work? The awe-inspiring, God's-eye view title was forced on MacDiarmid, his son and his bibliographer by the botched editions which had gone before. What else could they possibly have called the books--"The Real Collected Poems"? Yet this publication actually is the real Collected Poems for which we had been waiting so long. The limits of this definitive collection are clearly enough marked. It contains hitherto uncollected poems but not unpublished work--so therefore not the University of Delaware poems, nor the manuscript poems from Edinburgh University Library;⁸¹ it contains only work published since 1920 (though a few poems may have been written earlier), and therefore not "Memories of Langholm"--and in fact contains no pseudonymous work at all but only poetry by Hugh MacDiarmid and his douce *alter ego* C.M. Grieve, so therefore neither "The Yellow Bride" nor any other of "Laidlaw's" (unredeemed) productions finds a place here.

What yet may come is a matter for us to speculate on and possibly for future generations to enjoy. Manuscript work obviously exists: in libraries, with collectors, and possibly in private hands. My own feeling--remembering those lost early works and that huge three-decker novel--is that no poems or sections of poems many thousand lines in length are going to be uncovered, but I would be delighted to be proved wrong. As for published work--inevitably the editors will have missed some few pieces by Grieve or MacDiarmid, and no doubt researchers are working even now to collect the work of the irrepressible Alister Laidlaw, who would richly have enjoyed the joke. Slim volumes there may be to come (and annotated editions of individual books with fuller glossaries provided than MacDiarmid wanted here), but not in our lifetime another *Complete Poems*. The work is only begun, and the line of MacDiarmid's bibliographers stretches down the years of the future, but William Aitken stands at their head. What we look for now is his scholarly and bibliographical companion to the *Complete Poems*.

Professor Ann Boutelle recently commented that MacDiarmid's "...determination to let nothing perish in obscurity must have felt happily at home in the *Complete Poems* project."⁸² But that is precisely the point of a *Complete Poems*, or real *Collected Poems*, whether of Hugh MacDiarmid or any other poet worth the effort. The reader who wants only a selection of the best will find it in the *Hugh MacDiarmid Anthology* or another selection. Nobody who really cares about a great poet of our century will be thus satisfied.

And from the *Complete Poems* even those of us who thought we knew our MacDiarmid have learned more. Long ago Christopher Grieve told George Ogilvie that John Bogue Nisbet, a young poet and school friend killed in the Great War, "...must not go undedicate--I have the very poem (for poem it must be without saying)."⁸³ I was once rash enough to say he wrote no poem for Nisbet; but of course he did, not a great poem, but here is miraculously is on p. 1231, an imperfect sonnet with a most desolate closing line: "And Life's a wind that 'twixt your bones blows cold." Nisbet at the last is not undedicate,⁸⁴ and the record of MacDiarmid's own life's work, the one record he truly cared about, is here, carefully gathered by his son and his friend.

In Scotland an alarming rumour has gained currency. In the United States of America, the story goes, MacDiarmid's *Complete Poems* is difficult to come by, and the old *Collected Poems* is still in vogue. This will not do. Every serious student of MacDiarmid's work must, by whatever means, acquire his copy of the Grieve/Aitken edition. Having done so, he

should pray for the matchless and most valiant soul of Hugh MacDiarmid, and thank God for Dr. Aitken.

Edinburgh

NOTES

¹Hugh MacDiarmid *Complete Poems 1920-1976*, ed. Michael Grieve & W.R. Aitken, 2 vols. (London, 1978).

²It finally proved impossible to attract Scottish Arts Council funding if the books were not printed in Scotland or some other country of the United Kingdom.

³Except where otherwise stated, all MacDiarmid's letters quoted in this essay are the property of the National Library of Scotland or else are held on deposit there. My sincere thanks should be recorded to the Librarian and to, especially, his colleagues Mr. Stanley Simpson and Mr. Alan Bell in the Manuscript Department. I also make grateful acknowledgment to the University Libraries of Delaware and Edinburgh, and to William Blackwood & Sons, Printers and Publishers. Above all, however, I have to thank Mrs. Valda Trevlyn Grieve for permission to use letters and other copyright material.

