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CHITTERIN' LICHTS: TEXT AND INTERTEXT IN *SANGSCHAW* AND *PENNY WHEEP*

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The lexicographical encounter that transformed the apprentice English versifier C. M. Grieve into the virtuoso Scots makar Hugh MacDiarmid has long been a set-piece of Scottish literary history. In the early autumn of 1922, shortly after his thirtieth birthday, the poet fabricated his inaugural Scots lyric 'The Watergaw' out of eight words and phrases he had come upon in Sir James Wilson's *Lowland Scotch as Spoken in the Lower Strathearn District of Perthshire* (London: Oxford University Press, 1915). The poem's composition is typically discussed in terms of a psychological explosion that blew open a path to the affective domain 'M'Diarmid' (the preferred spelling of the surname until 1931[1]) would go on to explore in the mainly brief lyrics of *Sangschaw* (1925) and *Penny Wheep* (1926) and, more expansively, in the oracular reverie *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1926). Presentation of this received version of events is usually accompanied by speculations about cultural identity, the psycholinguistic inheritance of Lowlanders, and authorial biography. Such matters are not irrelevant but too exclusive a concern with them can occlude aspects of its creation that link 'The Watergaw' to the poet's earlier production and to much of the work he would compose after English had re-emerged as his primary medium in 1933. That Grieve should resort to a printed source for the vocabulary of an 'original' work was in fact nothing new in 1922, even if in this instance the particular nature of the source – an example-rich study of a Scots dialect – was to have far-reaching and unforeseeable consequences. Concentration on questions of language has led

[1] *Sangschaw*, *Penny Wheep*, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* and *To Circumjack Cencrastus* (1930) all identify Hugh M'Diarmid as their author. (That spelling predominates also in journal and periodical ascriptions of individual poems in the 1920s, albeit with variations.) *First Hymn to Lenin and other poems* (1931) was by Hugh McDiarmid. The familiar MacDiarmid formulation did not appear on the title page of a volume until 1932, in *Scots Unbound and other poems*, after which it became the established version of the name.

commentators to overlook a key (and very characteristic) aspect of 'The Watergaw', its deployment of the lexis it borrows from Wilson to expedite a second intertextual manoeuvre, creative interrogation of a further cultural artefact.

Some time before he astonished himself with the intensity of his response to Wilson's study, Grieve had taken pains to draw attention to the intertextual character of his writerly practice:

> As fish are seen through an aquarium so these perhaps strange fish of mine are discernible almost entirely through a 'strong solution of books' – and not only of books but of magazines and newspaper articles and even of speeches. What I have done is similar to what is done when a green light on a railway replaces a red light, or *vice versa*, in a given lamp.[2]

These comments from the prefatory note to *Annals of the Five Senses* would not be published until 1923, but they and the collection of alternating prose sketches and poems they introduce had already been set up in print a year or more before the composition of 'The Watergaw'. The quotations and allusions with which the *Annals* sketches bristle are only partly to be understood in relation to an attempt to reflect what the note calls the 'current reading and cultural conditions' of the six protagonists whose 'psychological movements' are (a tad too effortfully perhaps) portrayed: rather than being mere secondary characteristics, that is to say, they constitute the primary stuff from which the prose is composed. The author had long been aware that poems, too, can be put together out of pre-existing verbal materials. He was only seventeen when he took advantage of his position as editor of the school magazine to express mischievous delight in the power of old verses to generate new ones:

> The GOLDEN TREASURY is undoubtedly a most remarkable book. We advise young poets who cannot afford to purchase the entire book to buy at least the index of first lines. It is an inexhaustible mine, and the poems which can be built out of it in the course of a single afternoon are legion.
>
> Here are a few examples: –
>
> I
>
> Daughter of Jove, relentless power,
> Well I remember how you smiled,
> 'Twas on a lofty vessel's side
> (And you were proper riled).

[2] 'In Acknowledgement', in Hugh MacDiarmid, *Annals of the Five Senses and Other Stories, Sketches and Plays*, ed. by Roderick Watson and Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 1999), p. 4.

II

Come into the garden, Maud.
Alice, where art thou?
O Mary at thy window be
(Or else we'll have a row).

O saw ye bonny Leslie?
Proud Maisie's in the wood.
The Blessed Damozel leaned out
(And muttered something rude).[3]

The essay which follows seeks to relate MacDiarmid's use of philological treatises and dictionaries in *Sangschaw* and *Penny Wheep* to the intertextual tendencies of his art more generally. It also aims to highlight one frequently missed and at least partly intertextual quality of the 'early lyrics', their very wide range of cultural allusion. It closes with a reading of 'The Watergaw' which brings these topics together in a detailed tracking of the poem's application of its book-drawn diction to the figurative content of a well-known Presbyterian hymn. If 'The Watergaw' embodies one of early twentieth-century poetry's most vivid explorations of the flickering margin between faith and doubt, it does so on the basis of its irreducibly intertextual nature, its status as a text animated by the vital relationship it engineers between texts that stand on either side of it.

The fifty or so lyrics by Grieve that survive from the years leading up to his sudden turn to Scots are notably – even wildly – diverse in kind, ambition and achievement. Changes in his approach to composition in the early 1920s suggest he was consciously striving to redress the instabilities of purpose and tone that mark the apprentice work, to the extent indeed that *Sangschaw* and *Penny Wheep* may be said to owe a good deal to his struggle to put his English medium verse on a surer footing. One development is a move towards brief, imagistic poems. All ten pieces other than sonnets that can be ascribed to 1921 are in the latter category, and they not only foreshadow the short forms of the Scots lyrics but also display a stylistic economy that contrasts sharply with an earlier bombastic tendency.[4] Another development is a shift in Grieve's approach to the mechanics of sonnet writing which, though it does little to enhance the

[3] 'From The Editorial Scrap-Book', *Broughton Magazine*, 3.3, Summer 1910, p. 22.

[4] 'Withered Wreaths', collected as 'A Last Song' (*CP*, p. 14), 'Tryst in the Forest' (*CP*, p. 1113), 'Ennui' (*CP*, p. 1113), 'She Whom I Love' (*CP*, p. 1113), 'In Memory'(*CP*, p. 1114), 'To Margaret' (*CP*, p. 1114), 'Truth' (*CP*, p. 1115), 'Two Gods' (*CP*, p. 1115), 'Edinburgh' (*CP*, p. 1204) and 'Playmates' (*CP*, p. 1204). [*CP*: Hugh MacDiarmid, *Complete Poems*, ed. by Michael Grieve and W. R. Aitken, 2 volumes (Manchester: Carcanet, 1993, 1994).]

quality of the resulting sonnets themselves, anticipates the methodology of the Scots lyrics by exploiting print materials as thoroughly as the *Annals* sketches had done and the *Broughton Journal* skit recommended. The still uncollected 'To Andey Biely' appeared on 10 June 1922, embedded – as the original version of 'The Watergaw' would be three and a half months later – in a *Dunfermline Press* column under the poet's patronym.[5] The sonnet itself, along with much of the prose that surrounds it, is based on a *Times Literary Supplement* article.[6] The eight 'Continental Sonnets' that followed in the *Scottish Chapbook* (I-V, 1.4, November 1922; VI-VIII, 1.8, March 1923) were similarly assembled, with varying degrees of verbal rather than merely ideational fidelity, out of *TLS* notices.[7]

The predilection for short poems and the willingness to base new verses on pre-existing lexical formulations came together in 'The Watergaw'. The poet may initially have been attracted to the Wilson volume as much for its form – it is in essence a series of lists – as its subject matter, the Strathearn dialect of Scots. He was always partial to lists and inventories, and books that supplement their discursive and analytical materials with catalogues of one sort or another held a particular fascination for him.[8] Nevertheless, it can only have been a matter of time

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5 'Scoto-Russian Notes', in Hugh MacDiarmid, *The Raucle Tongue: Hitherto Uncollected Prose, Volume I*, edited by Angus Calder, Glen Murray and Alan Riach (Manchester: Carcanet, 1996), pp. 26-28 (pp. 27-28).

6 'New Tendencies in Russian Thought', *TLS*, 20 January 1921, p. 33.

7 Continental Sonnets: I 'J. K. Huysmans' (*CP*, p. 1218), 'The Character of Huysmans', *TLS*, 19 January 1922, p. 40; II 'The Golden Island' (*CP*, p. 688), 'Mallorca and the Poets', *TLS*, 16 February 1922, p. 106; III 'Amiel' (*CP*, p. 1218), 'Henri-Frédéric Amiel, 1821–1881', *TLS*, 29 September 1921, p. 617; IV 'Of Two Bulgarian Poets' (*CP*, p. 687), 'Two Bulgarian Poets', *TLS*, 13 October 1921, p. 662; V 'Introduzione alla Vita Mediocre' (*CP*, p. 1219), 'Carso and Caporetto', *TLS*, 12 January 1922, p. 20; VI '"U Samogo Moria"' (*CP*, p. 76), 'New Foreign Books', *TLS*, 2 November 1922, p. 707; VII 'Der Wunderrabbiner von Barcelona' (*CP*, p. 1226), 'New Foreign Books', *TLS*, 10 November 1921, p. 735; VIII 'Miguel de Unamuno' (*CP*, p. 1226), 'Unamuno and the Tragic Sense', *TLS*, 5 January 1922, p. 6.

8 Grieve's liking for lists is displayed in the early poetry by the rhetorical parallelisms of 'La Belle Terre Sans Merci' (*CP*, p. 1197), for example, and the celebration of the Catholic catalogue prayer 'Litany of the Blessed Virgin' in the sonnet of that name (*CP*, p. 1216). A decade later he would model a passage (*CP*, p. 346) of the *Scots Unbound* title poem on the glossary of Joycean terms incorporated (pp. 67-75) in Stuart Gilbert's contribution to Samuel Beckett et al, *Our Exagmination Round His Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress* (London: Faber and Faber, 1929). The following year's 'Taureau' (*CP*, p. 1268), similarly, would be built around headwords from the 'Explanatory Glossary of certain words, terms and phrases used in bullfighting' appended to Ernest

before he got round to investigating repositories of Scots, and Wilson's just happened to be the first of these to come to his attention. In late 1921 he had taken issue in the *Aberdeen Free Press* and *Montrose Review* with the widely reported campaign of the Vernacular Circle of the London Burns Club to promote literary use of the old tongue. Over the following months his attitude mellowed, however: he joined the Montrose Burns Club and even attended the conference of the International Burns Federation in Birmingham at the beginning of September 1922, where he won applause for a speech linking Burns to the future of Scottish literature; indeed he deported himself with sufficient tact and charm to secure an invitation to address the Vernacular Circle of the London Club the following year.

