

2007

"Tell it slant": Duncan Glen and Akros

Tom Hubbard

Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hubbard, Tom (2007) ""Tell it slant": Duncan Glen and Akros," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 35: Iss. 1, 487–500.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol35/iss1/38>

This Article is brought to you by the Scottish Literature Collections at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Studies in Scottish Literature* by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact digres@mailbox.sc.edu.

Tom Hubbard

“Tell it slant”: Duncan Glen and Akros

In the course of *In Memoriam James Joyce* (1955) Hugh MacDiarmid evokes the “intricately-cut gem-stone of a myriad facets / That is yet, miraculously, a whole.”¹ Fifty years on, we may contemplate the myriad-faceted work of Duncan Glen as poet, critic, editor, cultural activist, graphic designer and publisher.

On 1 October 2005, at a small-press event at the Scottish Poetry Library, Duncan Glen celebrated forty years of his Akros imprint. If we can talk of the career of someone who is suspicious of careerists, it can be broadly divided into three phases. Although it has important antecedents in the fifties and early sixties (as we shall see), the first period begins in August 1965 with the launch of *Akros* magazine, one of the very few outlets for Scottish poetry at the time. Glen had recently delivered himself of the first-ever book-length work on his main poetic mentor, *Hugh MacDiarmid (Christopher Murray Grieve) and the Scottish Renaissance* (Edinburgh, 1964), so a new beginning was timely—albeit one deeply influenced by MacDiarmid’s example. The magazine ran for fifty-one issues until October 1983. Not long thereafter, Glen sought fresh directions for his formidable energies.

¹*The Complete Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid*, ed. Michael Grieve and W. R. Aitken, 2 vols. (London, 1978), II, 823. Henceforth MacDiarmid.

The mid-1980s were a period of mingled threat and promise for Scottish culture; it's difficult to think of a period that hasn't been such, but at the time those words last, chance, and saloon suggested themselves. The devolution débacle of 1979 bred both defiance and despair. By February 1984 the new Scottish Poetry Library was up and running; within a year or so its closure was a very real prospect. Meanwhile, Duncan Glen was preparing for early retirement from his post as Professor of Visual Communication at what is now Nottingham Trent University, and relocation to Scotland after twenty years as an expat. In Nottingham he had launched an informal, occasional poetry periodical *Aynd* (meaning breath) and now this was succeeded by the more ambitious but still occasional *Zed 2 0*. Clearly he was opting for freedom over regularity; always his own man, he felt that an issue should come out according to its inner dynamic rather than against the clock. He also became a partner in Galliard, a new Edinburgh-based poetry publishing house that Glen instigated.

Glen had studied at Edinburgh College of Art during the 1950s, but had mostly commuted by train from Kirkcaldy in Fife; the experience of actually living in the capital allowed him unprecedented opportunities. He frequented the Scottish Poetry Library and in due course edited *Makars' Walk* (Edinburgh, 1990), a celebration of the Library's location in the Old Town; as editor and designer he took on the Library's Newsletter, which had long struggled to become more professional in content and appearance. With Peter France, then Professor of French at Edinburgh University and a fellow-denizen of the Poetry Library, he co-edited an anthology of translations, *European Poetry in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1989). He also wrote for Edinburgh University Press *The Poetry of the Scots* (Edinburgh, 1991).

As always, he was writing his own poetry, now understandably more focused on Edinburgh than it had ever been, as well as on the wider Scotland; as befits someone professionally concerned with the interdependence of the verbal and the visual, he addressed himself to painting, notably that of the great Italians of the Renaissance, making these the subject of several important poems of the late eighties and early nineties.²

There were serious setbacks. From his English "exile" he had been aware of the cliquishness of the Scottish poetry scene and had indeed sought a transcending eclecticism in his editorial choices for *Akros* magazine; now that he was based in Scotland itself he could feel the chill as never before. There was a narrowing of the poetic landscape as postmodernism slipped its libertarian mask and gripped an academically-fixated generation that was upcoming and in a hurry. Old loyalties and graces counted for nothing. A