⁴Quoted in Dr. Aitken's speech at the Café Royal, Edinburgh, 7 December 1978, when the Grieve/Aitken edition was "launched"; and printed in Dr. Aitken's article "On Editing the Complete Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid" in *Aquarius* No. 11 (1979), pp. 11-3.

⁵Café Royal and *Aquarius*, pp. 12-3.

⁶See Kenneth Buthlay's treatment of this poem in "Shibboleths of the Scots," *Akros*, 12 (August 1977), p. 33.

⁷Café Royal and *Aquarius*, p. 13.

⁸For the text of this three stanza poem see my brief tribute "In Memoriam Alister K. Laidlaw," in *Lines*, 67 (December 1978).

⁹*Vox*, 1 (1 February 1930), p. 430.

¹⁰In private hands.

- ¹¹*Edinburgh Evening News*, 13 January 1922.
- ¹²Published in "From Our Turret Window" in the *Edinburgh Evening News*, 16 January 1922.
- ¹³*Ibid.*, 12 January 1922.
- ¹⁴*Ibid.*, 30 January 1922.
- ¹⁵From "Killing No Murder," in *Second Hymn to Lenin and Other Poems*, in *Complete Poems*, p. 536.
- ¹⁶Letter, 1964, to George Bruce (B.B.C. Scotland), item 183 in *Hugh MacDiarmid* (Edinburgh, 1967), National Library of Scotland Cat. No. 7.
- ¹⁷Introduction to Gordon Wright, *MacDiarmid: An Illustrated Biography* (Edinburgh, 1977), p. 15.
- ¹⁸See MacDiarmid's letters to George Ogilvie, National Library of Scotland.
- ¹⁹Duncan Glen, *Hugh MacDiarmid and the Scottish Renaissance* (Edinburgh, 1964), p. 73.
- ²⁰Oxford University Press, 1915.
- ²¹"The Appreciation of the Golden Lyric: Early Scots Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid" in *Scottish Literary Journal*, 2 (July 1975), p. 54.
- ²²*Scottish Marxist*, No. 10 (Winter 1975), quoted in Edwin Morgan, *Hugh MacDiarmid*, The British Council (Harlow, 1976), p. 7.
- ²³*Edinburgh Evening News*, 1 September 1921.
- ²⁴Letter to George Ogilvie, 29 December 1921.
- ²⁵*Dunfermline Press*, 25 November 1921.
- ²⁶*Hugh MacDiarmid* (Edinburgh, 1982), p. 13.
- ²⁷Letter to Blackwoods, 14 August 1925.
- ²⁸*Scottish Chapbook*, 1 (October 1922), p. 62.

- ²⁹Letter to John Laidlaw, 24 January 1923, in private hands.
- ³⁰*Scottish Chapbook*, 1 (January 1923), p. 155.
- ³¹"Hugh MacDiarmid," *Glasgow Herald*, 4 April 1925.
- ³²*Scottish Literary Journal*, 2 (July 1975), p. 42.
- ³³*Francis George Scott* (Edinburgh, 1955), p. 24.
- ³⁴Letter to George Ogilvie, 9 December 1926.
- ³⁵*Ibid.*, 20 August 1916.
- ³⁶*Ibid.*, 4 December 1917.
- ³⁷*Ibid.*, 24 November 1918.
- ³⁸*Ibid.*, 2 November 1920.
- ³⁹*Ibid.*, 28 April 1918.
- ⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 23 March 1919.
- ⁴¹*Ibid.*, 12 June 1919.
- ⁴²*Ibid.*, 20 August 1916.
- ⁴³*Hugh MacDiarmid and the Scottish Renaissance*, p. 72.
- ⁴⁴"Clann Albann: An Explanation," *Scots Observer*, 7 (12 August 1933), p. 10.
- ⁴⁵Letter of 19 April 1927.
- ⁴⁶Ed. Kenneth Buthlay (London, 1968).
- ⁴⁷Letter of 20 July 1927.
- ⁴⁸Letter of 16 August 1929.
- ⁴⁹Blackwoods' letter of 7 April 1930.
- ⁵⁰Letter of 5 April 1930.
- ⁵¹The letter was dated 20 May 1945, but this may be an error since, when it was quoted in Maurice Lindsay's *Francis*

George Scott and the Scottish Renaissance (Edinburgh, 1980 pp. 55-6), he said he had received it in 1946.