There is a significant though underappreciated parallel between MacDiarmid's emergence as a Scots poet in the 1920s and that of Robert Burns a hundred and forty years earlier. In much the same way that antiquarianism's recovery of the post-medieval Scots poetic tradition in the eighteenth century had provided an enabling context without which the Ayrshire poet's achievement can scarcely be imagined, the expansion and consolidation of scholarly study of the Scots language in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries lent a vital underpinning to MacDiarmid's efforts. The scholar most closely associated with the London Burns Club's Vernacular Circle was Professor William Alexander Craigie (1867–1957), co-editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, who conceived the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* during the First World War and began work upon it in 1921, editing and overseeing publication of the fascicles that would eventually become Volumes I (1937) and II (1951). The dictionary Craigie began, an exhaustive compilation of the lexis of the official language of Scotland from the late middle ages up to the Union of Parliaments, would not be completed until 2002, when its twelfth and final volume appeared. Craigie was the most prominent member of the Scottish Dialects Committee, whose collections formed the preliminary basis of a second large-scale project, the *Scottish National Dictionary*, initiated in Aberdeen in 1929 by the phonetician William Grant (1863–1946). This second dictionary project, the 'new Dictionary in the makin' noo' as MacDiarmid called it *To Circumjack Cencrastus* (*CP*, p. 223), applied both regional and historical principles to its ten-volume (1931–1976) survey of the dialects and vernacular literature of Scotland and her Irish linguistic colony of Ulster in the years since 1700. These two

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Hemingway's *Death in the Afternoon* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1932). Another poem composed in 1933, 'Tam o' the Wilds and the Many-Faced Mystery' (*CP*, p. 368), would draw substantially on the taxonomical addenda to Samuel Smiles's *Life of a Scotch Naturalist: Thomas Edward, Associate of the Linnaean Society* (London: John Murray 1876).

comprehensive and systematic scholarly enterprises may have borne fruit too late to have an impact upon MacDiarmid's practice, but their genesis shared a cultural moment with the first stirrings of his art.[9]

Wilson's study, by contrast, was almost contemporary with those stirrings, more immediately so than strict arithmetic might indicate, given the interruption created by the War and the fact that it took the poet, demobilised in July 1919, until late April 1921 to settle into his new civilian life in Montrose. There is at any rate no disputing the contemporaneity of the influence of another contribution to the burgeoning literature on Scots, George Watson's *The Roxburghshire Word-Book: Being a Record of the Special Vernacular Vocabulary of the County of Roxburgh, with an Appendix of Specimens*. Watson (1876–1950) was Craigie's senior assistant at the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and his book, which bore a dedication to Craigie, constituted a Special Number of the Transactions of the Scottish Dialect Committee series under the general editorship of Grant. Published by Cambridge University Press in late 1923, it was turned to account by the poet within a short time of its appearance.[10] An item from its Appendix of Specimens, originally recorded by Sir James Murray (1837–1915), provided him with the basis for the opening line, title and footnote of one of *Sangschaw*'s best known lyrics: 'They're teuch sauchs growin' i' the Reuch Heuch Hauch [meadow at Hawick]'. Murray's specimen (p. 343) is 'unpacked' over the four dazzlingly inventive quatrains of 'The Sauchs in the Reuch Heuch Hauch' (*CP*, p. 18). The slightly altered version of the great lexicographer's parenthetical

[9] A combined online version of the two dictionaries became available in 2004. *DSL Online* incorporated a new *SND* supplement a year later and underwent revision in 2014 and 2022. The digital repository (dsl.ac.uk) and the organisation which supports it were officially known as *Scottish Dictionaries Online* until 2021, when the name was changed to *Scots Dictionaries Online* in acknowledgement of the comparably national status of Scotland's non-Teutonic language, Gaelic.

[10] Precisely how short is impossible to say, as each of the four *Sangschaw* pieces based on Watson's book made its initial appearance in the collection itself. The only way of dating the contents of *Sangschaw* and *Penny Wheep* more precisely than by title-page is by date of prior publication, but rather fewer than half the poems saw the light of day before incorporation in one or other of the Blackwoods volumes. Fourteen of the thirty pieces in *Sangschaw* had appeared in the poet's own periodicals the *Scottish Chapbook* and the *Northern Review* between October 1922 and August 1924, and nineteen of the forty-seven items in *Penny Wheep* in the *Scottish Chapbook* between November 1922 and November/December 1923. '"You Know Not Who I Am"' (*Sangschaw*) and the English *Penny Wheep* lyric 'A Herd of Does', printed in the *Glasgow Herald* of 9 January 1924 and 3 June 1925 respectively, were the only poems out of a total of seventy-seven in the two collections to be separately pre-published other than by the author (and the first of these had already appeared in the *Chapbook*).

explanation that MacDiarmid recycles as footnote to the second half of his title ('A field near Hawick') somewhat cheekily gives the impression that the stubbornness his poem celebrates – and finds an analogue for in the intractable phonology of Scots – has a local habitation known to the author some miles up the road from his native Langholm.

Elsewhere, a selection of entries from the alphabetically ordered 'Vocabulary' that makes up the main body of the *Word Book* is manipulated to conjure into being another of the most admired poems in *Sangschaw*:

> †AIREL, *sb*. I. 'An old name for a flute' (Jam.). Ld. 2. Musical notes of any kind. Rxb. [s.e. Sc. (1810). ? From E. *air*, tune.]
> ALUNT, *adv*. Rxb., G. In a flame or blazing state; on fire: 'A gleed had set the lum alunt' (Laidlaw, 34). [LUNT *sb*.]
> BYOUS. †I. *adj*. Marked, unusual; 'Its boughs are bus't in. . . byus green' (Halliday 261). 2. *adv*. Very, particularly: 'A byous clever callant.' *N* [Sc. (1823), *byous*, from E. *by*, + *-ous*.]
> DERKENIN', *sb*. G. *c*. Also *derknin', -ing* (Rxb., *N*-W), *darkening* (G). The evening twilight, or *gloaming*. [§ 34 A.]
> GORBLIN', *sb. N*, W-S. Also *gorbleen* (W) An unfledged bird: 'Gape, gorblins, an' A'll gie ee a worm' (playfully said on giving gifts to children). Cf. RAW *a*. 4. [So earlier s. Sc. (1728): Cf. GORLIN'.]
> †SLIGGY, *a.* Insinuating; plausible: 'The serpent's sliggy tongue, . . . When he did Eve beguile' (A. Scott[1] 83). [Cf. SLEGGY and E. *slick* plausible.]
> SPATRIL, *sb.* I. A musical note as printed on the score: 'Dots, and mystic spatrils' (A. Scott[1] 22). Rxb. §2. A spat or gaiter. Rxb., NE. [Sc. *spat* spot + E. *-rel* = I. E. *spat* (1802) = 2.]
> †WHURAM, *sb*. Rxb. I. 'A term applied to crotchets and quavers in singing' (Jam.). 2. Any ornamental piece of dress, [Cf. WHEERUM.][11]

'Ex Vermibus' (*CP*, p. 23) literalises the metaphorical injunction 'Gape, gorblins, an' A'll gie ee a worm' to present a materialist, non-transcendent twentieth-century counterpart to the medieval Chain of Being, as the wriggling worm offered to the hungry fledgeling in the first stanza ultimately fuels the intricate song by means of which the grown bird sets the heavens ablaze in the third. The dependence of the aesthetic realm upon the earthly, and the transfiguration in turn of the earthly by the aesthetic, are asserted in a brief poem that works primarily through sound, specifically the sound of Scots: to pronounce 'worm' in the non-rhotic, monosyllabic southern English manner would be to destroy not only the rhyme with 'whuram' but the link between earth and music that the lyric

[11] The dagger symbol indicates words or meanings Watson considered no longer current.

proposes and (as it were) enacts. In a typically enriching piece of intertextual play, MacDiarmid releases Watson's metaphor and the title's truncated version of the proverbial Latin phrase 'voces ex vermibus' (voices from worms) to take each other's measure. And yet, for all this richness, only the first pole of the duality that sustains the lyric comes from its linguistic elements, the second being supplied by the medieval conception of universal hierarchy these are deployed to overturn.

'A clud on the cantle o' Wheel-rig', an illustrative saying from the *Word Book*'s definition of CANTLE, is used to kick-start the vigorously Expressionist 'Wheelrig' (*CP*, p. 30), which inverts the pathetic fallacy by presenting a sentient landscape faced with a first-person subject struggling to keep up with its moods. Much of the lexis of 'Overinzievar' (*CP*, p. 22), too, derives from the 1923 Special Number, which is also where the poet found, under RA-RA-RAE, the song he adapted for the opening couplet of *A Drunk Man*'s famous 'Drums in the Walligate' lyric (*CP*, p. 98). In most of the instances cited, as in the early Scots work in general, the poetically generative element in the philological source tends to be a phrase rather than an individual word or words, brilliantly deployed though many of the discrete items of vocabulary are. In some cases MacDiarmid extracts from the chosen phrase implications discernible to any alert reader; in others he identifies possibilities of a less obviously 'intrinsic' nature, semantic opportunities which owe nearly everything to his own ingenuity in spotting – or creating – them. The locutions selected help facilitate a strong sense of voice, and are managed in such a way as to convey an impression both of character and setting.

Watson's and Wilson's books are minor in scale compared to John Jamieson's *An Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language*, which brought together the richest trove of Lowland words in existence before the appearance of the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* and *Scottish National Dictionary*, and to which, within weeks of composing 'The Watergaw', MacDiarmid turned in search of further lyric opportunities. Jamieson (1759–1838), an Edinburgh-based clergyman and antiquarian who had been collating examples of spoken as well as of written Scots since the 1780s, produced the first version of his *Dictionary* in two quarto volumes in 1808. A pair of equally bulky supplementary tomes followed in 1825. A partly cross-referenced second edition was published in 1846. John Longmuir (1803–83) and David Donaldson revised the entire work for the so-called 'Paisley' edition of 1879–82, running together the contents of the 1808 and 1825 publications in an alphabetically rationalised four-volume arrangement, and introducing hundreds of additional (predominantly literary) headwords and examples. The new headwords and their accompanying explanatory matter were printed within square brackets to signal they had not been collected by Jamieson himself. That this was

the edition MacDiarmid consulted in the public library at Montrose is indicated by his exploitation of such bracketed entries such as OOLIN (for the opening of *Penny Wheep*'s 'Blind Man's Luck' [*CP*, p. 46]).

His manifest preference for illustrative examples over headwords makes 'dictionary-dredging' a potentially misleading term for the poet's reiving of lexicographical compilations. *Penny Wheep*'s 'In Mysie's Bed'[12] offers an extreme instance of the way a MacDiarmid poem can arise from a dictionary specimen and yet ignore (or transform) the import of its source. The first stanza is reproduced almost verbatim from the (lightly edited) quotation from John Galt's *Ringan Gilhaize*[13] used by Jamieson to illustrate his second definition of BAA:

> 2. To bleat as a sheep, Ayrs.
> 'Zachariah Smylie's black ram – they had laid in Mysie's bed, and keepit frae baaing with a gude fothering of kail-blades, and a cloute soaken in milk.' R. Gilhaize, ii. 218.

The second, 'original' stanza duly finds rhymes for each of the four words granted end-of-line status by the arrangement of Galt's sentence into verse to create MacDiarmid's first quatrain. In the novel, the placing of the ram in old Mysie Gilmour's bed is part of a jest played on the English philanderer Lieutenant Swaby, who thinks he is on the way to a tryst with the sixteen-year-old Martha Swinton. Whether or not the poet understood that this was what the quotation referred to, he deployed it in his poem to suggest an entirely different set of circumstances; the ram now appears to be a symbol of sexual potency, tucked surreptitiously into a young woman's bed. It is left to the reader to surmise that this act of agrarian high jinks relates to a folk practice concerning courtship and the struggle for dominance between the sexes. Mysie, at any rate, is unbothered by the prank:

> Quo' Mysie, lauchin', 'Gin I s'ud wed
> He may be ca'd a man
> But I'll haud him as dumb, ye maun ha'e nae doot,
> As owt o' this ilk.' (*CP*, p. 58)

MacDiarmid's Mysie, significantly younger than Galt's, takes her laughing place as one of the cast of impressionistically sketched characters who inhabit the sometimes rustic but far from pastoral world of *Sangschaw* and *Penny Wheep*.

The multiplicity of personae in the lyrics, along with the range of emotions to which they give voice, should act as a warning against a

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[12] First published in the *Scottish Chapbook* in February 1923.

[13] John Galt, *Ringan Gilhaize or, The Covenanters* (3 vols.; Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1823), Vol. II, p. 218.

persistent critical tendency to treat MacDiarmid's early Scots work in terms of authorial psychology. Wonder, desire, sexual disgust, unflappable confidence, a young girl's hapless love, a deranged mother's grief, a bridegroom's brute sense of entitlement and an elderly widower's loneliness are among the feelings stylised. The small man's fantasy of crowing over a cornered bully in 'Focherty' (*CP*, p. 53) may involve a flourish of ironic self-portraiture, but the collective impact of the poems is to present us with a world as fictional as Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County. This is not to say that the verse bears no trace of its creator's experience. Evocations of life in the Borders recur, and it would be pedantic to insist that the poet speaks other than in *propria persona* through the *I* of 'Crowdieknowe' (*CP*, p. 26), a lyric about the graveyard in which many of his maternal relatives lie buried. A couple of examples may be cited, however, to exhibit the dangers of too confidently mapping the boundary between memory and intertext in the early work.