²See Duncan Glen [henceforth DG], *Selected New Poems, 1987-1996* (Kirkcaldy, 1998), and also his extended prose essay, *Poets & Paintings: Reinterpretations* (Kirkcaldy, 2003).

former protégé told him: "I shall always be grateful to you for printing my early poems but we have to crush you."³

Glen felt increasingly uneasy with the general acquiescence in Thatcherite ideology: cultural activism had given way to marketing. The more refusenik tendencies in poetry became ever more dependent on the independent small presses as the large publishing conglomerates favored bland, consumer-friendly products, insofar as they favored any kind of poetry at all. 1999 was the year of something called "devolution" and the restoration of a Scottish Parliament; to Glen, however, cultural power seemed as remote as ever from the Scots in their capacity as citizens rather than consumers. The same year saw his culminating polemic, "*This is No Can of Beans*": *A Prospect from the Window of a Small-Press Publisher* (Kirkcaldy, 1999).

Observant readers of bibliographic data will note a new place of publication for Glen and his imprint. In 1996 Duncan and Margaret Glen moved from Edinburgh to Kirkcaldy, still within easy reach of the capital but free of its culture-vulture claustrophobia. Glen was simultaneously making his homecoming, as it were, to his 1950s; he was also looking to the future, and to the initiation of his third phase. He not only continued to edit *Zed 2 0* but greatly expanded the list of Akros Publications to include a new series of single-author poetry pamphlets by a wide range of established, developing and emerging authors including myself. The revived Akros imprint not only reflected his dogged independence but also revealed him as a key participant in a more general movement towards pamphlets as a form of poetry publishing. He found himself as one free spirit among many who had become frustrated by those disguised authoritarianisms which had taken hold by the turn of the twentieth century.

My own collaborations with Duncan Glen have been conducted mainly during his third phase; living as we do in the same town we have been able to meet and work face-to-face, a refreshing experience in electronic times. If there is such a phenomenon as an adopted native (paradoxical as it sounds), Duncan Glen is that. In recent years he has established himself as a local historian, having earlier performed this role for his natural native locus in Cambuslang, near Glasgow, with *A Nation in a Parish* (Edinburgh, 1995) and *A New History of Cambuslang* (Kirkcaldy, 1998). His *Illustrious Fife* (Kirkcaldy, 1998) revealed just how much Fife's literary history is that of Scotland in microcosm. Robert Henryson, Sir David Lyndsay, Sir James Melville of Halhill, Douglas Young, Alastair Mackie, Alan Bold: all these and more of national reputation are very readably situated in their various Fife habitations. It's an informal genre that Glen has made his own—the literary tour based on walks facilitated by bus links.

³Quoted in *Zed 2 0*, No. 17 (2003), p. 32.

I have always thought that Fife's literary background has not been really recognised and I knew Fife better than Lanarkshire although I was born there. [...] Edinburgh is beautiful to visit but I don't really like living there. You feel there is an authenticity about Fife folk, they have confidence without arrogance. When I was here in the fifties I used to think they were a bit introverted and not quite sure of themselves, but maybe that was because I was young and didn't appreciate what it was about. With Edinburgh I often think that you get confidence but sometimes it covers up something else, but in Fife it seems natural. Among people you speak to there is a confidence about their language and themselves—people talk very freely.⁴

That last remark is of particular interest given that a still-dominant orthodoxy of Scottish literary discourse assumes that, outwith the main urban and university centers, the Scots inhabit a couthy kailyard culture where, out of habit or obligation, everyone is a conformist. The obvious irony is perhaps lost on those who persist in such a patronizing—and indeed authoritarian—point of view. Glen's valuing of all that is un-prescriptive is very much related, existentially, to his belief in community. This is not romantic wish-fulfillment. In poems such as the sequence *Clydesdale* (Preston, 1971), Glen does not spare the reader the hardships and frustration of life in those parts of west-central Scotland where industry has abutted on agriculture, and where planners and other control-freaks threaten the interests of the people who actually live there. One of the main attractions of Glen's poetry is his unsentimental honoring of the human warmth which can prevail in the drabest of circumstances. I had the privilege of reprinting "John Kennedy, Steelworker 1939-1975" in my all-Scots anthology *The New Makars* (Edinburgh, 1991), but for me (as, I suspect, for many) Glen's most moving and memorable poem is "My Faither":

