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Margery Palmer McCulloch

“A very curious emptiness”:
Walter Scott and the Twentieth-Century
Scottish Renaissance Movement

Edwin Muir’s characterization in *Scott and Scotland* (1936) of “a very curious emptiness...behind the wealth of his [Scott’s] imagination”¹ and his related discussion of what he perceived as the post-Reformation and post-Union split between thought and feeling in Scottish writing have become fixed points in Scottish criticism despite attempts to dislodge them by those convinced of Muir’s wrong-headedness.² In this essay I want to take up more generally the question of twentieth-century interwar views of Walter Scott through a representative selection of writers of the period, including Muir, and to suggest possible reasons for what was often a negative and almost always a perplexed response to one of the giants of past Scottish literature.

As with Robert Burns, whom Muir yoked together with Scott as “sham bards of a sham nation” in his poem “Scotland 1941,”³ Walter Scott was the subject of a number of scholarship and biographical studies both in the inter-

¹Edwin Muir, *Scott and Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1982), p. 2.

²See, for example, Alan Massie’s Introduction to *Scott and Scotland* (1982), pp. v-xvi and Margery Palmer McCulloch’s “Interwar Criticism” in Cairns Craig ed., *The History of Scottish Literature*, 4 (Aberdeen, 1987), 126-9. Examples of views from his own time are included in Margery Palmer McCulloch, ed., *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland 1918-1939* (Glasgow, 2004), pp. 43-7. Henceforth *Modernism*.

³*Complete Poems of Edwin Muir*, ed. Peter Butter (Aberdeen, 1991), p. 100.

war period and in the years immediately prior to World War One. G. Gregory Smith's *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence*, which, read selectively, provided Hugh MacDiarmid with his "Caledonian Antisyzygy" theory of Scots letters, contains a substantial chapter on Scott.⁴ Smith's book was published in 1919, thus giving it the appearance of being part of the postwar movement to regenerate Scottish literary culture, but it began life in a different context as a series of lectures given in Glasgow in 1911 associated with an attempt to found a University Chair of Scottish Literature. For Gregory Smith, the nature of Scott's success is to some extent paradoxical. He comments that "much of Scott's influence flowed from his personality. He is rarely judged on purely literary grounds." However, despite this puzzlement which he shared with the later Scottish Renaissance writers, Smith's description of Scott's writing as a "tonic" and his emphasis that Scott "gave not only to English but to the world's literature the Historical Novel" (Smith, pp. 249, 261), show a positive commitment and understanding of Scott's influence which is strikingly absent from most interwar perceptions of Scott. Perhaps that phrase "gave not only to English" [my emphasis] holds the key to the difference between this pre-1914 and essentially North British response and that of the writers of the literary revival; even those who, like Muir, were not committed to a nationalist route to regeneration. In the post-World War One period, the identity of Scotland, its history, traditions and present condition had moved to the center of the ideological stage, and the political relationship with England and what was seen as the inhibiting influence of English culture were therefore under attack by the reformers. Inevitably, consideration of Scott's fiction and reputation was undertaken in the context of the move to restore Scotland's distinctive cultural and national status, something which ran counter to the prevailing perception of Scott's conservative politics and his support of the Union with England.

Perhaps surprisingly, Hugh MacDiarmid had little that was specific to say about Scott in the early years of the revival, unlike his repeated references to Burns in poetry and polemical writing. It may be that as someone who believed that poetry was *the* art form, the reading of fiction, including Scott's historical novels, was not among his priorities. An early consideration of Scott does take place in his editorial column "At the Sign of the Thistle" in the *Scottish Nation* of 22 May 1923, but this is conducted principally through a review of *The Influence of Walter Scott on the Novels of Theodor Fontane* by L. A. Shears of Connecticut. As so often in MacDiarmid's essays, his argument here is conducted through references from Shears' book and so contains little evaluation of his own. However, what is interesting in relation to the aims of the revival movement are the passages from Shears that MacDiarmid chooses to highlight and the interpretation he places on his account. He consider, for

⁴G. Gregory Smith, *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (London, 1919), pp. 3-5, 20, 248-75. Henceforth Smith.