The subtitle 'Caretaker of Highland Shooting Lodge Loquitur' invites us to read 'The Day Before the Twelfth' (*CP*, p. 1239)[14] as a comic depiction of the newly married Grieves' consternation at the intrusion of yet another grouse shooting party from England into their Easter Ross idyll in the autumn of 1920. (The poet was employed as caretaker of Kildermorie Forest Lodge for eight months from late August of that year; his wife Peggy worked beside him for most of that time.) And yet the opening five lines turn out to have been modelled not on his own recollections but on those of the author of a passage from *Journal from London* quoted by Jamieson under two separate headwords, HANYIEL SLYP and LITHRY:

> In came sik a rangel o' gentles, and a lithry o' hanyiel slyps at their tail, that in a weaven the house wis gaen like Lawren-fair.

The memory/intertext balance can tip in the opposite direction as well, with autobiographical implication lurking in the least likely locations. 'The Blaward and the Skelly' (*CP*, p. 1212), the lesser of the two lyrics MacDiarmid concocted from Wilson's book (both printed in his *Dunfermline Press* article), twice rhymes the second noun of its title with the name Nelly. Kenneth Buthlay is hardly to be blamed for seeing the bathetic chime as evidence of surrender (albeit forced surrender) to literary convenience:

> *Blaward* (blue cornflower) and *skelly* (wild mustard, charlock) appear in a list of trees and plants in Wilson, and it looks as though the poet suffered a heavy defeat from the unfortunate rhyming

[14] *Scottish Nation*, 22 May 1923, p. 14. 'The Day Before the Twelfth' is among the more substantial of the twenty-seven already published Scots lyrics MacDiarmid chose to omit from *Sangschaw* and *Penny Wheep*.

> limitations of both words, especially the latter. Considering the rhymes available, *Nelly* is no doubt the least dismal of a bad lot, but it is not for nothing that we have the proverbial saying, 'Not on your Nelly'.[15]

Buthlay was not in a position to know that a woman called Nelly once held an important place in the poet's affections. Helen ('Nelly') Murray, a fellow-student of Grieve's at the Broughton Junior Student Centre, graduated MA (Hons) from Edinburgh University and became a teacher in Chigwell, Essex. A small manuscript deposit given to Edinburgh University Library after Nelly's death by her sister Ena MacRae is accompanied by a note from 'Brenda E. Moon, Librarian' to the effect that the poet was 'deeply attached' to Nelly and had been a 'frequent visitor' to her home at 92 East Claremont Street in the city. EUL E2001.33 contains three letters from Grieve to Murray, one written from Salonika in January 1918, and the others dating from his period of home leave in the summer of that year. The deposit also includes two poems, apparently from a slightly earlier phase of their friendship. One of these, 'Nelly in Dreams', like 'The Blaward and the Skelly', praises Nelly's eyes and hair.[16]

'Christopher Murray Grieve dived in at one end [of Jamieson's *Dictionary*] and Hugh MacDiarmid clambered ashore at the other': Norman MacCaig's comic aperçu brilliantly summarises the dramatic change that overtook Grieve's poetry in 1922 but it understates the willed and wide-ranging manner in which the new makar set about the task of enhancing his stock of Scots locutions.[17] He drew not just on lexicographical works but on regional studies such as Hugh Miller's *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland*, which supplied the verb *spales* along with the underlying narrative for 'Servant Girl's Bed' (*CP*, p. 65).[18] And his strictly lexicographical quests, while not quite exhaustive, went significantly further than existing accounts acknowledge. *Penny Wheep* (like *A Drunk Man*) seems indebted in places to the anthropologist Walter Gregor's *The Dialect of Banffshire: with a Glossary of Words not in Jamieson's Scottish Dictionary* (London: The Philological Society, 1866), one of those books with a catalogue addendum the poet found so hard to resist. Gregor's glossary had been substantially though not

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[15] Kenneth Buthlay, 'The Appreciation of the Golden Lyric: Early Scots Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid', *Scottish Literary Journal*, 2.1, July 1975, 41-66 (pp. 58-59).

[16] I am grateful to the late John Manson for bringing the Helen Murray material to my attention.

[17] Norman MacCaig, 'A Note on the Author', in Hugh MacDiarmid, *Scottish Eccentrics* (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1972), pp. v-x (p. vii).

[18] See Hugh Miller, *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland; or, The traditional history of Cromarty* (2nd ed., London: Johnstone and Hunter, 1850), p. 466.

comprehensively absorbed into the Paisley edition of *Jamieson*; the evidence, while not conclusive, suggests that MacDiarmid had intermittent recourse to the original before (demonstrably) using it for the closing stanzas of 'At the Sign of the Thistle' (*CP*, p. 277).[19] He certainly availed at an early stage of David Donaldson's *Supplement to Jamieson's Scottish Dictionary, with Memoir, and Introduction* (Paisley and London: Alexander Gardner, 1887), which he would mine more thoroughly nearly a decade later for 'Scots Unbound' (*CP*, p. 340), 'Whuchulls' (*CP*, p. 1089) and other lexically ostentatious works. He left some easily accessible word hoards undisturbed, however. James Colville's *Studies in Lowland Scots* (Edinburgh and London: William Green, 1909) would be a key source for the language of *To Circumjack Cencrastus*, 'Water Music' (*CP*, p. 333), 'Tarras' (*CP*, p. 337) and (again) 'Scots Unbound', but there is no trace of it in the lyrics. And, for all the impact of Sir James Wilson's first book on Scots to his 'conversion' to the language, MacDiarmid seems to have ignored its successors, *The Dialect of Robert Burns, as spoken in central Ayrshire* (London: Oxford University Press, 1923) and *The Dialects of Central Scotland* (OUP, 1926).

The involvement of major scholars of Scots in the generation and development of the *Oxford English Dictionary* is a reminder of the intimate kinship between the northern and southern British linguistic descendants of Anglo-Saxon – a major theme of Colville's book. English was the language in which MacDiarmid conducted not only most of his social interactions (in his adult years at least) but also his long career as a journalist and writer of discursive prose. His tendency to conscript his Scots poems for service in his political battles in support of Scottish independence should not blind us to those same poems' critical engagement with the language habits of the wider Anglosphere. The great majority of the lyrics sport English titles, and the locutions they scrutinise are frequently well known Anglophone proverbs and dead metaphors. 'In the Hedge-Back' (*CP*, p. 25) drives so inexorably towards its final stanza's literalisation of the underlying but unquoted phrase 'the earth moved' that the poem is perhaps best understood as a dynamic meditation on that euphemism. 'Empty Vessel' (*CP*, p. 66) exposes the misogyny implicit in the cliché 'empty vessels make most noise' by suggesting that the lament of the lyric's unfortunate young mother for her lost child has sufficient emotional depth to fill interstellar space. 'Hungry Waters' (*CP*, p. 52) creates an attractive children's poem on the basis of a term once employed in chemistry to denote the supposed capacity of distilled water to absorb

[19] The poem first appeared in the *Glasgow Herald* of 21 June 1926 (p. 8). TYAUVE and TYPE are printed a few lines away from each other on p. 202 of *The Dialect of Banffshire*.

minerals from vessels and containers to compensate for what had been lost in the process of purification. (In geology the phrase is still used for the power of swiftly flowing water to pick up sediment.) The customary singular became plural – and the import of the phrase saline – when the poet connected 'hungry water' to the first ('A kind of long seaweed') and third ('Applied to the hair of the head, when hanging in lank, tangled and separate locks') of Jamiesons's definitions of DABERLACK. 'In the Pantry' (*CP*, p. 33) brings an almost demonic literal-mindedness to bear upon a saying it remains content to allude to rather than reproduce: its exploration of the plight of 'a man' (l. 6) who has lost his proverbial appetite for life provides one of the poetry's more lurid exercises in defamiliarisation, successively likening land, sea, sun and moon to corrupted food.

That English as well as Scots dictionaries – or at least the most famous of Scotland's English dictionaries – could furnish source material for MacDiarmid's work in the northern tongue is hinted by 'Sea-Serpent' (*CP*, p. 48). The intertextual pyrotechnics of this middle-length poem link the serpent of the Ophite Gnostics (familiar to the poet via the theology of Vladimir Solovyov, 1853–1900) to the 'Midgard Snake' or World Serpent of Norse mythology[20] and also (arguably, at least) to the aquatic beast of the title as defined by the Rev. Thomas Davidson in a rare moment of jocosity: 'an enormous marine animal of serpent-like form, frequently seen and described by credulous sailors, imaginative landsmen, and common liars'.[21] Perhaps nothing illustrates the intricacy of the early work's lexicographical politics as amusingly as the little lyric 'Les Mammuques' (*CP*, p. 1222), published under the poet's patronym in the *Glasgow Herald* of 3 July 1923. A quotation from Randle Cotgrave's seventeenth-century *Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* in Jamieson's entry on

[20] See Heather O'Donoghue, *English Poetry and Old Norse Myth: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 175-80, for an illuminating discussion of MacDiarmid's use of Norse mythological imagery at various stages of his career.

[21] *Chambers's Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language, pronouncing, explanatory, etymological, with compound phrases, technical terms in use in the arts and sciences, colloquialisms, full appendices, and copiously illustrated*, edited by Rev Thomas Davidson (London and Edinburgh: W. & R. Chambers, 1901). The diction of such 'Synthetic English' poems as 'In the Caledonian Forest' (*CP*, p. 391) and 'Vestigia Nulla Retrorsum' (*CP*, p. 416) demonstrates that MacDiarmid used the revised and enlarged edition of 1931 when working on them in late 1933. He had evident recourse to *Chambers's* at other points in his life too, however, and the version the present writer saw him check at Brownsbank on 10 August 1974 was either the first edition or one of its early reprints, all of which feature the original's wine-red printed front cover with recessed Edwardian-style lettering.

MAMUK provided both the ornithological detail and the French title, bequeathing 'Les Mammuques' the distinction of being the only English poem in the oeuvre derived from the Scots *Etymological Dictionary*.

French, English, Scots . . . and sometimes a language to be found in no dictionary whatever:

Ke-uk, ke-uk, ke-uk, ki-kwaik. . . .

The neologistic hen-cackles that open the hyper-realist 'Farmer's Death' (*CP*, p. 34) attest to MacDiarmid's faith in the power of utterance to assert and even embody particularity, the value his aesthetics and politics pit against abstraction and dud universalism. It is a value that implies plurality, and just as Scotland's status as a nation is contingent on the existence of other nations, so the exercises in rejuvenated Scots in the two Blackwoods collections rejoice in the company of poems in – and from – other languages. Hence the English ('In Glasgow', *CP*, p. 41) and French ('La Fourmiliere', *CP*, p. 41) lyrics with which *Sangschaw* concludes, and the three English poems, one with a Russian title, at the end of *Penny Wheep* ('A Herd of Does', *CP*, p. 75; '"U Samogo Moria"', *CP*, p. 76;[22] 'Your Immortal Memory, Burns!', *CP*, p. 77). Hence also the claims to competence in a range of European tongues signalled by the subtitular ascriptions that run through both books: 'After the German of . . .' (*CP*, pp. 22, 57), 'Suggested by the Russian of . . .' (*CP*, p. 29). 'After the Cretan' (*CP*, pp. 58, 59, 60), 'Suggested by the French of . . .' (*CP*, pp. 102,[23] 68). The starting point of all but one of the pieces thus introduced was a widely available (and therefore easily identifiable) English rendering of a continental original.[24] Before dismissing the subtitles as instances of bad

[22] The misspelling of 'Samogo' as 'Samago' in all printings up to and including *CP* replicates an error in MacDiarmid's *TLS* source. (See note 7.)

[23] 'Love: Suggested by the French of Edmund Rocher' does not appear in its *Penny Wheep* context in *CP*, though it is listed at the appropriate point in the Contents. Only the lightly revised and necessarily untitled version used in *A Drunk Man* is printed there.

[24] MacDiarmid's sources were *Contemporary French Poetry. Selected and Translated by Jethro Bithell* (London: Walter Scott, 1912); *Contemporary German Poetry: An Anthology chosen and translated by Babette Deutsch and Avrahm Yarmolinsky* (London: John Lane, 1923); Lucy M. J. Garnett, *Greek Folk Poesy: Annotated translations from the whole cycle of Romaic folk-verse and folk-prose, edited with essays in the Science of Folklore, Greek Folkspeech and the Survival of Paganism by J. S. Stuart-Glennie, M.A.* (Guildford: Printed for the Authors by Billing and Sons; and sold by David Nutt, 270, Strand, London, 1896); and *Modern Russian Poetry: An Anthology chosen and translated by Babette Deutsch and Avrahm Yarmolinsky* (London: John Lane, 1923). One of the eight poems presented by MacDiarmid as a translation owes nothing to any of these publications: the

faith, it is worth remembering that up to the end of 1926 or so Grieve continued to think of 'Hugh MacDiarmid' as a construct, and that the Caledonian *Übermensch* invented to take responsibility for the Scots poems might reasonably be expected to be more of a polyglot than his progenitor. [25] The citations of language of origin underscore the broader intertextual aspirations of the two volumes, while also serving the ends of the poet's cultural propaganda by nudging his lyric enterprise away from the Anglophone and British contexts customarily invoked for Scottish literary effort.