Staunin noo aside his braw bress-hauled coffin
I mind him fine aside the black shinin range
In his grey strippit troosers, galluses and nae collar
For the flannel shirt. My faither.

I ken him fine thae twenty or mair years ago
Wi his great bauchles and flet auld kep;
And in his pooch the spottit reid neepkin
For usin wi snuff. My faither.

And ben in the lobby abune the braw shoon and spats
Aside the silk waistcoat and claw-hammer jaicket
Wi its muckle oxtter pooch, hung the lum hat.
They caa'd him Jock the Lum. My faither.

⁴"The Duncan Glen Interview" [conducted by Maureen Macnaughtan], *Fife Lines*, 1 (September 1998), 57.

And noo staunin wi thae braw shinin haunles
See him and me baith laid oot in the best
Black suitin wi proper white aa weel chosen.
And dinna ken him. *My father.*⁵

The change from Scots to English in the last word hardly requires comment, but it more than hints at Glen's not-always restrained anger at the repression, suppression, call it what you will, of natural Scots speech. In his collection of polemical essays, *The Individual and the Twentieth-Century Scottish Literary Tradition*,⁶ Glen invokes William Carlos Williams's basing of the universal in particulars, and argues that "the Scottish idea" is as valid for our poets as "the American idea" is for Gary Snyder and his contemporaries. This, for Glen, is part of MacDiarmid's call "to be yersel," a social existentialism that asserts Scots language against those who, in *mauvaise foi*, would opt not only for easy acceptance by the dominant culture but would actively collude in the attempted extirpation of the subject culture. It is not that, in his own poetry, Glen has gone along with MacDiarmid's form of a Scots reintegrated, as it were, from the various regional dialects; Glen prefers rather a relaxed, conversational register, and in this respect he has presented us with an equivalent to Janáček's practice in opera and song, i.e., molding the music to the contours of Czech (specifically Moravian) speech. That is to say, the poetry is based on speech, but goes beyond it, as do opera and song. Plain speech without poetry and song can be merely random and even banal; but poetry and song lacking a speech-basis can be arid and effete. This goes some way towards explaining a seeming inevitability about certain Scots poems, as if they had composed themselves. Examples would be Ian W. King's "The Day He Gaed Awa," a ballad about a 1930s Fife miner who waits at the bus stop on the first leg of his journey to Spain to fight fascism, and who won't be returning.⁷ King's poem attracted a "folk" following in Fife at a time when the miners' cause was very much to the fore. A better-known example, however, is Tom Leonard's "The Good Thief," which Glen quotes:

heh jimmy
ma right insane yirra pape
ma right insane yirwanny uz jimmy

⁵DG, *In Appearances* (Preston, 1971), p. 42. Henceforth *In Appearances*. The text of this and subsequent poems by DG was revised by him at the proof stage of this essay. There are slight differences from the versions in their first book publication.

⁶Duncan Glen, *The Individual and the Twentieth-Century Scottish Literary Tradition* (Preston, 1971). Henceforth *The Individual*.

⁷Ian William King, *The Deid Sheep on Lumphinans Bing* (London, 1977), pp. 12-3.

see it nyir eyes
wanny uz⁸

Of Glen's work, "My Faither" amply qualifies, but I would also cite "The Meikle Bin," "Innocence," and "The Room," all included in *In Appearances*. They are poems born of the democratic intellect, human emotion, and above all imagination, which cannot always afford to be either democratic or human.