example, that "Shears' book has quite unpredicated interests for Scottish readers today" in that it makes clear that "in spite of his enthusiasm for the variety of English life and his appreciation of the benefits to be obtained in London," Theodor Fontane's residence in the capital "left him far from a thorough-paced Anglophil." On the contrary, Fontane "notices and remarks upon the lack of *Gemütlichkeit* in English life.... The German," he [Fontane] observes, "lives in order to live, the Englishman in order to make a display. In Germany one lives happily when one lives comfortably (*behaftlich*); in England, when one is envied." In contrast, according to MacDiarmid's reading, is Fontane's response to Scotland: "Even in modern Scotland, Fontane felt himself immediately in a more congenial atmosphere than in England. As soon as he crossed the Tweed he was conscious of a welcome difference."⁵

In addition to these quotations and interpretations regarding Fontane, the references to Scott with which MacDiarmid chooses to end his review article emphasize that relationship with Europe which was an important part of the Scottish Renaissance movement's platform alongside its focus on purely Scottish affairs. He comments that Shears points out that "while it is the combination of romanticism, realism, and *Heimatkunst* that made Scott so popular in Germany, it is as the realistic portrayer of the customs and variegated types of his countrymen that the novelist had the most beneficent influence on serious writers" (*Raucle Tongue*, I, 82).

Unfortunately, the positive influence of Shears' study did not long remain with MacDiarmid. In his *Contemporary Scottish Studies*, published in 1926, we find him regarding the revival of interest in Scott equally as unacceptable as the Burns Cult, although not entirely on the same grounds. While Burns "belongs mainly to Scots Literature," he now sees Scott as belonging to a significant extent to the "central traditions of English literature" and his supporters as being "all either English or Anglo-Scottish litterateurs." And he continues: "The movement to reinstate Scott in critical esteem and popular regard must therefore be regarded as one designed to conserve and reinforce certain elements in English culture, while taking it for granted that Scotland and England have identical cultural interests." And this idea of common cultural interests ran counter to the beliefs of the infant revival movement, an opposition he takes care to emphasize:

At the moment when, belatedly, tendencies, however tentative to a Scottish Literary Revival, are manifesting themselves, it is peculiarly necessary to ensure that English literary traditions are not recouping themselves by means which are likely to pre-

⁵C. M. Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid), "Scott and Theodor Fontane," *The Scottish Nation*, 29 May 1923; reprinted in *Hugh MacDiarmid: The Raucle Tongue*, ed. Angus Calder, Glen Murray and Alan Riach, 3 vols. (Manchester, 1996), I, 80, 81. Henceforth *Raucle Tongue*.

vent the emergence of the diametrically opposed tendencies upon which the development of distinctively Scottish literature depends.⁶

By the early 1930s, MacDiarmid has gone over completely to the anti-Scott party, mocking the negative effects of both the "large-hearted humanitarianism of Burns" and the "broad-minded humanity of Sir Walter Scott" which have resulted in "Burns Clubs, Harry Lauderism, and the sniveling sentiments of men like Ramsay MacDonald; while the recent [Scott] centenary farce showed what wonderfully broad minds Scott's influence has propagated in our midst."⁷ In an article specifically on that Centenary, published in the *Free Man* in October 1932, he insisted:

No intelligent person can have witnessed the Edinburgh procession in connection with Scott's centenary without a sense of shame.... Such an antiquarian cortege was appropriate to Scott's fame and an adequate commentary on its true character. The defensive note in most of the Centenary speeches was significant. Even if, we were told, Scott is little read and found intolerably prolix, dull, and full of false romanticism, he was a great man even more than a great writer and, while his financial dealings are ingeniously excused in one way or another, we are asked to admire his debt-paying feat. But being thus conventionally honest entailed a dishonesty to something infinitely greater, and no writer of world-wide fame had less artistic integrity or more snobbish contempt for his craft than Scott.... He had no profound and progressive sense of his country.⁸

As Gregory Smith commented earlier, one notices that Scott is still being judged not by literary criteria but by factors external to his work. MacDiarmid's animus against Scott also seems based on his appropriation by English culture and by Anglo-Scots, with, perhaps, as with Burns, his Scots-speaking characters providing material for music-hall Scotsmen. In addition, Scott's high Toryism, his enjoyment of his position as Laird of Abbotsford and his intercourse with southern nobility were all antipathetic to the views of these predominantly socialist—in some cases Marxist—interwar writers.