Translation makes a virtue of the practice of basing new texts on pre-existing ones; composition of the earliest among MacDiarmid's Scots lyrics might perhaps be said to have involved a species of translation, the transformation of prose dictionary samples into poetry. There, however, definitive verbal features of the finished artefact were determined by the wording of the source, which cannot to any comparable degree be the case with Scots poems worked up from English versions of European originals, where the source no longer supplies the lexis of the product. The fact that none of the 'After . . .' and 'Suggested by . . .' lyrics pre-dates late 1923 may indicate that it took a year or so for the poet to develop the capacity for untethered play with Lowland idioms required by the substantially different compositional process involved in the European adaptations.[26] In so consistently improving on their English medium models, nonetheless, the 'translations' exemplify the same stylistic continence and tonal self-possession that attended MacDiarmid's first resort to Scots. Two of them,

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allegedly Cretan lyric 'The Robber' (*CP*, p. 60) appears to have been confected to complement the pair of variations on Garnett that precede it.

[25] On its second appearance, in the *Scottish Chapbook* of October 1922, the originally anonymous 'The Watergaw' was assigned to 'Hugh M'Diarmid'. The name had already been used a couple of months earlier in the same magazine as cover for Grieve's quasi-autobiographical English trialogue 'Nisbet, an Interlude in Post War Glasgow' (published in two parts in the August and September issues). In newspapers and periodicals from late 1922 to the end of 1926 'Hugh M'Diarmid' was appended exclusively to writing in Scots. That Grieve was desirous of building a separate, parallel poetic career 'of his own' is indicated by the publication of fifty-two English poems under his patronym or initials during the same period.

[26] '"You Know Not Who I Am"', 'The Last Trump', 'Love' and 'The Dead Liebknecht' were printed in the final issue of *Scottish Chapbook* in November-December 1923. The remaining four 'After . . .' and 'Suggested by . . .' pieces in *Sangschaw* and *Penny Wheep* made their first appearance in those books. 'Peace' and 'Sorrow and Song', two further Scots translations from the last *Scottish Chapbook*, remained uncollected until *CP* (pp. 1238, 1239). Also passed over for the Blackwoods volumes was 'The Aerial City' (*Glasgow Herald*, 25 May 1925), which *CP* (p. 1053) makes available only in the idiosyncratically revised version that appeared in *Poetry Scotland* 4 (1949).

'Love' (*CP*, p. 102) and 'The Dead Liebknecht' (*CP*, p. 57), are as arresting as anything in *Sangschaw* and *Penny Wheep*. 'Love', despite its subtitle, owes little to Edmond Rocher (1873–1948), echoing no more than the closing phrase of 'Love Them All', a trite and misogynistic lyric reproduced (in the editor's English rendering) in the introduction to Bithell's anthology.[27] With the aid of Jamieson's entry on EASSIN, MacDiarmid converts this unpromising material into one of the career's most forceful rehearsals of the body-spirit dichotomy. The closing couplet's mimesis of orgasm and the sexualised language that pervades the poem foreshadow characteristic features of *A Drunk Man*, where 'Love' would in due course find a home. The alchemical power of the poet's Scots is in similarly glittering evidence in his adaptation of Deutsch and Yarmolinsky's mediation of a lyric by Rudolf Leonhardt (1889–1953) in memory of Karl Liebknecht, murdered leader of the January 1919 'Spartacist' uprising in Berlin. MacDiarmid's pun on 'lowsin' time' marks a typical flourish: taken as a compound, the two words denote no more than 'knocking-off time'; considered separately, they evoke the release from servitude that socialism promises 'workers a''. The sense of unfinished business and latent power in the image of the smiling corpse at the end of the poem is a function of the way another detail without precedent in the Deutsch and Yarmolinsky rendition – the word *yet* – makes the dead man's smile a continuing rather than merely momentary phenomenon. With its urban setting and Marxist sentiment, 'The Dead Liebknecht' both extends the referential range of the Scots lyrics and helps anchor their world in post-First World War modernity.

MacDiarmid referred to the original language of his two Greek adaptations and their bespoke companion piece as 'Cretan' presumably to assert the universality of dialect poetry and to highlight the representative nature – in European terms – of his own use of Scots. Italian, Turkish and Arabic residues make Cretan one of the most distinctive dialects of modern Greek. 'The Soldier and the Cypress Tree', however, the folk poem underlying the first and most substantial of the three *Penny Wheep* pieces, was composed not in the southern Aegean but in the Zagori region of Epirus in the north-west of the country – about as far from Crete as it is possible to be and still be in Greece.[28] 'Under the Greenwood Tree' (*CP*, p. 58) deploys the stanza form and characteristic sense of fatalism of the

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[27] *Contemporary French Poetry*, p. lxxix. The last four lines assert of women:

> They fill thy life with sorrows ever fresh;
> They are Eternal Beauty passing through
> Thy visions; they are flaring torches who
> Illume thee – and the miseries of thy flesh.

[28] See *Greek Folk Poesy*, p. 58.

traditional Scots ballad to release the poem incarcerated in Garnett's jaded Victorian diction. The phrase 'sodger laddie' associates the protagonist with the sentimental imperialist trope of the wandering Scottish soldier, the familiarity of the diction helping to naturalise the scene. The title nods both to Amiens's pastoral song in Act II Sc. 5 of *As You Like It* and to the atypically idyllic 1872 novel by Thomas Hardy to which it gave its name. MacDiarmid's substitution of greenwood tree for Garnett's cypress removes the original title's death symbolism only to render all the more poignant and unexpected his soldier's encounter with destiny under the shade of a plant conventionally identified with love and life. Though 'Under the Greenwood Tree' may strike the reader as one of the more conventional poems in *Penny Wheep*, its invocations of Shakespeare and Hardy and conflations of Greek and Scottish landscapes involve inter-textual play of a sophisticated and grimly ironic kind.

'The Three Fishes' (*CP*, p. 59) is just half the length of its (genuinely Cretan) prototype, classified by Garnett under the subheading 'magical'.[29] The Scots poem treats its source as no more than a starting point for a balladic parable of puberty and the transfer of a son's affections from mother to sexual partners. MacDiarmid's speaker retains an interest in all three girls, polygamously conflated as 'Love', whereas in the 1896 text only one of the 'mortal maidens' becomes an object of desire. The poet is unlikely to have known that a celebrated fellow-practitioner of the generation ahead of his own had already modelled a lyric on the same Garnett translation, though he was almost certainly familiar with the result. In 'The Song of Wandering Aengus' (1897) W. B. Yeats conspicuously tones down the source's phallic symbolism but preserves its concentration on an individual girl.[30]

The poem quoted to inaugurate our discussion of translation illustrates the fragility of the partition between 'Suggested by' and 'original' in *Sangschaw* and *Penny Wheep*. 'Farmer's Death' turns on the contrast between the extravagant vitality of the farmyard and the stillness of the house where the farmer has died, its juxtaposition of exterior and interior underpinned by the disparity between the bold figuration of the first and second lines of each quatrain and the bleakly matter-of-fact style of the third and fourth. The hallucinatory effect is heightened by incongruities of detail: the depiction of pig and midden ascribes a tail to the latter rather than the former, while, in a reversal of their customary associations with death and burial, worms are (twice) mentioned as food

[29] 'The Three Fishes', *Greek Folk Poesy*, p. 69.

[30] Yeats's debt to Garnett is noted in A. Norman Jeffares, *A Commentary on the Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968), pp. 66-67.

rather than feeders; the word 'corpse' occurs, as it were secondarily, in a figure of speech evoking the desolation of the house rather than as an acknowledgement of the presence of the farmer's body, explicit mention of which is deferred to the last two lines; the farmhouse itself, for all its stillness, is gendered feminine rather than neuter. Everything is taking place in a Borders setting akin to that of many of the other lyrics, one might think, yet the central image of the pig on the midden (ll. 5, 6 and 14) appears to have originated in Flanders: 'There is a famous sonnet of Verhaeren's which paints pigs rooting up a muck-heap, while the sun makes the liquid on their flanks shine like roses.' So notes Jethro Bithell, more or less in passing, in the introduction to his French anthology.[31] The sonnet in question is 'Les Porcs', from *Les Flamandes* (1893), the debut collection of the Francophone Flemish poet Emile Verhaeren (1855–1916).[32] Bithell's comment pertains to the second quatrain. The same editor had not included a version of the sonnet in the extensive representation he accorded Verhaeren in the Belgian predecessor to his French compilation.[33] It looks likely therefore that the coming together of pig, midden and sunlight in 'Farmer's Death' was indebted to the editorial reference rather than to the Verhaeren poem itself, whether in French or English, and that the Scots lyric owes its existence to MacDiarmid's fascination with the contradictory notion, thus relayed at second hand, of sharny pigs as a locus of radiance:

> The pig's doup skinkles like siller.

The contradiction is deftly particularised and heightened by the solitary status of the pig and the focus on its backside rather than flanks. 'Farmer's Death' provides an extreme, almost fantastical example of MacDiarmid's responsiveness to textual stimulus; though on show throughout *Sangschaw* and *Penny Wheep*, it is a responsiveness for which literary history offers little in the way of obvious precedent.

Verbal suggestibility of so rare a kind can leave commentary uncertain how to proceed: in the absence of an identifiable triggering text, the critic may fear an interpretation of a given piece will in due course be rendered irrelevant (or worse) by the emergence of the lexical formation that called it into being. It is possible that not only individual items but entire groups of poems exploring similar attitudes or perspectives may have issued from a specific verbal point of origin. Is there an allusive

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[31] *Contemporary French Poetry*, p. lxxiv.

[32] I am indebted to Will Stone for help in identifying 'Les Porcs'.

[33] *Contemporary Belgian Poetry. Selected and Translated by Jethro Bithell* (London: Walter Scott, 1911). The poem by George Ramaekers (1875–1955) on p. 124, lightly rendered into Scots, was to provide ll. 309-16 of *A Drunk Man* (*CP*, p. 92-93).

aspect, for example, to the interstellar distances repeatedly invoked in the lyrics as measures of human experience? So-called 'cosmic' imagery provides the early work's iconographical signature, featuring centrally in 'The Bonnie Broukit Bairn' (*CP*, p. 17), 'Au Clair de la Lune' (*CP*, p. 23), 'The Eemis Stane' (*CP*, p. 27), 'Somersault' (*CP*, p. 47), 'Scunner' (*CP*, p. 64) and 'Empty Vessel' (*CP*, p. 66). Interstellar space was much in the news in the 1920s as a consequence of the English astronomer Arthur Eddington's experimental demonstrations of the curvature of light as it passes through the solar system. Eddington's corroboration of Albert Einstein's theory of general relativity led not only to Einstein's ticker tape parade in New York and Nobel Prize for Physics (both 1921) but to a worldwide growth of interest in science in general and astronomy in particular. That the lyrics' cosmic vistas had a contextual dimension, therefore, cannot be doubted. Evidence that they may also have had an intertextual one is less compelling, but a vital fragment of what might be construed as such was to be furnished by the poet himself in 1930. A passage from the sequence he published that year hints that his short poems of half a decade earlier may have been composed in haunted awareness of Blaise Pascal's famous admission in *Pensées*:

> *Le silence eternel des ces espaces infinis m'effraie*.
> (The eternal silence of these infinite spaces terrifies me.)

The subsection of *Cencrastus* entitled 'The Head of Clanranald' (*CP*, p. 265) avails of a rhetoric of mountain summits to comment on key moments in the development of human self-understanding. It includes the lines (ll. 2797-98):

> The stance frae which Pascal
> Was fleggt at the stars. . . .