"Residence outside Scotland," wrote Glen from his English expatriation, "can be one of the best cures for the parochial belief of some Scots that the Scots and the English have a common language" (*The Individual*, p. 42). That utterance dates from 1971; a mid-lifespan later, the Scottish Executive refuses to accord Scots the status already conferred on Gaelic. Certainly, when one looks at the matter from a European perspective, the Scots' self-inflicted cultural vandalism becomes especially unforgivable. Consider this: in Maastricht one can see street-signs in both standard Dutch and in the language of Limburg province; moreover, the database of the Bibliography of Scottish Literature in Translation (BOSLIT, at <http://boslit.nls.uk>) reveals that over three thousand literary works in Scots have been translated into many European languages.

Duncan Glen's experience is similar to that of many of us who have returned to Scotland and have felt more dislocated than when we were away. For the poetry this is no bad thing, if (to paraphrase Yeats) it leads us to write in conflict with ourselves, never mind with others. In Glen's case the tensions are present more in the Lanarkshire than in the Fife poems: he has, after all, *chosen* Fife. Nonetheless, he has found it a challenge to be able to arrive at the "diversity-in-unity" that was so desired by his mentor MacDiarmid when contemplating Scotland as a whole. Rather than resort to the current (and tiresome) practice of pluralizing the word Scotland, he adopts his customary easy-oasy persona; this is somewhat deceptive, however, as it becomes clear that (in the past, at least) he hasn't felt "at home" anywhere in the country:

I hae problems.

I wad scribe o Scotland
and make a unity o it

but
ken nae word o Gaelic
though I've had three fornichts in the hielants

* * *

⁸*The Individual*, p. 42. Also in Tom Leonard, *Poems* (Dublin, 1973), p. 67, and much reprinted.

Dundee I hae forgotten frae an efternoon visit
and Union Street, Aberdeen, I've never seen to forget.
Perth I reached efter a lang bike ride
and had to turn back as soon as I got there
haein nae lichts.
Stirling Castle I hae stood on an surveyed the scene
but I mind the girl mair than the panorama.
The Borders I ken weill, enterin or leavin, by a sign
SCOTLAND
But I've never got aff the train.

* * *

I hae problems.

Still there's Edinburgh
and that gies a bit o status if no unity
for aa that aabody kens Edinburgh
(they'd hae us believe!)
I had the advantage o digs in Marchmont
and days at the Art College
— but aye a visitor wi a time limit
as still
wi sae mony ithers.

I hae problems
being frae Lanarkshire.

* * *

There's my Scotland. A wee corner o Lanarkshire
and Glesca (I should mention!)
whaur as message boy
at fifteen I kent aa the addresses
and short cuts. There I belonged

— till I left at eichteen!⁹

The collection *Realities*, from 1980, is divided into sections carrying such titles as "Walkin in Fife" and "Traivellin Man." The poet who is on the move can thrive on a dialectic of identification and detachment. With Fife, as suggested above, there is more of the former than the latter. Glen is not a poet to busy himself with pointless academic fretting over "Scottish identity" and whether or not we've got beyond it; he just puts one foot in front of the other, hikes

⁹DG, *Realities: Poems* (Nottingham, 1980), pp. 118-19. Henceforth *Realities*.

across rural Fife with Margaret or alone, and sets down the poetic results. As a nominalist rather than a dealer in abstractions, he often quotes William Carlos Williams' "no ideas but in things."

THE UNKENT

Late at nicht we come owre the Cuiuin Hill
 through the trees closin in, and out by the tinkers' camp
 wi daurk bulbous tents and tethered horses.
 We walk very quaitly close thegither but fast
 at the sound o their howlin and wailin that's mebbe
 singin. And the stirrin o horses.
 The stars are bricht in a daurk black sky
 and the moon castin lang hidin shadows. Feelin
 the nip in the air and that singin gettin nearer
 we set aff into a slaw tip-toe run
 haund in haund past their tents. Quicker and
 quicker but as quaitly as we can wi quick looks back
 owre oor shouders. The singin cheynges key
 as we turn onto the main road
 and the sound o our feet loud as drums
 but there's nae thocht o stoppin wi the deil at our heels.
 Weill past nou we laugh and are aff into a happy run thegither
 doun into Star village wi its daurk windaes
 and the neighin o grey mare aside North Dalginch farm
 and soos gruntin in Bellfield's sties close to the road.
 A stoat or weasel's quick across the road
 and houlets hoot in the nicht air.