Before returning to consider Edwin Muir's position in more detail, I want to look at the curious case of Donald Carswell's biography of Scott, a book which received much praise in its own time, but one which perplexes this present reader as much as its author finds Scott's situation perplexes him. Like many writers of the literary revival, the Carswells were socialist in their politics. Scott's Toryism would therefore not have attracted their sympathy. On

⁶Hugh MacDiarmid, "Conclusion II," *Contemporary Scottish Studies* (London, 1926), p. 317.

⁷"Dunbar and Burns" in *Raule Tongue*, II, 429.

⁸"The Scott Centenary," reprinted in *Modernism*, pp. 125-6.

the other hand, despite their friendship with MacDiarmid, Muir and others involved in the Scottish Renaissance movement, and despite their own contributions to Renaissance writing projects, the Carswells were, in the context of nationalist politics, North Britons as opposed to new nation makers. They were expatriates living by choice in Hampstead, and despite the status of Scottish Woman of Letters Catherine's *Life of Burns* gave her, both Carswells were ambivalent and ironic in their attitudes to Scotland and the movement to regain national autonomy, seeming content to be sophisticated Scots living in the United Kingdom metropolis as opposed to provincial Edinburgh or parochial Glasgow. This should have led to a certain affinity with Walter Scott's Unionist position, one would have thought. Yet, in its own peculiar way, Donald Carswell's *Sir Walter* is as contradictory a book as Muir's later *Scott and Scotland*.

Sir Walter: A Four-Part Study in Biography was published by John Murray in 1930, one of an increasing number of publications about Scottish affairs appearing from London publishers in the late 1920s and 1930s. John Buchan, whose own biography of Scott was to be published in 1932, wrote effusively to Carswell: "I need not tell you—for you know very well already—how good this thing of yours is. I have read it with the greatest admiration and delight. It is one of the freshest and most searching ever written on the subject." Then, after this opening congratulation, Buchan goes on to demonstrate where he himself differs from Carswell in his reading of Scott—as, for example, in approaching him with "more affection and a large lump of veneration" and challenging Carswell's charge of "lack of intellect."⁹

In the Preface to his book, Carswell claims Scott as a man of genius, but he simultaneously employs a condescending narrative idiom which subverts this claim: "never was a man of genius so ordinary and appealingly human, alike in his strength and his frailty, his simplicity and his tortuousness, the greatness of which he was barely conscious and the littleness that meant all the world to him."¹⁰ This narratorial subjectivity continues to color the account of Scott which follows. I use the word *narratorial* deliberately for this supposed biography, like his wife's *Life of Robert Burns* (also published in 1930), is novelistic in form, with an omniscient narrator who consistently employs an ironic narrative perspective. However, whereas Catherine Carswell's omniscient narrator employs her irony against Burns's society and especially against a late Enlightenment Edinburgh which treated the poet like "the Learned Pig that performed daily in the Lawnmarket" (as she characterizes the fêting of

⁹John Buchan, letter to Donald Carswell, 12 July 1929, National Library of Scotland Acc. 6571.

¹⁰Donald Carswell, *Sir Walter: A Four-Part Study in Biography* (London, 1930), p. v. Henceforth *Sir Walter*.

Burns in Edinburgh),¹¹ Donald Carswell's omniscient narrator directs his irony at the subject of the biography, with Scott and his immediate ancestors being introduced in the manner of Jane Austen's ironic scene-setting, although with a heavier touch. Here, for example, is Scott's father contemplating his family:

If Mr Scott as a man of sixty could have been induced to give a candid opinion on the business of bringing up a family, he would probably have replied that, like most things, it partook largely of vanity and vexation of spirit. Anne Rutherford had, more or less cheerfully, borne him twelve children of whom the first six died in infancy. The second six—five boys and a girl—were hardy enough to grow up, but they did not inspire their father with enthusiasm. They were certainly a plain-looking lot, though he could not complain of that: after all, he had not chosen Anne Rutherford for her looks and the Scotts had never been beauties.... On the whole Mr Scott got most comfort from the contemplation of his third son and namesake, Walter, who was at the Bar, wherein was great cause for satisfaction and gratitude to the Power which directs even our afflictions to our good, for Wattie was of so venturesome and restless a disposition that he would assuredly have gone for a soldier had not Providence ordained him to hobble about on a stick all the days of his life (*Sir Walter*, pp. 8-9).