Is not this also the 'stance frae which' the universe is viewed again and again in *Sangschaw* and *Penny Wheep*? That 'stars' detail, so appropriate to the lyrics, was an addition by MacDiarmid, astronomical bodies going unmentioned in the 'espaces infinis' quotation itself. The modification may have been deliberate or the result of imperfect recall but one way or the other it links the seventeenth-century mathematician's observation to the poetry more strongly than a citation of stricter accuracy would have done.

Apprehensions of a universe from which the deity has withdrawn co-exist in the Blackwoods collections with the traditional Christian tropes of Nativity, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Day of Judgement. The two concerns are brought into relationship in 'The Innumerable Christ' (*CP*, p. 32), a lyric that vividly conjures immense distances of space and time as it explores the implications of new understandings of astronomy for old narratives of redemption. An epigraph advertises the poem's status as the unpacking of a thought from *Man and the Attainment of Immortality*, a

work of apologetics by the theologian, scientist and diplomat James Young Simpson (1873–1934):

> *Other stars may have their Bethlehem, and their Calvary too.*

The thought originally took a slightly different form:

> other worlds may know their Bethlehem, and their Calvary too.[34]

The first of the two substitutions made by the poet in appropriating Simpson's conjecture for his epigraph was obviously germane to the stellar imagery of 'The Innumerable Christ' (ll. 2 and 5); tellingly perhaps, it was also proleptic of his addition to the Pascal citation in *Cencrastus*.

'The Following Day' (*CP*, p. 8), from *Annals of the Five Senses*, inaugurated a series of reflections on the meaning of the life and death of Christ that was to run through the work up to the *Stony Limits* volume of 1934, achieving most prominence in *A Drunk Man* and the autobiographically inflected poetry of the early 1930s. 'I Heard Christ Sing' (*CP*, p. 18), at eighty-six lines the second longest item in *Sangschaw*, and 'Bombinations of a Chimæra' (*CP*, p. 60), at one hundred and ten the longest in *Penny Wheep*, constitute the major manifestations of the theme in the early Scots phase of the career. Both are intertextual to the not insignificant extent of being difficult to understand in the absence of awareness of the works to which they refer. The first is a dramatised meditation on an apocryphal account of Christ's singing and leading his disciples in a circular dance shortly before his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. The source is Chapters 94-97 of the Acts of John, which MacDiarmid had presumably come across in M. R. James's *Apocryphal New Testament*, as directly contemporary a publication as Simpson's study.[35] The second takes the form of a series of dubious paradoxes and

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[34] James Y. Simpson, *Man and the Attainment of Immortality* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923), p. 315. Simpson's book was reviewed by the poet in the *Glasgow Herald* two years before the publication of *Sangschaw*. See C. M. Grieve, 'A Russo-Scottish Parallelism: Solovyov and Professor J. Y. Simpson', *Glasgow Herald*, 17 March 1923, p. 6; collected in *Hugh MacDiarmid, Selected Essays, edited with an introduction by Duncan Glen* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), pp. 38-43.

[35] *The Apocryphal New Testament: Being the Apocryphal Gospels, Acts, Epistles & Apocalypses with other narratives & fragments newly translated by Montague Rhodes James* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), pp. 253-54. A letter of 12 May 1925 to Herbert Grierson describing the Acts of John as 'recently discovered' attests to the poet's sometimes astonishingly poor intellectual grasp of materials he was nevertheless able to turn to creative account. (Far from being recently discovered, the second-century Acts had been condemned at the Council of Nicaea in AD 787 for promoting the heretical, 'Docetic' belief that Christ's physical body was illusory.) See Alan Bold, ed., *The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984), p. 309.

antinomies inspired by the title of a fictitious learned tract in the catalogue of St Victor's library, as reported in *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Book II, Chapter 7: '*Quæstio Subtilissima, utrum Chimæra in vacuo bombinans possit comedere secundas intentiones; et fuit debatata per decem hebdomadas in Consilio Contantiensi.*' Rabelais's parodic Latin, which pokes fun at the arcane abstractions of scholastic philosophy, may be translated: 'The Most Subtle Question, whether a Chimæra bombinating in a vacuum can consume second intentions; as was debated for ten weeks in the Council of Constance.'

Allusions to scripture (of the canonical rather than apocryphal variety) recur throughout *Sangschaw* and *Penny Wheep*. Many are to Genesis, which, as we shall see, underlies 'The Watergaw', and which the poet was to exploit for a major seam of symbolic imagery in the poetry of the early 1930s. While the opening book of the Old Testament is echoed more or less unproblematically in 'Ballad of the Five Senses' (*CP*, p. 36), 'Sea-Serpent' (*CP*, p. 48), 'Parley of Beasts' (*CP*, p. 54) and elsewhere, its apparent citation in the title of 'God Takes a Rest' (*CP*, p. 32) turns out to be illusory, as the lyric itself offers not a reflection on the Creator's respite on the seventh day (as per Genesis 2. 2) but rather a fantasy of divine withdrawal from the cosmos. More distinctly perverse is the interrogation of Matthew 5. 39 in 'Bombinations of a Chimæra'. That poem's ten numbered speculations – or buzzings of a creature of fancy, if the title is to be believed – focus on the first part only (the three words before the colon) of Christ's seminal injunction to his disciples: 'But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.' The departures from orthodoxy in 'Bombinations' are niggling and even pedantic. And yet the paradoxes marshalled so chimerically there, for all their tameness, paved the way for the agonised heterodoxies of *A Drunk Man*, where the protagonist's embodied, individuated voice gives heft to the sequence's violently contradictory meditations on the mystery of the simultaneous divinity and humanity of Christ – a mystery treated in turn as an analogue of the speaker's inability to reconcile the physical and spiritual dimensions of his own nature.

Like much that is most vital in the lyrics, the scriptural simile that forms the climax of 'Somersault' owes its force to sheer surprise. The unexpectedness of the comparison of planet Earth's unstoppable rotation to the suicidal rush of the Gadarene swine (Mark 5, Luke 8. 26-39) is buttressed by the farfetched rhyme with 'Gadara' and the contrast effected thereby between scripture's demonically possessed pigs and the farmyard's dependable sow:

> The West whuds doon
> Like the pigs at Gadara,
> But the East's aye there

Like a sow at the farrow.

Perhaps the most potent (because most surprising) of all allusive moments in MacDiarmid's early Christological poems occurs at the end of 'I Heard Christ Sing' (ll. 85-86), where the key reference is not to scripture, either canonical or apocryphal, but rather to a notorious incident in medieval Scottish history:

> Judas and Christ stude face to face,
> And mair I couldna see,
> But I wot he did God's will wha made
> Siccar o' Calvary.

These climactic lines give the violence of the Crucifixion its grim due by way of their adaptation of the infamous words of Sir Roger de Kirkpatrick of Closeburn, who murdered John 'The Red' Comyn, Lord of Badenoch, before the high altar of Greyfriars in Dumfries on 10 February 1306. Tradition holds that when Robert the Bruce emerged from the church to announce to his companions that he had wounded Comyn, his rival for the Scottish throne, he added, 'I doubt I have slain [him]'. Kirkpatrick responded, 'You doubt? Then I'll mak' siccar', before rushing into the church and stabbing Comyn through the heart. Such sudden juxtapositions of disparate worlds are characteristic of MacDiarmid's poetry at its most spirited; their kinship to the startling figurative collisions of seventeenth-century English 'metaphysical' verse is presumably what led an anonymous admirer to hail the poet as 'a Doric Donne'.[36]

Easily the most allusive poem in the Blackwoods collections is *Penny Wheep*'s 'Gairmscoile' (*CP*, p. 72), which goes some way towards advertising its status as such by studding its lines with the names of famous writers – (Henrik Arnold) Wergeland, (G. K.) Chesterton, (Francis) Jammes, (Thomas) Carlyle – alongside those of contemporary and now forgotten versifiers despised by the poet, (Gilbert) Rae, (John Smellie) Martin and (John S.) Sutherland. A longer version in the final issue (2.3, November-December 1923) of the *Scottish Chapbook* had been accompanied by footnotes explicating these and other references.[37] In both embodiments the poem is unusually discursive by the standards of the early work, and the allusions do little beyond enriching its informational content – they have neither the association-generating nor ironising

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[36] See unsigned review of *The Lucky Bag*, *Scots Observer*, 2 July 1927, p. 4. The comparison was restated (again anonymously) in the same paper four months later (5 November), when, under the sub-heading 'A Doric Donne' on p. 12, MacDiarmid was described as 'leading us back from vulgarly conventional hieroglyphs to the true alphabet of Scots poetry'.

[37] See *CP*, p. 1234-25 for the discarded passages and their accompanying annotations.

functions of the intertexts already discussed. The citation embedded in the new title is another matter, however. The cumbersome original title – 'Braid Scots: An Inventory and Appraisement' – had deferred to the terminology for Scots used by the Vernacular Circle of the London Burns Club; by the time MacDiarmid came to revise the piece for collection in 1926, however, he had long since concluded that support for his endeavours would never be forthcoming from the 'official' Scotland of gentlemen's societies and Burns Clubs. He had in the intervening period encountered the Irish compound noun 'gairmscoile' (*lit.* schoolcall) – the word applied to a summons to a poetic school – in Daniel Corkery's *The Hidden Ireland*, a book that would make an important contribution to his evolving sense of the Gaelic world and of the overlapping poetic histories of Ireland and the Highlands.[38] The shortened poem packs considerably more punch than its slightly rambling prototype, and the new title completes its transformation from bookish reflection to rallying cry. Recourse to a Celtic language for the name of a poem urging release of the latent power of one of the archipelago's Teutonic tongues reflected MacDiarmid's linguistic pluralism along with his disdain for what he saw as the Anglo-Saxon supremacism inherent in conventional commentary on the Scots language and Scottish literature. In particular, it underscored his repudiation of the notion that the Lowlands and the Highlands and their associated poetries should be thought of as mutually antagonistic. That he used an Irish rather than a Scottish Gaelic or even a Welsh/Brythonic word was of political significance in the Scotland of the 1920s, a time of widespread anti-Irish prejudice. Immigrant labourers from Ireland had made a major contribution to the industrial and commercial expansion of the country in the previous century. In 1923 the Church and Nation Committee of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland responded to the secession of the larger part of Ireland from the Union by adopting a report called *The Menace of the Irish Race to Our Scottish Nationality*, a document that argued, *inter alia*, for repatriation of Irish Catholic 'undesirables'. The beleaguered civilisation depicted so vividly in *The Hidden Ireland* was definitively a Catholic as well as a Gaelic one, oppressed by the very 1689 settlement that laid the ground for the Scottish Union of 1707. The choice of 'Gairmscoile' as title, then, is to be understood not only in relation to the ending of the poet's brief dalliance with the Burns movement but also in the broader context of his rejection of

[38] See Daniel Corkery, *The Hidden Ireland: A Study of Gaelic Munster in the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1924), p. 256. Gaeldom emerges as a major concern of MacDiarmid's about a third of the way through *Cencrastus* and provides the focus of some of his most ambitious poems from 1934's 'Lament for the Great Music' (*CP*, p. 462) onwards.

the values of a conservative, unionist, aggressively Protestant cultural establishment. But how was his audience to know this? The nuances of cultural politics in 'Gairmscoile' were almost inevitably lost on readers of *Penny Wheep*, which offered neither a gloss on the title nor a key to the poem's references to French, English, Norwegian, German and Icelandic literature. (Though MacDiarmid could be single-minded to the point of obsession in creating his poems, he was almost always too busy with his next project or otherwise too preoccupied to devote adequate attention to curating them.)