But what we ken
 — at haund! (*Realities*, pp. 58-9).

I am familiar with these trails around Markinch, but I have experienced a new glow when following the "Walkin in Fife" sequence with the Ordnance Survey map of the area before me. The places he mentions actually *exist*; I know that, of course, but it is good to have a sense of "thereness" which must not be confused with literal-mindedness, a charge which might be leveled at me if not at Glen himself. This is a partly-imagined, or at least recreated, landscape with real tinkers, mares, sows and owls in it; a gentle set of variations, almost, on not-so-gentle themes from MacDiarmid's "On a Raised Beach":

Do not argue with me. Argue with these stones.
 Truth has no trouble in knowing itself.
 This is it. The hard fact. The inoppugnable reality (MacDiarmid, I, 430).

For all that he reveres MacDiarmid, both the work and the man, Duncan Glen has never been an unquestioning disciple.

I'd staun, Chris, wi your Lenin
o the Hymns but, as aye, there's douts about
the steps o the successors
— no to mention their luvè life.¹⁰

MacDiarmid was a communist (of sorts) but not all communists are MacDiarmid. The last line quoted is a typically irreverent questioning of anal-retentive authoritarians. He does invoke MacDiarmid, though, against such a common enemy.

I quote myself addressin you
on the New Scotland

Dear Christopher Grieve
like you I am returnin to Glesca
efter lang exile.

I found you singin like a lintie
in the streets

and doon the road in the park
they're lockin up the swings
for Sunday.¹¹

In like wise he calls up another favorite, Sydney Goodsir Smith, from the shades. Smith, who had died aged fifty-nine in 1975, was a notable (even notorious) yea-sayer to life's natural urges, a denizen of the howffs and wynds of the Old Town of Edinburgh: Glen sees him as the celebrant of the "lallan dancing leid" against the genteel city's moralizers and equally prissy academics.¹²

In 1971 Glen wrote: "The puritanical conscience remains a strong force in our culture and it likes the stability of a known and morally-approved goal to work towards: a journey to make towards self-improvement" (*The Individual*, p. 49). In Scotland today (as elsewhere) officialdom, in the form of funding

¹⁰DG, *Mr and Mrs J. L. Stoddart at Home* (Preston, 1978), p. 34.

¹¹DG, "In Memoriam Hugh MacDiarmid" [extracts], *Cenrastus*, No. 18 (Autumn 1984), p. 13.

¹²DG, "Dancin Leid," in his *Follow! Follow! Follow! and Other Poems* (Preston, 1976), pp. 21-2.

bodies, insists on the arts following a crudely instrumental path, towards social therapy or becoming part of the so-called “creative industries”; if they expect any public money to come their way, artists must negotiate their way through the Scylla and Charybdis of political correctness and “business plans.” The arts must not be allowed to be what they are... the arts. Glen decided that the time spent in filling in forms for Scottish Arts Council funding could more usefully be devoted to actual editing and publishing. (It will come as no surprise that this anti-authoritarian poet, designer and self-publisher finds an avatar in William Blake, to whom he has devoted an issue of *Zed 2 0* (no. 8, June 1995).

