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Preface to SSL 44.1

Patrick G. Scott

University of South Carolina - Columbia

Tony Jarrells

University of South Carolina

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SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE TO *SSL* 44:1

This special issue, on Scottish-Russian Literary Relations since 1900, guest-edited by Dr. Anna Vaninskaya of the University of Edinburgh, takes a fresh look at a topic that was of special interest to this journal's founding editor, and which has attracted increased research attention in recent years. Because of Ross Roy's own background in comparative literature, *Studies in Scottish Literature* has regularly included articles about the influence of Scottish writers in other literatures. On Burns alone, *SSL* has published articles on responses or translations in Chinese, Danish, German, Hungarian, Japanese, and Portuguese, as well as Russian. Ross himself had been greatly impressed by interest in Burns when he visited Moscow to speak on Burns Night in January 1975. Over the past six years, an earlier *SSL* article on the most prominent modern Russian translator of Robert Burns, Samuil Marshak, has been downloaded so often that it ranks in the top ten of *SSL*'s 1100 articles.

Understandably, many studies of Scottish literary influence have focused on the appeal of the great romantic-era Scottish writers—Macpherson's Ossian, Burns, Scott—as models of romantic nationalism. The essays here, focusing on 20th and 21st century writing, confront a different world. As G. S. Fraser wrote in the 1940s, romantic nationalism no longer held its previous appeal:

With Byron and with Lermontov
Romantic Scotland's in the grave.¹

Fraser's choice of pan-European romantic-era icons still poses a useful challenge to the more narrowly-delimited Scottish literature teaching canon that would emerge in the next generation, but the names were even then remote and unexpected, deliberately evoking an image of literature, and of

¹ G. S. Fraser, "Meditation of a Patriot," from *Home Town Elegy* (London: Editions Poetry London, 1944), 21, reprinted in *Poems of G. S. Fraser*, ed. Ian Fletcher and John Lucas (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1981), 37. Cf. W.B. Yeats, "September 1913" ("Romantic Ireland's dead and gone, / It's with O'Leary in the grave").

Scotland, that seemed unreal, in 1940s wartime Scotland, in a century with “no gods, and precious few heroes.”² The nineteenth century influence that Fraser elegized or ironized had been all one way; “Romantic Scotland,” he wrote, “was an emigrant.” Focusing on the period since 1900, the essays here, in contrast to more traditional reception studies, treat influence as less unidirectional and show Scottish writers reacting to Russian literature as well as Russians responding to Scots. The primary focus is on cultural interaction, rather than on political influence or U.K.-U.S.S.R relations, but, as Dr. Vaninskaya’s introduction makes clear, from each side of the cultural interaction, there has been continuing recognition and engagement with the other tradition.

This issue falls into two sections. The first part, following Dr. Vaninskaya’s introduction, has four shorter articles on translation, political drama, dramatic adaptation, and divergent fictional treatments of the double. From the Scottish side of the relationship, authors discussed include Burns, Stevenson, McGrath and Lochhead; from the Russian side, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Meyerhold, and Nabokov. The second part presents Patrick Crotty’s detailed re-examination of Hugh MacDiarmid’s use of Russia and Russian writing, based on research for the forthcoming *Complete Collected Poems*. The essays are complete in themselves, but they grew from a symposium series and a wider-ranging project on 20th century Scottish-Russian cultural relations, with an extensive web-site of both primary and secondary sources, which is well worth exploring. One aim of the issue is to stimulate further research; authors and texts meriting consideration in this context might include Grassie Gibbon’s *Grey Granite*, Sorley MacLean’s revisions to revisions to *Dain do Eimhir*, Henderson’s *Song of the Gillie More*, and Edwin Morgan’s Mayakovsky translations.

We are grateful to Dr. Vaninskaya for her work in the assembling and initial editing of the issue, and to her and the contributors for their patience when publication was delayed through Patrick Scott’s other commitments. This is the first of two special-topic issues, with a second, on *Reworking Walter Scott*, guest-edited by Daniel Cook of the University of Dundee, and Lucy Wood, of the University of Edinburgh, to follow shortly as *SSL* 44.2. For the first issue of *SSL* 45.1, a full range of articles is already in hand, and *SSL* 45.2 will also be a general issue. For future issues, from *SSL* 45.2 onwards, we welcome scholarly articles, on all periods of Scottish literature, and from varied perspectives.

Patrick Scott
Tony Jarrells

² Hamish Henderson, *Elegies for the Dead in Cyrenaica* (London: John Lehmann, 1948; Edinburgh: EUSPB, [1977]), 17.