Readers with a passing knowledge of British poetry in the decades leading up to the publication of *Penny Wheep* would have needed no editorial nudge to help them figure out what is going on in 'Guid Conceit' (*CP*, p. 58), a riposte to 'The Good Conceit' (1899), an anti-Scottish squib by the ultra-conservative English controversialist Thomas William Hodgson Crosland (1865–1924). Crosland's lyric, in turn a parody of W. E. Henley's wildly popular 'Invictus', exploits the Scottish English phrase 'to have a good conceit of oneself' to indict Scots for what it implies is their propensity towards self-regard. The speaker of MacDiarmid's little poem, however, exhibits not vanity but joyful optimism in relation to spiritual possibility. (The favouring of Scots over English for the title constitutes an important component of the lyric's repudiation of its Southron intertext.) The cloud of Crosland's opening line[39] reappears at the end of MacDiarmid's quatrain, its presence there in the company of a jubilant capercailyie being indebted to the same *Jamieson* entry as the immediately preceding poem in *Penny Wheep*, 'In Mysie's Bed'.[40]

Classical mythology, literature and history, reference points as 'naturally' available to contemporaries like Eliot and Auden as they had been to Tennyson and Pope in earlier centuries, are almost entirely missing from MacDiarmid's allusive palette. Iain Crichton Smith has speculated that the fact that the poet was in important respects self-educated may account for their absence, as in the case of Blake.[41] The prominence of Greek mythology in 'Morning' (*CP*, p. 58), therefore, is unusual, even if

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[39] The first of the four stanzas of 'The Good Conceit' reads:

> Out of the cloud that covers me
> And blots the stars and seldom lifts,
> I thank whatever gods may be
> For my indubitable gifts.

[40] 'I had scarcely ceased *baaing* as a calf, when I found myself a beautiful capercailyie, winging the winter cloud' (from James Hogg's *The Perils of Man*, one of Jamieson's illustrations for BAA).

[41] See Iain Crichton Smith, 'The Golden Lyric: An Essay on the Poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid', in Duncan Glen, ed., *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Critical Survey* (Edinburgh and London: Scottish Academic Press, 1972), pp. 124-40 (p. 131).

classical antiquity is invoked only for its high-falutin' imaginings to be cut down to size:

> The Day loups up (for she kens richt weel
> Owre lang wi' the Nicht she mauna lig)
> And plunks the sun i' the lift since mair
> Like a paddle-doo i' the raim-pig.

According to myth, Eos, goddess of dawn, let daylight in to flood the earth every morning when she opened the gates of heaven with her roseate fingers (hence her stock Homeric epithet *rhododaktylos*, 'rosy-fingered'). The goddess was associated with licentiousness, having been cursed with insatiable desire by a jealous Aphrodite as punishment for her liaison with Ares, god of war. MacDiarmid democratises and de-etherealises the Hellenic representation of the cyclical advent of daylight by reformulating it in terms of Scottish rural life. His 'The Day' (rather than Dawn) is a servant girl who has been sleeping illicitly with 'the Nicht'; she has to rise early to conceal the relationship (as the almost violent suddenness of 'loups' attests) before getting ahead with her routine duties, the first of which she discharges by unceremoniously plopping the sun into the sky like a frog into a cream jug. The materialist comedy of 'Morning' is rooted in the expectation that the reader will be at once revolted and amused to hear of the traditional practice of using the flailings of a live frog in cream to make butter. The last line's unfamiliar vocabulary and ready-made image, almost certainly the initial motor of the poem's composition, were supplied by the Paisley edition, whence they had arrived via Gregor's *The Dialect of Banffshire*. MacDiarmid may have been aware also of the latter writer's genial account, in one of his subsequent publications, of the butter-making technique referred to in his 1866 glossary.[42] And yet it must be insisted that the found materials did not make the poem, which perfectly encapsulates the double character of MacDiarmid's intertextuality: the homely lexis of the last line was raised to the condition of poetry only when the poet successfully executed an unlikely connection between the quaint practice alluded to in that lexis and the carryings on of the ancient gods.

The poems of *Sangschaw* and *Penny Wheep* point to external texts in various ways other than those already mentioned. 'Country Life' (*CP*, p. 31), for example, takes its sardonic title from that of the (still extant) weekly founded in 1897 to meet public demand for idyllic portrayal of the homes, gardens and outdoor pursuits of the British landed classes. The

[42] See Walter Gregor, *Notes on the Folk-Lore of the North-East of Scotland* (London: Published for the Folk-Lore Society by Elliot Stock, 1881), p. 194.

phrase 'fidgin' fu' fain' in 'Wheelrig', meanwhile, echoes one of the best-known lines of Robert Burns:

> Ev'n Satan glowr'd, and fidged fu' fain.[43]

In deploying literary quotations as epigraphic prompts to interpretation, 'Au Clair de la Lune' and 'Sea-Serpent' follow the example of T. S. Eliot, who had recently revived that intermittent feature of Romantic and Victorian poetry, albeit with more pointed irony than is manifest in these particular instances. The rural fare the speaker of 'Supper to God' (*CP*, p. 70) proposes to set before the deity derives either from Jamieson or from the famous lexicographer's source, a much anthologised song: where two possible points of origin for MacDiarmid's diction are identifiable, it can be difficult to decide which of them has the stronger claim. '*[P]owsoudie or drummock, / Lapper-milk kebbuck and farle*', at any rate, the food words rehearsed in the lyric's flight of gleefully uncelestial fancy, were first served up in 'The Blythsome Wedding' (sometimes called 'The Blythesome Bridal'), a comic narrative song of enduring popularity and uncertain authorship:[44]

> There will be Tarten, Dragen and Brachen,
> and fouth of good gappoks of Skate,
> Pow-sodie, and Drammock, and Crowdie,
> and callour Nout-feet in a Plate. . .
> * * *
> There will be good lapper'd-milk Kebucks
> and Sowens and Farles, and Baps. . . .[45]

Fragments of the quoted passage crop up here and there across the Jamieson volumes but the concentration of details from it in 'Supper to God' may indicate that MacDiarmid drew his wording directly from the song itself.

In *An Introduction to the History of Poetry in Scotland* (1798) Alexander Campbell described 'The Blythsome Wedding' as 'the first of the Sangs of the Lowlands to be met with in print'.[46] Campbell's comment makes mention of the song an appropriate point at which to initiate discussion of the most persistent variety of allusion/citation in *Sangschaw* and *Penny Wheep*, the stream of references to songs, ballads, singing and

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[43] *Tam o' Shanter*, l. 185.

[44] It has been attributed to Robert Sempill of Beltrees (*c.* 1595–*c.* 1663) and Sir William Scott of Thirlestane (1645–1725), among others.

[45] *Watson's Choice Collection of Comic and Serious Scots Poems*, in Three Parts, 1706, 1709, 1711, in One Volume, Reprinted for Private Circulation (Glasgow: Maurice Ogle and Co., 1869), Part I, p. 10.

[46] Quoted by the unnamed editor in the General Index to the 1869 edition of *Watson's Choice Collection*, p. xiii.

music that flows through both volumes, particularly the first, where it incorporates itself in the very title. The 1925 collection was originally to have been called *Penny Wheep* but on 30 April of that year the poet informed his publishers that 'friends have suggested that *Sangschaw* would be a better title . . . [and] I am inclined to agree with them'.[47] The noun thus belatedly chosen to name MacDiarmid's debut is spiky with martial implication, having been modelled on *wappenschaw*, a display or muster of men-in-arms. *Sangschaw* was intended, then, as no innocuous exhibition of lyrics. And yet, for all its swagger, the 'schaw' element of the word was demonstrably of less importance to the author than the commodity being put on show, 'Sang'. Song is a stock, even jaded synonym for poem, and one to which MacDiarmid was to have continued if not altogether happy recourse long after his poetry had dispensed with musical principles of organisation. There is little jaded about the conflation of the categories in the Blackwoods books, though, for the simple reason that the contents of both collections repeatedly exhibit the musical qualities they praise (albeit in the restricted, primarily rhythmical way in which poems can be termed 'musical'). Curiously perhaps, the moment that most explicitly connects song to the author's own poetic practice occurs in the sole English poem in *Sangschaw*, 'In Glasgow' (*CP*, p. 41), where the consequences of inadequately serving a lyric gift are imagined in terms of the squalor and shapelessness of Scotland's largest city:

> I'd rather cease from singing,
> Than make by singing wrong
> An ultimate Cowcaddens
> Or Gorbals of a song.

Such self-reflexive anxiety is atypical of the volumes, however.

Singing features in the title, first line and much of the narrative of 'I Heard Christ Sing'. The heavens are set alight by the grown bird's 'slee and sliggy sang' in 'Ex Vermibus'. With its 'Hey, nonny, nonny' refrain, 'Reid E'en' (*CP*, p. 26) comprises a little replica song, while 'O Jesu Parvule' (*CP*, p. 31) takes the form of a lullaby in which Mary 'sings' to the infant Jesus. The protagonist's innocent singing in 'The Love-Sick Lass' (*CP*, p. 55) represents the opposite of the experience-heavy 'sabbing' to which it gives way. The urchin who whips the earth like a spinning top in 'Whip-the-World' (*CP*, p. 35), meanwhile, 'lays on wi' his sang'; the poem proceeds to envisage planetary rotation as a song in constant danger of faltering. 'Bombinations of a Chimaera' (*CP*, p. 64) culminates on an apparent claim to numinous experience, the stanzas that lodge the claim comparing themselves to a song so '*Fu' o' elation*' as to be capable of

[47] *Letters*, p. 337.

rousing the sleeping giants of legend. The tale of eerie, disembodied singing and piping told by the bluntly named 'Song' (*CP*, p. 48) stresses the shared physical basis of vocal and instrumental music. As if to illustrate the point, the post-apocalyptic singer of 'Krang' (*CP*, p. 69) expects no accompaniment other than the wind-harp to which the world's skeletal remains have been reduced. Instrumental music of a richer and more ambitious kind is invoked by the speaker of 'Sea-Serpent', who feels like 'A'e note in a symphony' (*CP*, p. 50) when aligned with the movements of the world-encompassing reptile of the title. Later in the poem, the first stirrings of Creation are likened to 'a trumpet-stang' (p. 50) in God's brain. The final moments of the world thus created will in due course be announced by the same instrument, its music obligingly pre-sounded in 'The Last Trump' (*CP*, p. 29):

> Toote-ootle-ootle-oo.
> Tootle-oo.

Allusions to individual songs and ballads add nuance to some of the best known among the lyrics. Mention has already been made to the way the title's invocation of the first of Amiens's songs in *As You Like It* deepens the pathos of 'Under the Greenwood Tree'. The lyric suite 'Au Claire de la Lune' is not only named after the still popular eighteenth-century French children's song, but, by offering a less than fully comprehending commentary on startling revelations by moonlight, it playfully shadows that song's teasing, half-knowing narrative of sexual encounter. (The spinning top image of the second poem and the title of the third – 'The Man in the Moon' – may be thought to conjure something of the chanson's child-world.) 'Servant Girl's Bed' (*CP*, p. 65) alludes to – or, at the very least, borrows from – a much more sombre song, the little known traditional ballad 'Fause Jamie', which MacDiarmid almost certainly came across in Miller's *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland*.[48] The lyric's opening lines ('The talla spales / And the licht loups oot'), its candle figuration and its vignette of dangerously unguarded sexual passion all derive from the ballad, which tells of the death of a pregnant country girl after her abandonment by her farmer lover in favour of a 'richer joe'. The marriage celebrations in 'the farmer's ha'' are subject to a sudden double omen as, in her shieling elsewhere in the neighbourhood, the dead girl's mother sews her shroud:

> An' a spale on the candil turn'd to the bride,
> An' a coffin loup'd frae the fire.[49]

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[48] The ballad is printed at the end of Chapter XXXI (see pp. 465-66). I can find no other source for it.

[49] *Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland*, p. 466.

(In a reminder of the overlap between the lyrics' various categories of allusion, 'Servant Girl's Bed' contributes to their series of interrogations of proverbial phrases – in this case 'to burn the candle at both ends' – as well as to their network of song references.)

Sangschaw begins with a citation of a much less obscure ballad. MacDiarmid would almost certainly have expected the more alert among his readers to pick up the echo of 'Jamie Douglas' (Child 204*A*) in the first two lines of 'The Bonnie Broukit Bairn' ('Mars is braw in crammasy, / Venus in a green silk goun'):

> I was a lady of high renown
> As lived in the north countrie;
> I was a lady of high renown
> Whan Earl Douglas loved me.
>
> Whan we came through Glasgow toun,
> We war a comely sight to see;
> My gude lord in velvet green,
> And I mysel in cramasie.