Against the “trained and performing tortoise” (Ezra Pound’s phrase) who plays the Establishment game, Glen has commended those who recognize that the writing of poetry involves risk-taking, even the risk of “folly” (Hart Crane), and this has informed his various roles as he addresses himself to his own poetry and that of others. He has declared himself, *passim*, on the side of the Redskins against the Palefaces, the Olsons to the Lowells, the MacDiarmids to the Muirs (though I could argue with him on that one), the early Eliot to the later. Eleven years ago, in *Lines Review*, I suggested that poets could be plotted on a spectrum ranging from the “laconic” to the “expansive,” and that Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman, respectively, could be placed at the extremes.¹³ More recently, pondering where Duncan Glen might belong, my initial instinct was to point him in the direction of Whitman, a “rovin creatur,” a “traivellin” man whose verse rolled on in generous amplitude. Then I realized that it wasn’t as simple as that: a strong counter-argument could be advanced that Glen is a subtle Dickinsonian. After all, she and he can utter short, gnomic lines with a dour aftertaste that would be worthy of the hard-bitten Clydeside steelworker or the Fife coalminer. Glen is variously on record as quoting approvingly Dickinson’s line, “Tell all the truth but tell it slant.” Again, these have been watchwords for his practice as editor/publisher as well as poet.¹⁴ “Telling it slant” is as subversive as Whitmanesque let-it-all-hang-out libertarianism, possible more so. The seeming Paleface can suddenly present evidence of red corpuscles; in Glen’s own poetry I would point above all to “Dresst to Kill”:

We’re dresst to kill.
It’s a white tie and tails affair.

¹³Tom Hubbard, “Rovin’ and Stayin’ Creatur’s: Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman,” *Lines Review*, No. 134 (September 1995), pp. 5-13.

¹⁴As we see in DG, “Akros,” in *Cenrastus*, No. 20 (Spring 1985), p. 33, “I tried as often as possible to encourage the theorising contributors to take an oblique rather than a direct approach.”

There's nae bare breists here.
Nae drinkin frae the finger bowl.

Aa's talk and polisht siller.
We ken the ceremony.

We stau in lines wi pride in oor weys.
We toast oor peers—oor heids thrown back.

Let in the lang-haired ane.
Let her roll naukit on the table.
Bring in the scabby heid.
The hairy-breistit ane.
The ane-leggit dwarf.

The stiff protectin fronts are burst.
Thocht's broken down wi its sophistication.
Reid-breistit emotion's in the drivin seat.
Aa's nuclear pooer and lynch-mob gane wud.

We're faur ayont ony chimps' tea-pairty.
We'll tear the stuffin oot ony fremmit doll (*In Appearances*, p. 57).

In defining the grotesque, Wolfgang Kayser cited "the merger of mutually incompatible elements."¹⁵ One can appreciate Glen's attraction to the early rather than the late Eliot. However, Hugh MacDiarmid might also have nodded approval—the MacDiarmid, that is, of taut surreality, of the "Grinnin' gargyle by a saint."¹⁶

It was during the 1950s, and his Edinburgh College of Art/first Kirkcaldy period, that the future editor/publisher of Akros Publications first took the measure of the existing Scottish small-press scene. Callum Macdonald was publishing the early issues of *Lines Review* and Derick Thomson was editing a new all-Gaelic magazine, *Gairm*. Before setting out by train to ECA, Glen would visit the John Menzies bookstall at Kirkcaldy station, intent on buying the latest number of William Maclellan's *Scottish Journal*.

He was greatly excited by the literary content of this and other Maclellan publications, such as the Poetry Scotland series of books by Douglas Young, George Bruce, W. S. Graham, Sydney Goodsir Smith, Hugh MacDiarmid (above all) and other key poets of the 1940 and 1950s. As to Maclellan's visual style, however, he had grave doubts, and at the time he wrote just what he thought of the look of *Scottish Journal*. Glen recalls that "as a professional

¹⁵Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grottesque in Art and Literature* (New York, 1981), p. 116.

¹⁶*A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, in MacDiarmid, I, 96.

graphic designer, I did not intend the phrase ‘luridly-becovered’ to be complimentary, seeing the covers as somewhat crude. Now I find them interesting, especially those designed by [George] Bain.”¹⁷

Bain’s predilection for tartan and Celtic motifs is very much of its time. It was inevitable that Glen, of a different generation from Maclellan and Bain, would develop a design policy more in keeping with the mid to late 1960s and beyond. His more mellowed response to Bain may in fact be the tribute of a man who favored pictorial matter on his own covers, which were not so much lurid as zany.