Later, telling of that same Wattie's fascination with the Ballads of Gottfried Bürger and with "Monk" Lewis's gothic romances, the narrator points to his concurrent lack of interest in Robert Burns who was at the same time, we are told, "dying at Dumfries, working even on his deathbed at his beloved task of preserving and restoring his country's folk-songs, and steadfastly refusing payment, though pinched for money." The narrator continues:

Naturally, a socially ambitious young advocate would not seek the company of a crapulous Exciseman, with his shabby-genteel household, his peasant wife, his many bairns (not counting his bastards), who had disgraced himself among the local gentfolk and was capable of advertising in shameless verse his amour with a blowsy barmaid at the Globe tavern. Scott's instinct was sound. A dubious contact was avoided. It is unlikely that he would have been happy with Burns. It is certain that Burns would have detested him (*Sir Walter*, pp. 19-20).

No one comes well out of such an account—neither Scott, nor Burns, nor his "peasant wife," nor "blowsy barmaid," nor indeed the Hampstead author who seems, on the evidence here, to have a nasty psychological animus against all things Scottish, including the subject of his biography.

Donald Carswell's biography of Scott is short—165 pages out of a book of 286, with the remaining section given over to brief accounts of James Hogg, John Gibson Lockhart and Joanna Baillie, all of whose lives interacted with Scott's but as treated here shed no further light on the principal subject. The

¹¹Catherine Carswell, *The Life of Robert Burns* (Edinburgh, 1990), p. 184.

Scott section is very readable, in a superficial, conspiratorial way, but its fast pace allows no time for the development or substantiation of points by its author nor time for reflection on the part of its reader. Important events such as the publication of the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* just suddenly happen, without preparation or any showing why and how Scott came to make the collection.¹² And similarly with the novels which seem to have sprung ready-formed from Scott's mind on to the publisher's page. They have no context in the events of their time or in the preoccupations of their author as they are presented here. MacDiarmid praised Carswell's unraveling of Scott's tortuous business affairs in the book, but here too one is left with the puzzle of how such an apparently incompetent man could have achieved such an outstanding success. And once again there is no critical consideration of the quality of Scott's novels, nor of their nature as historical novels, a consideration which might have helped towards an understanding of why it is that Scott's reputation has survived so powerfully. Instead readers are left with this comment:

So died, in his sixty-second year, Walter Scott, the simplest, sincerest and greatest of all romantics.... But the romantic life is not a practical proposition...it is a contradiction in terms...Scott never understood that. He never really understood anything, for though he had solid reasoning powers, he had little insight (*Sir Walter*, pp. 160-61).

As with so many of these interwar responses to Scott, Donald Carswell's biography leaves one with the sense of something *hors texte*, with the sense that Scott's life is acting as a kind of leech which is drawing out the problems and insecurities of its twentieth-century author and his period.

In contrast to the above is John Buchan's *Sir Walter Scott* (1932) which offers a positive and knowledgeable account of Scott and his work. Buchan's biography provides the kind of contextual material that Carswell's so sorely lacks, positioning the reader in the transitional Scotland and Edinburgh of the late eighteenth century and anticipating in its introductory sections the philosophical positions where were to be central features of Scott's relationship with his country. We are told, for example, that "the Union of Parliaments in 1707 had been a blessing beyond doubt, but for a quarter of a century it had been a blessing well disguised." In 1771, the year of Walter Scott's birth, Scotland was still experiencing problems in its relationship with England, but confidence was growing and the country was at last beginning to move forward. The danger was that "in the process she was shutting the door upon her past": "There was a danger lest the land, setting out confidently on new paths,

¹²Walter Scott, *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, 2 vols. (Kelso, 1802); 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1803). Henceforth *Minstrelsy*.

might condemn as provincial and antiquated what was the very core and essence of her being.”¹³

Buchan’s introductory narrative establishes the context for the story that is to come; and he is similarly successful in his creation of the context of Scott’s childhood familiarity with Edinburgh and with the life of the Borders where he was sent to stay with his grandparents in the hope of improving a weak leg. The later publication of *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* is therefore understood to be rooted in Scott’s early and continuing love of the Borders; his gradual collection of ballads during his journeyings there and his employment of assistants such as John Leyden and James Hogg. Buchan comments that “the impulse which led to the *Minstrelsy* was historical and patriotic rather than poetic,” and he is aware that Scott’s methodology—his aim “to achieve a standard text”—was not that of future scholarly collectors. Yet his narrative shows how this early literary work was part of the essential character of the man and how it led to the novels that sprang from the same response to the condition of Scotland at that time. In his Introduction to the *Minstrelsy*, Scott states his hope that his efforts in relation to the collection “may contribute something to the history of my native country; the peculiar features of whose manners and character are daily melting and dissolving into those of her sister and ally”: a perspective echoed some years later in the Postscript to his first novel, *Waverley* (1814).¹⁴