⁵²MS dated London 1932, in the University of Delaware Library.

⁵³Letter to Blackwoods of 15 May 1931.

⁵⁴For a full explanation of the proposed poem, see MacDiarmid's own account in the *Scots Observer*, 12 August 1933.

⁵⁵See especially Kenneth Buthlay's "The Scotched Snake," in *The Age of MacDiarmid*, ed. P.H. Scott & A.C. Davis (Edinburgh, 1980), pp. 122-56.

⁵⁶Blackwoods' letter of 9 February 1927.

⁵⁷Author's note in *First Hymn to Lenin and Other Poems* (London, 1931), p. 7.

⁵⁸In *Voice of Scotland*, 7 (April 1956), p. 24.

⁵⁹Café Royal and *Aquarius*, p. 13.

⁶⁰London, 1935.

⁶¹See "MacDiarmid's Other Dictionary," in *Lines*, 66 (September 1978), pp. 5-14.

⁶²Letter of 19 May 1933.

⁶³Letter of 22 June 1933.

⁶⁴See Ruth McQuillan and Agnes Shearer, *In Line With The Ramna Stacks* (Edinburgh, 1980).

⁶⁵In Edinburgh University Library; there is evidence that this was written slightly earlier than the printed version of the poem--published in *Stony Limits*.

⁶⁶Quoted in W.R. Aitken's "A Hugh MacDiarmid Bibliography," *Hugh MacDiarmid, A Critical Survey*, ed. Duncan Glen (Edinburgh, 1972), p. 228. This bibliography is updated by the same hand in *Akros*, 12 (August 1977), pp. 111-14.

⁶⁷*Direadh* (Dunfermline, 1938) and *Voice of Scotland*, 1 (December 1938-February 1939), p. 4.

⁶⁸Letters to Neil Gunn of 21 February, 9 May and 6 July 1938.

⁶⁹Kenneth Buthlay, *Hugh MacDiarmid* (Edinburgh, 1964), p. 97.

⁷⁰*Complete Poems*, p. 1462.

⁷¹*Botteghe Oscure*, Quaderno VIII (Rome, 1951), pp. 192-9.

⁷²*Poetry Review*, 40 (February-March 1949), p. 15.

⁷³New York, 1962; there was an Edinburgh edition also in 1962 and a slightly revised edition from New York in 1967.

⁷⁴*Direadh* (Dunfermline, 1938); rptd. from *Voice of Scotland*, 1 (December 1938-February 1939), pp. 13-21.

⁷⁵*Hugh MacDiarmid* (Edinburgh, 1964), p. 99.

⁷⁶Letter of Francis George Scott, 9 July 1933, in Edinburgh University Library.

⁷⁷"The Sacred Book of the Arts" in *Gnomon: Essays on Contemporary Literature* (New York, 1958); rptd. in *Twentieth Century Poetry*, eds. G. Martin and P.N. Furbank (Milton Keynes, 1975), p. 339.

⁷⁸*A Clyack Sheaf*, p. 7.

⁷⁹Edited and selected by David Craig and John Manson (Harmondsworth, 1970).

⁸⁰Edited by Michael Grieve and Alexander Scott (London, 1972).

⁸¹For example, there is the Scots poem, "The Fall of France, 25 June 1940."

⁸²Ann Edwards Boutelle, *Thistle and Rose* (Edinburgh, 1980), p. 231.

⁸³Letter to George Ogilvie, 20 August 1916.

⁸⁴Puzzled English-speaking readers may be assured that "dedicait" is the correct Scots form of English "dedicated."