For instance, the May 1969 issue of *Akros* (No. 10) has a cover design incorporating a big-chinned, big-nosed, cheesy-grinned and top-hatted cartoon character. Attached to the hat is a winding-key which has just been turned and caused the crown of the hat to pop up, spilling out a profusion of typed words such as “obfuscurate,” “spindilillikon,” “condrambulaters”—the dafter the better—as well as “Sydney Goodsir Smith” enclosed in a bubble. The fellow in the hat is redolent of the strange creatures appearing in the Beatles’ movie *The Yellow Submarine*. All very late sixties, and the work of one Barry O’Riordan, clearly a valued student and later colleague of Glen’s.

Since the 1970s, however, Glen’s style has moved on, and while pictorial matter has been far from abandoned, it has on the whole given way to an imaginative use of typography. This is a special interest of Glen’s, and he has devoted a substantial book to the subject; *Printing Type Designs: A New History from Gutenberg to 2000* appeared from *Akros* during 2001 and was launched at a special event in the National Library of Scotland. At a time when publishers generally take a graceless, utilitarian and downright ignorant attitude to typography, Glen’s creative care is exemplary. When he and I were working on my *The Integrative Vision: Poetry and the Visual Arts in Baudelaire, Rilke and MacDiarmid* (Kirkcaldy, 1997), I submitted a small selection of images relevant to the three poets. Glen accordingly opened each chapter with a full page carrying the number of the chapter, the title and subtitle, and with a drawing of the chapter’s discussed poet immediately below. On the verso there appeared a reproduction of the poet’s handwriting. It seemed an elegant way to welcome the reader to each section of the book. There had been a precedent, however, in the Special Double Hugh MacDiarmid Issue of *Akros* (Vol. 12. No. 34-35, August 1977), which was published to mark the poet’s eighty-fifth birthday. Each essay was preceded by its own special title-page and, as with my book, that page bore an evocative image. Few writers of scholarly essays, these days, can expect such attention to the presentation of their work.

¹⁷William Maclellan, *Scottish Journal*, images chosen and introduced by Duncan Glen (Kirkcaldy, 2004), p. 5. See also DG’s *Hugh MacDiarmid and the Scottish Renaissance* (Edinburgh, 1964), p. 203 for “luridly-becovered.”

Glen is fond of quoting John Ashbery's line, in "The One Thing that Can Save America," on "The quirky things that happen to me." There's a serious side to Glen's sense of humor, whenever "quirky things" have influenced his design strategies; it's another way of "telling it slant." Take the cover of the August 1980 issue of *Akros* (vol. 15, no. 44). Instead of the expected final cover, we are offered its mock-up, the lettering drawn in pencil, within ruled lines, as well as such handwritten professional messages as "logo-artwork, supplied" in the left-hand margin. Not everyone, of course, will welcome a cover in its "raw" proof state, but John Oldfield, Glen's cover-designer on this occasion, is not so much indulging in a postmodern gimmick as, in effect, challenging our commodity fetishism; he wants us to be aware of the process which leads to a final product. I don't see this as necessarily aggressive on Oldfield's part; he (and Glen) are very hospitably allowing us into their workshop.