Few commentators would dispute that the trajectory of the poetry from *Sangschaw* to *In Memoriam James Joyce* lends a measure of substance to Iain Crichton Smith's observation that MacDiarmid 'began as a poet with both a masculine and feminine sensibility and eventually allowed the masculine elements in himself to dominate his work.'[50] What Smith arguably missed, however, was the self-consciousness of the early work's interest in gender in general and femininity in particular, an interest reflected in the lyrics' many acts of cross-gendering, and one which as good as announces itself in the female/male reversal of the opening of 'The Bonnie Broukit Bairn'.[51] 'Jamie Douglas' is not the only song referred to in the lyric. The title remodels (and de-genders) that of 'The Bonny Brucket Lassie', a notoriously banal eighteenth-century reconstruction of a traditional song. The *Jamieson* entry on BROUKIT, BROOKED, BRUCKIT quotes a comment by the music publisher George Thomson (1757–1851) agreeing with Burns that the old air needed new words to replace the five-stanza lyric by James Tytler (1745–1804): '*The bonie*

[50] 'The Golden Lyric', p.135.

[51] The lyrics are notably concerned with female experience, whether in the first person ('Cloudburst and Soaring Moon', *CP*, p. 46; 'Locked', *CP*, p. 51; 'The Robber'), the second ('Servant Girl's Bed'), the third ('Cophetua', *CP*, p. 30; 'The Currant Bush', *CP*, p. 46; 'The Love-Sick Lass', 'Morning', 'Empty Vessel'), or a mixture of the first and third ('The Fairmer's Lass', *CP*, p. 66; 'In Mysie's Bed', 'O Jesu Parvule'). It is instructive to consider these poems in the light of the author's earlier, somewhat clumsy assumption of a female persona in the *Annals* sketch 'The-Never-Yet- Explored' (*Annals of the Five Senses and Other Stories, Sketches and Plays*, pp. 71-86).

bruket Lassie, certainly deserves better verses, and I hope you will match her'.[52] Belatedly rising to the publisher's bait, MacDiarmid dispenses with the song and writes instead a short 'cosmic' page-lyric where the focus moves down the sky, the social order and the page until it reaches the tear-streaked child of the title, who turns out to be planet Earth. Everything works impressionistically – quite where, on the human/social dimension of the poem's informing metaphor, the lavishly dressed planets are supposed to have gathered to indulge in privileged chatter is left to the reader to decide, as is the degree to which the child physically shares their presence.

'Empty Vessel', too, draws on the tradition of Scottish folksong, and again in a not entirely straightforward way. While the three lines from 'Jenny Nettles' quoted in *Jamieson* under KAIRNEY may have provided the lyric's starting point, the leap from the deranged girl's singing to Pythogoras's music of the spheres and Einstein's theory of general relativity appears to have been facilitated by MacDiarmid's engagement less with the song itself, one of the most persistently anthologised in Lowland tradition, than with various nineteenth-century discussions of it. (I have explored the unusually rich intertextual background of 'Empty Vessel' elsewhere.[53]) 'O Jesu Parvule' cites two songs, playing one off against the other in an implied critique of the patriarchalism of the poet's Calvinist inheritance. The phrase that provides the epigraph and refrain features at third hand in Jamieson under BALOW ('A lullaby'). MacDiarmid follows his source in using the abbreviation *Godly Ballates* to refer to a compilation which can perhaps to an extent be judged by its pugnaciously puritanical full title (if not its cover): *Ane Compendious Buik of Godly and Spiritual Sanges, collectit out of sundrye partes of the Scripture, with sundrye other Ballates changeit out of prophaine languis in godly Sangis for avoyding of Sin and Harlotry, with augmentation of syndrye gude and godly Ballates, not contenit in the first edition. Exactlie*

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[52] Tytler's verses, first published in *Scots Musical Museum*, I (1788), song 68, began with the earlier fragment:

> The bonny brucket lassie
> She's blue beneath the e'en.

Jamieson quotes Thomson's comment, 1 August 1793, from Currie, *Works* (1800), vol. IV, p. 85, responding to Burns, who wrote in July 1793 that 'the air deserves fine verses': see *Letters*, ed. Roy, vol. II, pp. 221, 243, and cf. Burns's scathing annotation on Tytler in Cromek, *Reliques of Robert Burns* (London: Cadell, 1808), p. 224. Burns provided the new verses, but, unlike MacDiarmid, did not incorporate the traditional fragment. See also *Songs for George Thomson* [*Oxford Edition of Robert Burns*, vol. IV], ed. Kirsteen McCue (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), p. 378.

[53] See Patrick Crotty, 'The Full Vessel: On an early MacDiarmid lyric', *The Dark Horse*, 46 (Winter 2022/23), pp. 115-20.

correctit and newlie printed in Edinburgh, be Robert Smith, dwelling at the Nether Bow, 1600. There is no evidence that the poet attempted to seek out the individual work in question, 'Ane Sang of the Birth of Christ'; had he done so he would scarcely have been surprised to find a metrically flatfooted 'sang' of sixty lines that takes pains to pay as little attention as possible to the mother allegedly doing the singing, besides failing to approach the condition of lullaby (singability, whether to the tune of *Baw lu la law* or any other). He is likely to have been responding to the (not entirely fair) reputation of the *Ballates* for bullish artlessness, then, rather than to the particulars of 'Ane Sang', when he composed a delicate Christmas carol which, by focusing on the sensibility of the Virgin, celebrates the *anima* that Carl Jung was later to suggest had been suppressed across northern Europe as a consequence of the Reformation.[54] The title (*trans.* 'O tiny Jesus') is taken from the first of three Latin apostrophes in the second stanza of the macaronic Latin-German carol 'In Dulci Jubilo', by the fourteenth-century Dominican friar Heinrich Seuse ('Henry Suso'). The poet may have been familiar with the piece by way of Robert Pearsall's still widely sung Latin-English version of 1834:

> *O Jesu parvule*,
> My heart is sore for Thee!
> Hear me, I beseech Thee,
> *O puer optime*;
> My praying let it reach Thee,
> *O princeps gloriae.*
> *Trahe me post te.*
> *Trahe me post te.*

It is possible, however, that he never heard the Pearsall translation and encountered 'In Dulci Jubilo' in what might be considered the least likely of quarters. The question of the derivation of his lyric's title is thrown wide open – and in a way that highlights the extreme uncertainty attendant upon the quest for textual sources – by the inclusion of a truncated Latin-Scots rendering of the Catholic carol in the *Godly Ballates*.[55] One way or another, MacDiarmid's interest in the Marian dimension of non-reformed

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[54] See, e.g., 'From "Answer to Job"' (1952), in *Jung: Selected Writings*, selected and introduced by Anthony Storr (London: Fontana, 1983), pp. 321-29 (pp. 321-27).

[55] The late nineteenth-century scholarly edition of the *Ballates* was presumably accessible in 1920s Montrose. See *A Compendious Book of Godly and Spiritual Songs, commonly known as 'The Gude and Godlie Ballatis', reprinted from the edition of 1567*, edited, with an introduction and notes by A. F. Mitchell DD LL.D (Edinburgh: printed by William Blackwood for the Scottish Text Society, 1897). 'Ane Sang of the Birth of Christ' appears on p. 49, and 'In Dulci Jubilo' (stripped of its Marian fourth stanza) on p. 53.

Christianity is a matter of record. His sentimental attraction to Catholicism had been put on embarrassing display in the *Scottish Chapbook* of October 1922 in 'Litany of the Blessed Virgin' (*CP*, p. 1216).[56] With its breathless regard for the ornamental diction of Marian devotion, misunderstanding of 'davidica'[57] and general air of over-excitement, that poem had unwittingly effected a parody rather than a recreation of the verbal richness of Catholic ritual. 'O Jesu Parvule', conversely, even if one of the slighter pieces in *Sangschaw*, is executed to perfection. The lyric's quiet celebration of a maternal love at once cosmically significant and touchingly human is at the furthest remove imaginable from the near-ludicrous attitudinising of 'Litany of the Blessed Virgin'. There could be no more vivid illustration than the contrast between the two poems of the way the turn to Scots granted MacDiarmid access not only to emotional and acoustic subtleties unprecedented in his previous output, but also – more mysteriously, perhaps – to an almost unerring instinct for perspective and angle of approach.

'O Jesu Parvule' advertises the two hymns to which it alludes before we get even as far as the first line. 'The Watergaw', by contrast, presents itself as a free-standing lyric, with no hint of quotation in its title, and no epigraph. On its initial appearance in 'North-Middle Scots', an article by C. M. Grieve in the *Dunfermline Press*, it was attributed to a 'friend staying with me the other weekend' who had

> busied himself for an hour or two with Sir James Wilson's *Lowland Scotch as Spoken in the Lower Strathearn District of Perthshire* . . . which . . . , owing to the war, had gone unread by me and was still uncut when my friend discovered it in the corner of a bookshelf.[58]

Lists of words and phrases pertaining to weather and time on p. 169 of Wilson's study include *weet nikht*, wet night; *oan ding*, beating rain or snow; *yow-trummul*, cold weather in July after shearing; *waatur-gaw*, indistinct rainbow; and *foarnuin*, morning, before 12 o'clock. *Aanturin*,

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[56] The sonnet, attributed to C. M. Grieve, featured as the third in a numbered sequence called 'Scots Catholic Choir' in the *Scottish Chapbook* 1.3, October 1922, p. 75. The others were by Jessie Annie Anderson (I, V) and John Ferguson (II, IV). A footnote (p. 74) described the sequence as 'Five sonnets representative of neo-Catholic tendencies in contemporary Scottish literature'.

[57] The Litany is a Latin call-and-response prayer of medieval origin in which each of fifty-one poetic invocations of Mary is answered by 'Ora pro nobis' (Pray for us). The second line of the sonnet (''Twixt towers of ivory and davidica') suggests that the poet took his cue for translating 'Turris Davidica' (Tower of David) from the invocation that follows it, 'Turris eburnean' (Tower of ivory), and concluded that davidica was a precious material of some sort.

[58] C. M. Grieve, 'North-Middle Scots', *Dunfermline Press*, 30 September 1922, p. 7. Reprinted in *The Raucle Tongue*, Volume I, pp. 30-33.

occasional, rare, is printed in the first column of the Dictionary section (p. 234), and *chittur*, shiver, chatter (with cold), eight pages later. A Proverbs and Sayings section offers on p. 190 *Dhur'z nay reek ee laivruk's hoos dhe-nikht*, There's no smoke in the lark's house to-night (said when the night is cold and stormy). Uncertain orthography and punctuation gave the first printed version of the lyric[59] a tentative quality of which there is little trace in the canonical text published in the *Scottish Chapbook* the following month:

The Watergaw

Ae weet forenicht i' the yow-trummle
I saw yon antrin thing,
A watergaw wi' its chitterin' licht
Ayont the on-ding;
An' I thocht o' the last wild look ye gied
Afore ye deed!

There was nae reek i' the laverock's hoose
That nicht – an' nane i' mine;
But I hae thocht o' that foolish licht
Ever sin' syne;
An' I think that mebbe at last I ken
What your look meant then.[60]

The literal meaning of 'yow-trummle', conspicuously withheld from Wilson's gloss, is activated so effectively by MacDiarmid that the *trembling* with cold of the shorn imaginary *ewe* reverberates through all that follows, presaging the shivering of the weak rainbow's light in the third line and setting the key for the entire poem's quivering on the brink

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[59] *The Water Gaw*

Ae weet fore-nicht in the yow-trummle
I saw yon antrin thing
– A water-gaw wi' its chitterin' licht
Ayont the on-ding;
An' I thocht o' the last wild leuk ye gied
Afore ye deid.

There was nae reek i' the laverock's hoose
That nicht – an' nane i' mine;
But I hae thocht o' that foolish licht
Ever sin syne;
An' I think that mabbe at last I ken
What your leuk meant then.

[60] Hugh M'Diarmid, 'The Watergaw', the *Scottish Chapbook* 1.3, October 1922, p. 61. All subsequent printings have reproduced the *Chapbook* text. The auxiliary verb in l. 9 will have an apostrophe ('ha'e') in the forthcoming *Complete Collected Poems*.

of a meaning it never quite discloses. The lyric's most nearly obvious intertext works both to clarify and deepen its mysteries:

> And God said, This *is* the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that *is* with you, for perpetual generations:
>
> I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.
>
> And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud:
>
> And I will remember my covenant, which *is* between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.
>
> Genesis 9. 12-15.