It is interesting that Buchan himself had expressed very similar sentiments in the Introduction to his 1925 historical collection of Scottish poetry, *The Northern Muse*. Unlike MacDiarmid, Buchan would appear to have been pessimistic about the continuing contemporary literary potential of the Scots language, but he was anxious that readers should remain aware of the old tongue and be able to read the poetry and other literature it had inspired. He wrote:

Thirty years ago I learned in the Tweedside glens to talk a Scots, which was then the speech of a people secluded from the modern world; to-day if I spoke it at a Tweeddale clipping I should find only a few old men to understand me. Scots can survive only as a book-tongue, and it is to that purpose that I would bespeak the efforts of my countrymen. The knowledge of the book-tongue is still fairly common, and if, in the mill of a standardized education, it should ever be crushed out, we shall lose the power of appreciating not only the ‘makars’, but the best of the Bal-

¹³John Buchan, *Sir Walter Scott* (London, 1932), pp. 13, 16-7. Henceforth Buchan.

¹⁴Buchan, pp. 60, 65; Introduction to *Minstrelsy*, p. cxxxi, quoted by Buchan, p. 61; *Waverley* (London, 1976), p. 478..

lads, Burns, and Sir Walter Scott—that part of our literary heritage which is most intimately and triumphantly our own.¹⁵

Buchan was therefore in many ways an ideal biographer for Scott, sharing his belief that the political Union of Scotland and England was of benefit to Scotland, yet fiercely patriotic in his wish to preserve knowledge and understanding of Scotland's distinctive historical culture. He understood the complex, apparently contradictory impulses which motivated Scott; and although he could not approach Scott's achievement in his own fiction, he understood the nature of creativity and his book brings Scott's novels as well as the man himself to life. Unusually for this Scottish Renaissance period, he also understood the importance of Scott as a writer who influenced other writers, while at the same time acknowledging that, in Scott's case, the man and writer are inseparable. On the other hand, even if he was able to accept, as MacDiarmid and his associates could not, that Scott could be both a consenting North Briton and a patriotic Scotsman, he also understood that there was a price to be paid for the "secret world...of fancy and thought" he had created for himself:

His secret world made him a little insensitive to the anomalies of the real one. It killed in him, except at rare moments, the soul of the reformer. It was a domain where the soul turned in upon itself, and dreams did not result in action. Being mainly concerned with the past it was a static thing, and bred few ideals for the future (Buchan, pp. 358-9).

This is an assessment with which Scott's hostile interwar critics would certainly have found themselves in agreement.

The most antagonistic of these interwar critics was Edwin Muir, with his now infamous *Scott and Scotland*. Muir is, in my view, an outstanding example of a writer who projected his own insecurities on to his historical subject. By 1936, when *Scott and Scotland* was published in the *Voice of Scotland* series, Muir had already achieved a considerable reputation as a critic and, with his wife Willa, as a translator of Kafka and other German writers. In the 1930s he had also become increasingly involved in writing on Scottish affairs for the *Spectator* and other periodicals. Yet although he was a participant with MacDiarmid in the on-going literary revival, Muir was always uneasy about Scotland which, as an Orkneyman, he called his "second country."¹⁶ He was especially uneasy about the Scots language which he himself did not use as a literary or everyday language, and this language question increasingly made its way into his periodical writing of the early 1930s. Muir was also insecure in

¹⁵ John Buchan, Introduction, *The Northern Muse: An Anthology of Scots Vernacular Poetry* (London, 1925), p. xxvi.