As regards literary content I mentioned Glen's current work on behalf of established, developing and emerging writers, but that tripartite commitment has been in force since the beginning. Before *Akros*, in the early sixties, Glen was designing and publishing small-press, limited editions of MacDiarmid poems; the earliest of them dates from 1962, the same year that the first collected edition of MacDiarmid appeared from an American publisher. MacDiarmid's *The Burning Passion* was issued by "The Akros Press" in 1965, and the next year saw the first item in the Akros Poets series: Alastair Mackie's *Soundings*. Though Glen has been a persistent champion of Mackie (1925-95), this poet remains one of the most shamefully neglected of the great twentieth-century makars. In some ways this has been an attraction of opposites: as an Aberdonian, Mackie commanded a denser register of Scots than Glen; Mackie's poetic bearings have been European (he was a superb translator into Scots), whereas Glen's—on the whole—have been American. Both, however, delight in brief, laconic lines bearing a dry grotesquerie: a "slant" sensibility is common to both Mackie's "In Absentia" and Glen's "Dresst to Kill." *Soundings* was hand-set by Glen in a 10pt Monotype Baskerville font and hand-printed by him on a small Adana machine. Glen has shown a special regard for Baskerville, the most elegant and poised of eighteenth-century type-faces.

Other poets appearing in *Akros* magazine between 1965 and 1983 have since become well-known: we could cite, more or less at random, Tom Leonard, Liz Lochhead, aonghas macneacail, Alan Spence and Kenneth White. Glen ("mild old me") has been publisher to two competing titans, Alexander Scott and Tom Scott, and has been caught in their cross-fire; on the same day in the early 1970s, he was threatened with litigation by both men because he had printed comments by each on the other. He now finds this comical, his wife rather less so.

Margaret Glen has been more than a moral supporter: she has been Duncan's collaborator in all his editing and publishing ventures, undertaking

much of the proof-reading, handling of orders, dispatching, and accounts, a quietly efficient presence on both the creative and practical fronts. One thinks of earlier Scottish husband-and-wife partnerships-in-art: that other Margaret, wife and co-worker of Charles Rennie Mackintosh; Edwin and Willa Muir. It's been said, often, that self-publication has its hazards, lacking as it does the filtering process of peer review, as well as the infrastructures available to the larger houses. Duncan has not been immune, but it should be remembered that those closest to us personally are often our severest critics. One should never underestimate Margaret Glen's powers of scrutiny; he was wise to marry her. She was an incomer to Fife; born in Mallaig, Inverness-shire, she moved to Stirling and then Markinch, Fife, where she married Duncan. They left Scotland for London because Duncan saw that as the only place in the UK where a progressive designer could hope to be given a chance to produce good work. I am personally grateful to her for the care which she has taken over my own titles published under the Akros imprint.

Another of Duncan Glen's favorite watch-phrases is "lines of communication." In his case they have been astonishingly varied, and I have barely mentioned his work as an educator in art colleges; he has been eager to learn of my own more limited experiences as a tutor/lecturer at the art schools of Glasgow and Edinburgh. His poetry has been presented as theatre, which of course lifts text into another dimension; one has to *hear* Duncan Glen's poetry, performed preferably in a Lanarkshire accent, before one can approach anything like a full appreciation of his art. In 1977 the Scottish composer Ronald Stevenson (b. 1928), a fellow-MacDiarmidian, made a song-setting of his poem "Time's Gane Oot" (*In Appearances*, p. 11); the first page of Stevenson's calligraphed score is reproduced in *Zed 2 0*, No. 17 (2003), p. 4. Stevenson finds references to Einstein's space-time concept in the work of two Scottish poets, MacDiarmid and Glen, and cites in particular those lines from "Time's Gane Oot": "Here's daurks and mists no bent/ or fixed by ony licht."¹⁸ In the same volume within which Stevenson's essay appears, Glen opens his own contribution with these words: "I left school at fifteen (I could have left at fourteen) in March 1948 with no knowledge of Scottish literature as a separate entity."¹⁹ Clearly Duncan Glen has been more of a "traivellin man" than most of his contemporaries as well as those of us who have come after.

Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest

¹⁸Ronald Stevenson, "MacDiarmid's Muses," in P. H. Scott and A. C. Davies, eds., *The Age of MacDiarmid* (Edinburgh, 1980), p. 168. Henceforth Scott.

¹⁹DG, "Lines of Communication with Hugh MacDiarmid," in Scott, p. 27.