

# Studies in Scottish Literature

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Volume 49  
Issue 1 *Hugh MacDiarmid at 100*

Article 1

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2-2024

## Series Editors' Preface to SSL 49.1

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### Recommended Citation

Scott, Patrick and Jarrells, Tony (2024) "Series Editors' Preface to SSL 49.1," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 49: Iss. 1, v-vi.

DOI: 10.51221/sc.ssl.2024.49.1.1

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol49/iss1/1>

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## SERIES EDITORS' PREFACE

The background and scope of this special issue, guest-edited by Scott Lyall and James Benstead, of Edinburgh Napier University, is explained in Dr. Lyall's introduction. The topic it celebrates and interrogates, the first appearance in print of 'Hugh M'Diarmid', in 1922, has wide implications, because of the long-lasting influence within Scottish literary studies of the Scottish Renaissance group Christopher Murray Grieve initiated and of the reshaping he proposed in how Scottish literary history should be viewed.

An issue devoted to MacDiarmid would have pleased *SSL*'s founding editor, Ross Roy, who became friends not only with Grieve himself but with many of the next generation associated with the Renaissance movement. When *SSL* started publication in 1963, Ross's three-member editorial board included C. M. Grieve, and *SSL*'s early volumes were contemporary both with MacDiarmid's widest public influence in Scotland and with Scottish literature's institutional recognition as a distinct academic field. Alongside scholarly articles, the journal published critical essays and polemics from non- or even anti-academic writers.<sup>1</sup> Iain Crichton Smith wrote appreciatively on MacDiarmid's early poems, and J. B. Pick reviewed *The Company I've Kept* with affectionate exasperation.<sup>2</sup>

Over the past sixty years, much has changed, both in ways of conceptualising Scottish literary history and in the depth and quantity of scholarly research on MacDiarmid. Ross's own friendships perhaps constrained reassessment in *SSL*: he published Alexander Scott's remarkable interview with Grieve, there was significant attention in *SSL* to editorial questions, and discussions of the MacDiarmid-Burns connection and of MacDiarmid's politics, but *SSL* under Ross published relatively

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Tom Scott, 'Observations on Scottish Studies', *SSL* 1.1 (July 1963), 1-13; Sidney Goodsir Smith, '*Trahison de clercs*: the Anti-Scottish Lobby in Scottish Letters', *SSL* 2.2 (October 1964), 71-86.

<sup>2</sup> Iain Crichton Smith, 'Hugh MacDiarmid: *Sangschaw* and *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*', *SSL* 7.3 (1970), 169-179; J.B. Pick, in *SSL* 5.3 (1968), 198-200.

little criticism directly focused on his poetry.<sup>3</sup> In Ross's final volume, Duncan Glen pushed back against reappraisal, likening MacDiarmid's later poems to Whitman's *Song of Myself* and Pound's *Cantos*, and asserting that

at its best, his poetry, confined by neither parochialism nor nationalism, belongs alongside Joyce's *Ulysses*, Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and with William Carlos Williams's *Paterson*.<sup>4</sup>

This is the first ever *SSL* issue wholly devoted to MacDiarmid, and it constitutes *SSL*'s fullest engagement with his writing under the current editors.<sup>5</sup> The essays approach his work from varied perspectives, and the reappraisals that they offer focus chiefly, though not wholly, on the 1920s, looking at his poetry, literary milieu, historical context, and compositional methods in the years when 'MacDiarmid' was still pre-canonical even in Scotland. While written in the 2020s, not the 1920s, through the eyes of different and later generations than Ross's own, the issue is no debunking; collectively the essays constitute something of a tribute to MacDiarmid's continuing interest.

We are grateful to the guest-editors for entrusting the project to *SSL*, for working with their contributors to develop the essays, and for submitting the issue so professionally copy-edited at a time when Patrick Scott could not undertake that aspect of production.

Patrick Scott  
Tony Jarrells

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<sup>3</sup> Alexander Scott, 'An Interview With Hugh MacDiarmid', *SSL* 14 (1979), 1-22. Critical articles included Margery Palmer McCulloch, 'The Undeservedly Broukit Bairn: Hugh MacDiarmid's *To Circumjack Cencrastus*,' *SSL* 17 (1982), 165-185; T. J. Cribb, 'The Cheka's Horrors and *On a Raised Beach*,' *SSL* 20 (1985), 88-100; Christopher Whyte, 'Construction of Meaning in MacDiarmid's "Drunk Man"', *SSL* 23.1 (1988), 199-238. On editorial issues and publication history, see Ruth McQuillan, 'The Complete MacDiarmid,' *SSL* 18 (1983), 177-209; J. T. D. Hall, 'Hugh MacDiarmid, Author and Publisher,' *SSL* 21 (1988), 53-88; W. R. Aitken, 'On Editing MacDiarmid's *Complete Poems*,' *SSL* 28 (1993), 75-80. On MacDiarmid and Burns, see Margery Palmer McCulloch, 'Burns, MacDiarmid and Beyond: Transformations of the Love Lyric and its National Context', *SSL* 30 (1998), 199-208; Carol McGuirk, "'Nocht Sae Sober As a Man Blin' Drunk': MacDiarmid's Transformations of Burns in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*", *SSL* 30 (1998), 209-218; Robert Hay Carnie, 'Hugh MacDiarmid, Robert Burns and the Burns Federation', *SSL* 30 (1998), 261-276.

<sup>4</sup> Duncan Glen, 'Hugh MacDiarmid in Our Time', *SSL* 35-36 (2007), 202-212. Like the Alex Scott interview, MacDiarmid's only other contribution in *SSL* was posthumous, a reproduction of his short tribute-poem to Glen as an appendix to Glen's article (*ibid.*, p. 213).

<sup>5</sup> But note Patrick Crotty, "'Like Pushkin, I': Hugh MacDiarmid and Russia', *SSL* 44.1 (2018), 47-89.