Books Noted and Received

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This list covers a first group of the books received or noted since publication of SSL 43:2; further titles from this period will be noticed in a future issue. Where the book or e-text has been made available, entries are based on personal review; some briefer entries have been edited from the publisher’s description. The compiler welcomes timely information on new publications from publishers or authors. Inclusion in this list need not preclude possible subsequent discussion in a more formal review.

—This volume consists of eleven substantial essays, with an introductory overview and brief conclusion by the editor, who also himself contributes a essay on “Did Scotland make Scotia Great?” For SSL readers, the most directly relevant contribution is by Michael Morris, on literary treatments and deflections of Caribbean slavery, but many essays contain something with implications for literary study; Burnsians, for instance, might note the essays by Eric Graham on Scottish connections with Jamaica plantations and by Suzanne Schwarz on Scottish surgeons and the Liverpool slave trade.

—“The essays in this collection define the parameters of present-day Auchinleck studies. They scrutinize the manuscript’s rich and varied contents; reopen theories and controversies regarding the book’s making; trace the operations and interworkings of the scribes, compiler, and illuminators; tease out matters of patron and audience; interpret the contested signs of linguistic and national identity; and assess Auchinleck’s implied literary values beside those of Chaucer.”

— Late Victorian Scottish poetry (other than Stevenson or Davidson) often seems difficult to integrate with the teaching canon in either Scottish or English literary studies. This is the first of three volumes collecting the letters of the Scottish poet, novelist, biographer and editor William Sharp (1855-1905), published both in print form and open-access digital form. Born in Paisley, educated at Glasgow Academy, and for two years at Glasgow University, where he was taught by Swinburne’s Oxford contemporary John Nichol, Sharp moved to London in 1877, working in a bank, en route to become a full-time writer. Sharp was an established professional man of letters under his own name before, in the 1890s, he created a parallel (and successful) second literary career as “Fiona Macleod.” The editor, William F. Halloran writes:

The poems and stories Sharp published as Fiona Macleod exceeded in quality and popularity those he wrote as William Sharp, but Fiona Macleod herself was his most impressive achievement, ... it is in the letters that Sharp brought her fully into being. Initially a lark, she became a financial necessity. Enjoying the deception, he soon became entranced by the woman he was creating (p. 6).

Sharp maintained the “lark” by routing Macleod manuscripts and letters to his sister in Edinburgh for recopying and forwarding.

This edition is expanded from the editor’s earlier online Sharp letters site, hosted by the Institute of English Studies.¹ The edition is based on six decades of research and collecting, during a period which has seen growing interest in Sharp/Macleod from other scholars, and wider recognition of the questions his/her work might raise.

While the general introduction is relatively brief, avoiding expatiation on larger interpretative or theoretical issues, Professor Halloran also provides brief introductions to each chapter or section of the letters, providing in effect a short narrative biography, together with 100 pages of annotation in endnotes, and an impressive appendix of letter locations and libraries used. Except in the final chapters, this first volume is essentially on Sharp before Macleod, only adumbrated here, presumably takes over in the next two. Correspondents here include D.G. Rossetti, Swinburne, Meredith and others, with little to offer on Sharp’s early life in Scotland.

It does, however, provide a good sense of the literary and publishing milieu in which Sharp, like other ambitious expatriate Scots, became a professional writer, in his case as (inter alia) London art critic for the *Glasgow Herald*, editor of the Camelot Poets, briefly editor of *Young Folks*, and much else. In a letter to Robert Louis Stevenson in December 1886, Sharp reports that his anthology *Sonnets of the Century* (Walter Scott, 1886), had sold 15,000 copies in ten months, 14,000 at 1 shilling, with 1,000 of a de luxe quarto in different issues at 12/6 or 20/-, and that the revised edition would have a print-run of 10,000 (p. 173); the editor tells us that Sharp did not share in royalties, but that the success established his reputation for other commissions. Other highlights include a letter to Rossetti from Lesmahagow in 1881, describing an ideal Scottish dinner menu; and Sharp’s visit to Whitman in Camden, NJ, in January 1892, when he was charged to take back to British admirers “the last greetings of a tired old poet” (p. 373).