¹⁶ Edwin Muir, "Nooks of Scotland," *The Listener* (10 January 1958), p. 120.

regard to his poetic development at this time. Although his *First Poems* had been published in 1925 by Virginia and Leonard Woolf at the Hogarth Press and he had been reasonably successful in having subsequent collections published, Muir took a long time to mature as a poet. In the mid-1930s, his poetry was still unresolved, with *Variations on a Time Theme* of 1934, for example, heavily influenced by Eliot's work. In 1935 he and Willa and their young son left Hampstead to live in St Andrews and it may be that this return to Scotland brought to a head his insecurity in relation to a Scottish cultural revival which appeared to be strongly Scots-language based and highly nationalistic; and an insecurity also about Scotland which seemed to offer few opportunities for making a living in the arts. The emptiness which Muir diagnosed as the seat of Scott's problems was, I think, more truly a vacancy at the heart of his own ambitions to be a poet and at the heart of the Scotland of his own time. This is not the place to go into the question of the unnecessary quarrel between MacDiarmid and Muir over the literary use of the Scots language. What is clear is that both writers willfully ignored the fact that for the majority of Scots in the 1930s some form of Scottish-English was indeed the language of both heart and head. Scottish English was the mither tongue, if you like, for most Scots (as indeed MacDiarmid, as Grieve, recognized in the very early 1920s before he became the poet of "The Watergaw" and his whole language agenda altered).¹⁷ On the other hand, what seems to me to be the most significant part of Muir's critique is the part which is most often not quoted in accounts of *Scott and Scotland*. After that well-known passage about the need for writers to adopt not only the English language but the English tradition, he continues:

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.¹⁸

This is an argument that has little to do with language or tradition, but much to do with cultural and artistic immaturity and therefore the lack of an educated artistic audience. I believe one could put up a good case for its continuing to be a significant argument even in this early twenty-first century and despite several waves of supposed literary and artistic renaissance.

¹⁷See section "Language, Identity and the Vernacular Debate" in *Modernism*, pp. 11-51. For recently discovered interwar articles on the language question, see *Scottish Studies Review*, 6 (Spring 2005), 59-73.

¹⁸Edwin Muir, *Scott and Scotland: The Predicament of the Scottish Writer* (London, 1936), p. 4.

The most logical negative criticism of Scott in the interwar period is in my view that made by Neil M. Gunn. Gunn was a strong Scottish nationalist, but he was in particular a nationalist committed to the regeneration of the Highlands. Most of his novels were historical, although some were set in the time frame of his boyhood memories. Gunn was therefore strongly aware of Scott as an historical novelist and an historical novelist who brought the Highlands into his narratives. It was the way in which Scott presented his historical themes which formed the basis of Gunn's criticism. He wrote in his review of Muir's *Scott and Scotland*:

It is not that the [Scott's] history was untrue or was inadequate subject matter for his genius; it was that it no longer enriched or influenced a living national tradition; it had not even the potency of pure legend; it was story-telling or romance set in a void; it was seen backwards as in the round of some time spyglass and had interpretive bearing neither upon a present nor a future.¹⁹

For Gunn, then, Scott's failure was that a new social order could not organically grow out of his historical narratives; his history was shut into its past. In contrast, Gunn's own emphasis, expressed in the article "Highland Games" and throughout his fiction and non-fiction writing, was on the importance of "growing and blossoming from our own roots."²⁰ For him, our future must have an organic connection with our present and our past, and his own novels explored the past of the Highland people not only in the attempt to understand how decline had come about, but also in order to recover and re-present traditions and values which could be used for regeneration. Gunn's compass pointed to the future, while Scott's movement was to the past, even if, in some of his best novels, the near past.

I have suggested that the negative responses of interwar Scottish Renaissance writers to Walter Scott and his work arose out of the problems of their own time, problems they to a large extent shared with Scott's period, even if they were unconscious of this or unwilling to acknowledge it: questions of language and identity, both cultural and national; how to deal with English political and cultural power yet preserve some Scottish distinction; how to live in a period of transition. Yet the most important difference, as we have seen in the response of Gunn, was the interwar belief that Scotland did have a future which could be self-determined, even if there were some differences among activists as to the degree of autonomy to be achieved. On the other hand, an important but mostly unacknowledged link between these interwar writers and

¹⁹Neil M. Gunn, review of *Scott and Scotland*, in *Scots Magazine*, 26 (October 1936), p. 73.

²⁰Neil M. Gunn, "Highland Games," in *Scots Magazine*, 15 (September 1931), p. 414.

the earlier Walter Scott was the European dimension which provided a significant context in both periods.