Much of the power of 'The Watergaw' derives from this half-hidden biblical allusion. The Genesis connection enhances the poem's aura of elemental force, not least by suggesting that the 'on-ding' of the unnamed person's death was a catastrophe comparable to the Deluge. It also reveals that the watergaw was 'antrin' in a sense beyond the obvious meteorological one of having been glimpsed *before* the downpour. If the watergaw is in some way a token of God's covenant that there will be no 'on-ding', then how can it have preceded the 'on-ding' the poem records? Does the dying person's 'last wild look' result from – or at the very least reflect – the inverted sequence of events? To say that the addressee has been granted insight into the reality or otherwise of the afterlife is to follow the prompts of the text – but also to say more than the text does. The 'chitterin'', uncertain state of the watergaw renders its status as a token friable and difficult to construe, unlike the firmly set divine rainbow whose meaning is openly explicated in the verses from Genesis. There are three separate temporal planes in the poem – the remembered dusk in which the speaker glimpsed the rainbow, the night further back in time when the addressee died, and the present of the concluding lines in which the speaker begins to appreciate the significance of the intermediate stage's rainbow for the dying person's 'last wild look'. A lyric made entirely of words invites us to speculate on the meaning of a communication from someone who no longer has power over words. Readers of early twentieth-century poetry may be stuck by the serendipitous chime between the end of 'The Watergaw' and the beginning of an even more famous (and in intertextual terms strongly Scottish) lyric written on a farm in South Shaftsbury, Vermont, in midsummer 1922 and still unpublished two

months or so later when a journalist in Montrose began tessellating words from Wilson's *Lowland Scotch*.[61] Compare

> An' I think that mebbe at last I ken

and

> Whose woods these are I think I know.

'The Watergaw' and Robert Frost's 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' may be very different poems where form and mood are concerned, but there are significant parallels between their modes of procedure. Both lyrics deploy a rhetoric of inclement weather to present the predicament of an isolated speaker, and a dialectic of estrangement and belonging at the narrative level of both cloaks a deeper concern with the inscrutability of experience and the limits of the knowable.

The manifestly 'exterior' lexical materials supplied by Wilson elicited from MacDiarmid a poem that, particularly in its revised version, makes an extraordinary impression of interiority. The subjectivity to which 'The Watergaw' admits us (or appears to admit us) can be understood as a construct of its language, indeed as a testament to the poetic power of that language. Commentators, however, have been eager to interpret the lyric as an exploration – even an emanation – of the poet's own psychology, and to treat it as an account of the premature death of his postman father James ('Jimmy') Grieve. MacDiarmid himself was hostile to such approaches. On 15 January 1975 he wrote to Edwin Morgan: 'I must tell you that "The Watergaw" was not written about my dying father – or the dying of any other person – and suffers I think because it can be read in that way'.[62] The poet was not incapable of dissembling, so his denial should not perhaps be taken as conclusive. The problem with identifying the lyric's addressee as James Grieve, however, is the lack of persuasive supporting evidence. A passage from a subsequent poem explicitly describing the demise of the

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[61] See Jay Parini, *Robert Frost: A Life* (London: William Heinemann, 1998), pp. 208, 212-13, for an account of the circumstances of the composition of Frost's lyric. Frost's mother, Isabelle ('Belle') Moodie, spent the first eleven years of her life in Leith before being sent by her grandparents to live with her uncle's family in Columbus, Ohio. She is said to have read and recited Scottish poetry to her children, and to have had a particular fondness for Burns, whose work is echoed twice in 'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening'. The incongruous circumstance of a horse's displaying more prudence than its master recalls *Tam o' Shanter*, while 'He gives his harness bells a shake' remodels 'And gae his bridle reins a shake' (from 'It Was a' for Our Rightfu' King').

[62] *Letters*, p. 677.

Langholm postman has been cast as a return to the scene evoked in 1922 lyric,[63] but the proposed link between the texts does not survive scrutiny:

> Afore he dee'd he turned and gied a lang
> Last look at pictures o' my brither and me
> Hung on the wa' aside the bed, I've heard
> My mither say. I wonder then what he
> Foresaw or hoped and hoo – or gin – it squares
> Wi' subsequent affairs.
> 'From Work in Progress' (*CP*, p. 1148).

The look of the dying person is connected unambiguously to hope and foresight here, rather than equivocally, as in 'The Watergaw'; and those qualities pertain now to nothing more mysterious than the earthly fortunes of the soon-to-be-departed's offspring. This second 'Last look' is a 'lang' rather than fleeting one, while – crucially – it lacks a 'wild' character. Indeed the noun 'look' is employed in slightly different senses in the two texts – in the lyric it refers (at least in part) to the mien of a dying person as perceived by another, in the more discursive poem to a dying person's sustained glance at empirical objects, photographs of Christopher and Andrew Grieve.

The attraction of identifying the addressee of 'The Watergaw' as James Grieve lies in its provision of an origin myth for the Scots poetry, and indeed for 'Hugh MacDiarmid'. Christopher Grieve's life was already in crisis in early 1911. On 27 January, the then eighteen-year-old was forced to discontinue his studies at the Broughton Junior Student Centre in Edinburgh as a consequence of a misdemeanour. The disgraced youth had still not returned from the capital a week later when (on 3 February) his father died unexpectedly at the family apartment in Langholm.[64] Various comments scattered through the work can be cited in support of the view that the poet inherited from these difficult circumstances a pressing need to justify himself to his father's memory. An entrenched misreading of 'The Watergaw' results from the unjustified application to the poem of (genuine) knowledge of the shadow cast over the author's life by the events of early 1911. Taking the death of James Grieve to be its subject allows for composition of the lyric to be seen as having somehow removed a psychological obstacle that had been in place for more than eleven years, thereby releasing powerful feelings that soon commenced their convenient

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[63] The connection was first made by Kenneth Buthlay. See 'The Appreciation of the Golden Lyric', pp. 55-56.

[64] See Alan Bold, *MacDiarmid, Christopher Murray Grieve: A Critical Biography* (London: John Murrray, 1988), p. 56; and Ruth McQuillan, *Hugh MacDiarmid: The Patrimony, A tale of the generations of men, and a golden lyric* (Edinburgh: Akros Publications, 1992), pp. 18-20.

overflow into the emotionally agile poems of *Sangschaw* and *Penny Wheep*. Such an understanding of the emergence of the lyrics and their attendant MacDiarmid persona rests on a Romantic, not to say sentimental, notion of poetic creation, and it is hardly surprising that the poet himself had no patience with it.

Nothing is as fatal to reductionist biographical interpretations of MacDiarmid's work as identification of the verbal sources of his poems. It is therefore something of an irony that the textual key that unlocks the mystery of the composition of 'The Watergaw' and exposes the fatuity of insisting that the lyric concerns the death of James Grieve was first brought to public attention by a devotee of the biographical approach. The independent scholar Ruth McQuillan was a first-rate researcher into the life of the poet, a scrupulous investigator, in particular, of his early years in Langholm and his Shetland sojourn of 1933–41. She was also a shrewd reader of the poems, albeit unshakeable in her insistence that the lyric under discussion 'reflects on a private and personal experience'.[65] When one of her students with a background in the ministry pointed out the similarities between 'The Watergaw' and the late nineteenth-century hymn 'O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go', McQuillan was moved to speculate on the possibility of the hymn's having been sung at the Toonfit Kirk in Langholm on the Sunday after James Grieve's death rather than to revise her reading of the poem in light of the startling new evidence.[66] That evidence is so strong it can almost be left speak for itself:

> O Love that wilt not let me go,
> I rest my weary soul in Thee;
> I give Thee back the life I owe,
> That in Thine ocean depths its flow
> May richer, fuller be.
>
> O Light that followest all my way,
> I yield my flickering torch to Thee;
> My heart restores its borrowed ray,
> That in Thy sunshine's blaze its day
> May brighter, fairer be.
>
> O Joy that seekest me through pain,
> I cannot close my heart to Thee;
> I trace the rainbow through the rain,
> And feel the promise is not vain
> That morn shall tearless be.
>
> O Cross that liftest up my head,
> I dare not ask to fly from Thee;

[65] *Hugh MacDiarmid: The Patrimony*, p. 24.
[66] *Hugh MacDiarmid: The Patrimony*, pp. 24-27.

I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be.[67]

The words of 'O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go' were written in the summer of 1882 by the blind Church of Scotland minister George Matheson (1842–1906) and published shortly thereafter in the ecclesiastical magazine *Life and Work*. The Church's Hymnal Committee invited the organist and composer Albert L. Peace (1844–1912) to set them to music. At the request of the Committee, Matheson agreed to alter his original's 'climbed' to 'trace', a change arguably of immense import to 'The Watergaw', as it introduces the notions of uncertainty and insecure apprehension that were to be stylised so masterfully in the lyric. The hymn achieved widespread currency almost as soon as it appeared in *The Scottish Hymnal* in 1885, and is still sung in the twenty-first century at Presbyterian and Methodist funerals. So popular did it become in the decades after composition, indeed, that in Jerusalem in the spring of 1904 'the representatives of fifty-five different Christian communions, gathered from twenty-six different nations of the world, united together to the number of 1800 in singing Matheson's famous hymn on the brows of Calvary'.[68]

MacDiarmid may have been familiar not only with the text of 'O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go' but also with aspects of the context of its composition. This is unsurprising in view of the public eminence of a divine whose 'fame was carried to the ends of the English-speaking world'.[69] It is conceivable – to put it no more strongly – that some of the details of meteorological disturbance in 'The Watergaw' may relate to the mental perturbation described in Matheson's own account of the composition of the words of his hymn:

> My hymn was composed in the manse of Innellan on the evening of the 6th of June 1882. I was at that time alone. It was the day of my sister's marriage, and the rest of the family were staying over night in Glasgow. Something had happened to me, which was known only to myself, and which caused me the most severe mental suffering. The hymn was the fruit of that suffering. It was the quickest bit of work I ever did in my life. I had the impression rather of having it dictated to me by some inward voice than of working it out myself. I am quite sure that the whole work was

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[67] *The Scottish Hymnal, with Tunes for Use in Churches, by Authority of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland* (London: T. Nelson and Sons,1885), p. 221.

[68] See D. Macmillan, *The Life of George Matheson* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907), p. 192.

[69] Obituary for George Matheson, *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Edinburgh* 26 (1), 1906, p. 551.

> completed in five minutes, and equally sure that it never received at my hands any retouching or correction. The Hymnal Committee of the Church of Scotland desired the change of one word.[70]

Whether or not the poem echoes that passage, it is beyond doubt that it 'reflects on' (to use McQuillan's phrase) Matheson's hymn. The rainbow almost but not quite apprehended through the rain in the hymn's third stanza provides the detail most obviously pertinent to 'The Watergaw', but there are others scarcely less significant. The second stanza's 'Light' and 'flickering' yield the lyric's 'chitterin' licht', while the pervasive concern with the promise of eternal life makes explicit something the poem insists on keeping below the threshold of articulation. The verb 'saw', almost the only lexical component in MacDiarmid's first four lines not to come from Wilson, notably intensifies but still clearly derives from Matheson's 'trace' , while incidentally (and perhaps less than felicitously) reminding us that the minister could not see. The lyric's 'on-ding' is stronger almost to the point of violence than the hymn's 'rain'.

If 'The Watergaw' is a reflection on 'O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go', 'O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go' is just as surely a reflection on Genesis 9. 12-15; indeed we might say that the poem makes its approach to the biblical text through the hymn rather than directly. The impact of MacDiarmid's poem is in no way diminished by awareness of the hymn whose meaning it plumbs in language borrowed from Sir James Wilson. On the contrary. Why then did the poet's denials of an autobiographical dimension to his famous inaugural lyric make no reference to the intertext from which it draws so much of its life? Fear of accusations of plagiarism and even anxiety about the authenticity of the compositional process involved – Romantic notions of inspiration die hard, after all – may have had something to do with his silence on the matter. What is clear at least from his comments both at the time of composition and subsequently was that he knew he had produced in 'The Watergaw' a remarkable poem. He knew also that he had created it by bringing disparate texts together, one of them providing the lexis and the other being a species of song. After such knowledge, *Sangschaw* and *Penny Wheep.*

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[70] *The Life of George Matheson*, p. 181.