—This book has drawn widespread critical attention for breaking the consensus over the role of literary consciousness in Scottish political developments of the past 40 years. Far more than most recent discussion, the book draws on political theory and sociology to introduce an alternative perspective, and some scepticism, into a story often told, at least in literature departments, as culturally inevitable. Hames’s larger case, differentiating the cultural dream of literary nationalism from the political grind of gaining significant devolved political power, will no doubt continue to be debated in coming years. Hames is alert to literary and political sanctimony, and I should expect political and institutional outsiders to take to his book, sometimes with glee; equally I should expect some in the arts to think it anti-literary, some students and general readers to find it too interested in cultural theory, and some from the political left to find it perhaps too abstracted from economic issues and practical politics. It is a mark of the book’s ambition, and the range of the case it makes, that such criticisms can be raised.

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2 Professor Halloran’s second volume, covering 1895-1899, has now appeared, both in print (Open Books Publishers, 2019), at £22.95 paper, £32.95 hardback, and free for download from: https://www.openbookpublishers.com/product/1114.

3 A version of one chapter, on the concept of gaining a voice as perhaps delusory substitute for actual political control, first appeared as an article in SSL, 39 (2013), before the 2014 referendum on independence.
But in addition to the book’s general argument, readers of SSL should perhaps also be alerted that it contains quite extensive comment on individual Scottish periodicals, authors and works. Ch. 1 offers a very funny discussion of the negative reaction by MacDiarmid’s allies to the launch of *Scottish International* (from 1968), while ch. 3 tracks the changed positioning of later magazines such as *Cencrastus, Chapman,* and *Radical Scotland.* William McIlvanney makes appearances in ch. 3, and for *Docherty,* in ch. 7. Alasdair Gray appears sixteen times, though each time relatively briefly. There is more sustained discussion in ch. 5, on James Robertson’s novel *And the Land Lay Still,* also cited in earlier chapters, and in ch. 7 on the vernacular in Irvine Welsh, A.L. Kennedy, and James Kelman. This is a book that anyone teaching modern Scottish literature should read, and those interested in other periods will find useful context on the debates from which current Scottish critical perspectives have developed.


—A dramatic account, grounded in archival research, of the crisis when Scotland’s 1846 potato crop was wiped out by blight, of starvation and death in the Hebrides and the West Highlands, where relief efforts came too late, and protests broke out against the soaring price of oatmeal, the replacement foodstuff, in towns and villages from Aberdeen to Wick and Thurso, with the military firing on one set of rioters, savage sentences on others, but with the protesters winning key concessions and cheaper food.


—This is the first scholarly edition of Scott’s *Marmion* (1808), and the first volume to appear in this important new series, designed to complement the successful and definitive Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels. It was enormously popular, with “four editions and over 11,000 copies … produced in 1808 alone. It was with the overwhelming success of *Marmion* that Scott’s poetic reputation was indisputably established, his immersion in the world of commercial publishing confirmed, and his commitment to a literary life fully determined.”

Despite social media, it often takes a surprisingly long time for major new scholarly series of this kind to arrive on library shelves, especially outside Scotland, and it takes even longer for scholarly users to recognize their strengths, happen on their discoveries, and start to use them routinely
for scholarly citation. Many libraries no longer themselves start standing orders for new series, waiting instead for them to be added to one or another bundle of digital resources; future scholars will not have access to the print volume of works like this unless current library users ask for them.


—Dr. McGinty has published several widely-appreciated studies of Burns, beginning with his book *Robert Burns and Religion* (2003). This book has not been sent for review, but *SSL* readers may like to have a brief description of its contents. Dr. McGinty cautions that the book “does not purport to be a work of philosophy but rather to show the poet’s reaction to the subject and the development of his understanding,” and summarizes it thus: “The work begins with the homespun philosophy of his early years under the tutelage of William Burnes and John Murdoch, then examines in detail some of the texts of John Locke, Adam Smith and Francis Hutcheson, including other writers who reflect Hutcheson’s thinking.” Later chapters comment on Burns’s interaction with or reading of Thomas Reid, Dugald Stewart, Archibald Alison and William Greenfield.


—This 200-plus “special section” is the most substantial American recognition of the W.S. Graham centenary, and probably the most lavishly-produced Graham tribute ever. It is important not only for the critical essays and discussion that it includes, but for the number of previously-unpublished poems, poetic drafts or “related poetic projects” that it makes available from several different archives, together with a full-colour section of artwork by Graham and others. The critical essays include David Nowell Smith’s own introduction, an agile meditation by W.N. Herbert based Graham-like around seven apparently-unrelated words (Crevasse, Telephone, Beast, Space,…), individual essays by John Wilkinson, Lavinia Singer, Rachel Boast, and David Lewis, and, using a publication strategy I can’t remember seeing quite like this before, a series of essays paired with a related series of Graham’s unpublished “approaches” or unpublished poems related to some better-known published work. One of these, Jeremy Noel-Tod’s “Yet More Shots of Mr Simpson, accompanied by eleven poem-sections, overlaps Noel-Tod has published elsewhere, in *TLS* and in the British tribute-volume, *The Caught*
Habits of Language: An Entertainment for W.S. Graham. Scottish critics will probably get most out of Hannah Brooks-Motl essay on Graham’s poems about Greenock, with eleven poems or poem-drafts). Especially notable, however, is a new essay, again with “a cluster of previously unpublished drafts” relating to Graham’s “The Beast in Space,” by Calvin Bedient, whose Eight Contemporary Poets (1974) was a landmark in Graham’s U.S. critical recognition. At the time Graham found Bedient’s discussion equivocal, and Bedient comments here:

In point of fact, and for the record, I regard Graham as one of the two most poetically brilliant and adventurous of the British poets of the 1950s through the 1970s…. Graham’s best poems—electric—will continue to live, and the rest of them, many of them choice, will be towed along. Could he have asked for more? Yes, always more (154).

Even if Graham might have wanted more, however, this collection, in an American-based, prestigious, but non-commercial literary review, sets a new benchmark in Graham criticism and appreciation,


—This book sets out to use a study of literary networking in the north of Ireland to discuss interrelationships between radical politics, religious dissent and literary innovation both before and after the pivotal events of 1798 and the Act of Union in 1801. In tracing continuities from the 1790s into the early nineteenth century, and exploring what the book argues is a newly self-conscious Ulster identity after the Union, Orr tries to move beyond what is by now quite extensive scholarship on the Ulster poets of the period, including, of course, work by Hewitt, McIlvanney, Baraniuk, and others, and her own earlier book on the correspondence of Samuel Thomson. The book encompasses not only John Hewitt’s Rhyming Weavers but a wide variety of writing in other genres. As newspapers of the period become more accessible to scholars and students, the focus Orr places on publishing as well as social networks is of increased relevance to the wider consideration of literary developments in the Romantic period. As one might expect, there is extensive reference to Burns, and it is refreshing to see Ulster writing read not just as its own world, or as prefiguring later Irish literary concerns, but with an eye to contemporary literary activity elsewhere.

--This wide-ranging study by a senior American musicologist situates Macpherson’s Ossian in the context both of a broad European classical tradition (Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Brahms) and of romantic nationalist, ethnomusicological, and philosophical developments. [To be reviewed fully in a future issue.]


—This study by an architectural historian includes (with much else) a half-chapter on Hume, a chapter on the monuments of Calton Hill, two chapters on monuments to Robert Burns, early and late, and a chapter on the Scott monument. While both the Burns and Scott monuments have received other recent scholarly attention (Whatley on Burns, Duncan in *Scott’s Shadow*, and most recently Mole on the Scott Monument), Rodger’s book, more ambitious than the typical architectural guide, pairs basic historical narrative with interpretative discussion in terms of architectural echoes and significance; the Glenfinnan monument to the 45, for instance, is compared to Trajan’s Column, and the first Burns chapter opens with an extended discussion of Giuseppe Terragni’s 1938 proposal to Mussolini for a Dante monument in Rome. Readers of *SSL* will find his perspective fresh and stimulating.


—“This book collects essays and talks about Robert Burns by the Burns scholar G. Ross Roy (1924-2013), founding editor of this journal. Along with introductions to such well-known Burns poems as "Tam o' Shanter" and "Auld Lang Syne," it includes essays discussing Burns's attitudes to the French Revolution, politics, and religion, his love-letters to Clarinda, *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*, poems written about Burns, and the editing of Burns's works. The volume opens with some autobiographical reflections about Ross Roy’s career as a Burns scholar, recorded shortly before his death, and it concludes with an illustrated interview about the G. Ross Roy Collection, at the University of South Carolina.”

Patrick Scott
—Originally published by Pickering and Chatto in 2012, this paperback reissue of Watson’s book gives opportunity to note that he includes a chapter on paratext in Burns and Scott (ch. 5: pp. 101-116).

—This book provides a readable account by an historian of the impact in Scotland from, and Scottish responses to, the war against France in the 1790s. The book covers popular responses as well as government action. It includes extended comment on the sedition trials of Muir, Margarot, and others, but it is particularly informative on the variety of Scottish military units and recruitment. It is perhaps chastening for literary scholars to realize this topic can be discussed without mentioning either Robert Burns, of the Dumfries Volunteers, or Walter Scott, of the Royal Edinburgh Light Dragoons and the Selkirkshire Yeomanry.