Reconnecting Scottish culture with its European mainstream (as in the days of the medieval makars) was an important part of the Scottish Renaissance manifesto. Yet, with John Buchan an honorable exception, most of these writers appear to have been unaware of, or for their own reasons to have deliberately ignored, connections between Scotland and Europe in the Enlightenment and early Romantic periods; and, in particular to have ignored Scott's interest in, and influence on, continental Europe.

In his book *Goethe and Scott*, G. H. Needler comments that "the first stimulus to an interest in German literature on the part of the people of Edinburgh was given, according to Scott, by Henry Mackenzie in a lecture before the Royal Society there on 21 April 1788."²¹ Mackenzie's enthusiasm for German drama (despite its being mediated through French translations) would appear to have excited Scott's imagination also, and he subsequently became part of a class formed in Edinburgh for the study of the German language in which he discerned interesting connections with Lowland Scots. He found German ballads of particular interest and went on to attempt his own translations of works such as Gottfried August Bürger's *Lenore* and *Der Wilde Jäger*, an activity credited with stimulating his own creative verse composition. Like the later Edwin Muir, Scott was very interested in Goethe and he translated three of his ballads, including the difficult *Erkönig*. *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* and *Marmion* have been seen by critics as showing the influence of Goethe's *Götz von Berlichingen*, Scott's translation of which was published in 1799. And while German literature may have provided an initial stimulus to Scott's creative imagination, his own verse romances and his novels in their turn influenced continental European culture, becoming, like Macpherson's *Ossian* fragments, significant players in the new Romantic movement, and inspiring both literary works and operas such as Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* and Rossini's *La Donna del Lago*. Buchan comments in his biography that

in France Alfred de Vigny, Mérimée, Dumas, Balzac and Victor Hugo drew from him their first inspiration; in Germany and Italy he was the patron of a new school of romance, Manzoni was his disciple, and the reading of *Quentin Durward* made Ranke an historian (Buchan, p. 335).

Scott, in the early nineteenth century, was opening up connections between Scotland and its continental neighbors, just as MacDiarmid and his associates aimed to do in the early twentieth century, although influences in the modernist period were primarily one-way influences from Europe.

²¹G. H. Needler, *Goethe and Scott* (Toronto, 1950), p. 4.

MacDiarmid's review article on the influence of Scott on the novels of Theodor Fontane, referred to previously, shows that he did have at least the beginnings of relevant information about Scott and Europe had he cared to explore further. This, however, he did not do. Donald Carswell makes passing references to Bürger and Goethe's *Götz* in his account, but without pausing long enough to make any meaningful interactive connections. Edwin Muir's position is perhaps the most puzzling. Like Scott, Muir was deeply interested in the work of Goethe, seeing Mignon's song "Kennst du das Land" as holding the essence of longing in Romantic literature. Nietzsche and Heine had provided him with philosophical support and stimulus in his difficult Glasgow years, and the discovery of the poetry of Hölderlin during his first European sojourn in the early 1920s encouraged his own poetry and became a lasting influence. From the mid-1920s until the outbreak of World War Two in 1939, translation of German authors provided Edwin and Willa Muir with their main income, while the translation of Franz Kafka and Hermann Broch in particular interacted with Edwin's own work. Through such translations the Muirs brought a new consciousness of contemporary German culture into Britain. Edwin's early essay on Hölderlin, published in MacDiarmid's *The Scottish Nation* in 1923, was the first English-language essay to be published on the German poet.

With such a strong interest in Europe and in German literature in particular, it is difficult to believe that Muir, who wrote about Scott on a number of occasions, did not know even a little about his similar affinities with German culture. Yet *Scott and Scotland*, as its title might suggest, is a particularly inward-looking book, drawing significantly on Buchan's biography for its short review of Scott's life and Scottish context and taking no account of beyond Scotland influences, either on Scott or emanating from Scott. Instead, a few references to European writers and critics throughout the book are used to demonstrate how differently the continentals go about their cultural business.

One is left to conclude that for Muir and his associates, preoccupied as they were in their various ways with attempts to create a new way forward for literature and nation; and preoccupied too with their personal ambitions and the artistic and economic frustrations of a parochial and unresponsive Scotland, Walter Scott had become the symbol of a previous North British identity which had to be rejected if contemporary national and personal aspirations were to be fulfilled. The emptiness they perceived in him was still significantly with them. In such a context, the European Scott, despite the connections which might have been made with Scottish Renaissance objectives, had necessarily to remain an unread book.