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‘Scottish Poetry 1945-2010’

Alan Riach, from *British Literature since 1945*, ed. Edward Larrissey (Cambridge University Press, 2016)

After the Second World War, poetry in Scotland required regeneration. The Scottish Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s had been a major force of revitalisation, led by Hugh MacDiarmid (C.M. Grieve, 1892-1978), aligning poetry, literature and all the arts in Scotland with renewed political ambition for an independent nation. After the war, MacDiarmid was still a major force among the new generation of poets, but the younger men and women would not follow his lead in any direct sense, and in any case, MacDiarmid had nothing but disdain for disciples.

The prevailing imperative among the major poets who began publishing in the late 1940s, 1950s and 1960s was not one of nationalism but of individual voice, language and, crucially, location. Each had their own favoured terrain in different parts of Scotland, a geography of the imagination that made singular use of co-ordinate points drawn from their places of birth or upbringing, their societies and languages. Most of them were men.

The generation of poets who began publishing in the 1970s and 1980s, many of the best of them women, brought another kind of regeneration, in terms of gendered identity. These poets demonstrated that their perspectives and experiences as women were as valid and valuable as those of the men of the previous generation, from whom they had learned much, and further, that regardless of gender-experience, their enquiries and judgements were equally valid and vital. From the 1990s through to the twenty-first century, the increasing range of priorities and perspectives challenges any simplification of overall trend, but the general sense of multi-facetedness, plurality or diversity, within the changing dynamics of an increasingly self-aware, politicised nation, was repeatedly demonstrated by, and characteristic of, all the poets working in this era.

One book consolidates the immediate post-war situation: *Modern Scottish Poetry: An Anthology of the Scottish Renaissance 1920-1945* (1946), edited by Maurice Lindsay (1918-2009) published by Faber after a meeting with T.S. Eliot to confirm the commission.¹ It included MacDiarmid and his contemporaries who had been publishing before the war, Pittendrigh McGillivray (1856-1938, who was also a significant sculptor), Violet Jacob

¹ Maurice Lindsay, ed., *Modern Scottish Poetry: An Anthology of the Scottish Renaissance 1920-1945* (London: Faber and Faber, 1946).

(1863-1946), Marion Angus (1866-1946), Lewis Spence (1874-1955), Helen B. Cruickshank (1886-1975), Edwin Muir (1887-1959), William Jeffrey (1896-1946) and William Soutar (1898-1943) but crucially, the book also introduced a younger generation writing out of their experiences of the war, including George Bruce (1909-2002), Robert Garioch (1909-81), Norman MacCaig (1910-96), Sorley MacLean (1911-96), Douglas Young (1913-73), Ann Scott Moncrieff (1914-43), George Campbell Hay (1915-84) Sydney Goodsir Smith (1915-75), W.S. Graham (1918-86) and Lindsay himself.

It was revised in a number of editions, culminating in *The Edinburgh Book of Twentieth-Century Scottish Poetry* (2005), co-edited with Lesley Duncan, running to 420 pages containing 159 poets. Of the 34 poets from the first edition, 28 remained. The number of women increased dramatically, while the range of geographical locations, languages and poetic forms was increasingly diverse.

The priorities represented in this anthology, in its various permutations from 1946 to 2005, arose from the vision of what Scottish poetry meant in MacDiarmid's *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* (1940). The key theme of variousness was evident in the languages in which Scottish poetry had been composed: not only Gaelic, Scots and English but also Latin and French. MacDiarmid's point was that Scottish poetry could not be defined (in Eliot's terms) as a single, organic entity, written in a long, unbroken tradition, in one language. Rather, it was one thing of many strands and characters, regenerated at particular moments in cultural history, and peculiarly responsive to the sometimes radical changes in national political identity.

The three decades following the Second World War, however, saw a marked emphasis upon matters of personal, individual, materialist reality, rather than the grand narratives of nationalism. These materialist and politico-social positions were to elaborate new strata of national understanding, deepening a sense of common humanity in the Cold War, post-Holocaust, post-nuclear world. The horrific truth of the radical egalitarianism enforced by the technology of arms underlies the poets' sense of humanity's potential, their faith in education, their sense of hope, and knowledge of the human propensity for self-destruction. Something of the character of the era comes through in the periodical *Poetry Scotland* (in the 1940s) and the annual anthologies *Scottish Poetry* (in the 1960s and 1970s) and *New Writing Scotland* (since 1983).

The presiding spirits of older, but less pessimistic, generations inform the anthology *Dream State: The New Scottish Poets* (1994; new edition 2002), edited by Donny O'Rourke: Edwin Morgan, Norman MacCaig and Iain Crichton Smith were still writing when the first

edition appeared, and when, a quarter of a century after his death in 1978, MacDiarmid's rediscovered poems from sources mainly in the National Library of Scotland were published in *The Revolutionary Art of the Future* (2003), they caused front-page newspaper controversy.

Anthologies at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries take us further. The most revealing include: *The Faber Book of Modern Scottish Poetry* (1993) edited by Douglas Dunn; *Contraflow on the Superhighway: A Primer of Informationist Poetry* (1994) edited by Richard Price and W.N. Herbert; *The Poetry of Scotland: Gaelic, Scots and English* (1995) edited by Roderick Watson; *The New Penguin Book of Scottish Verse* (2001), edited by Robert Crawford and Mick Imlah; *Scotlands: Poets and the Nation* (2004) edited by Douglas Gifford and Alan Riach; *Modern Scottish Women Poets* (2005) edited by Dorothy McMillan and Michel Byrne; and *Scotia Nova: for the early days of a better nation* (2014), edited by Alistair Findlay and Tessa Ransford.

Of the poets returning from the Second World War whose moral, intellectual and poetic hopes had begun to form at the start of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, anti-fascism was a driving motive. Edwin Muir (1887-1959) continued to publish in the Cold War era, and some of his most important poems represent it. *The Voyage* (1946), *The Labyrinth* (1949), *Collected Poems, 1921-1951* (1952), the influential *An Autobiography* (1954), *One Foot in Eden* (1956) and posthumously, *Collected Poems* (1965) extended and deepened his perceptions and pathos. With restraint and depth, 'The Good Town' (1949) notes how once, when goodness prevailed, people took on its 'hue' but now 'the bad are up' and 'we, poor ordinary neutral stuff' will helplessly assume that character too. More famously, 'The Horses' (1956) delivers a pastoral image of regeneration after war, but 'Scotland's Winter' (1956) offers no relief. People are consigned to 'frozen life and shallow banishment.'² Written mainly in the late 1930s but not published until 1957, MacDiarmid's book-length anti-fascist poem *The Battle Continues* damned the South African poet Roy Campbell and praised the Spanish republican Federico Garcia Lorca. During the Second World War, MacCaig was a conscientious objector. Most of the others had been in North Africa: Edwin Morgan, G.S. Fraser, George Campbell Hay and Robert Garioch until his capture (he became a prisoner-of-war in Italy). Pre-eminent among them as war poets were Sorley MacLean and

² Edwin Muir, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Peter Butter (Aberdeen: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1991).

Hamish Henderson (1919-2002). The work of these last two exemplifies the range of address Scottish poets were committed to.

MacLean, writing in Gaelic and translating his own poems, knew how limited his readership would be. Coming from a long line of singers and tradition-bearers, his was a new departure into writing modern and contemporary poetry directly engaging with politics, warfare and lost love. Henderson's practice and legacy were different. He wrote an extended sequence of war poems, carefully crafted, poised and passionate: *Elegies for the Dead in Cyreneica* (1948). This is from the First Elegy: 'There were our own, there were the others. / Their deaths were like their lives, human and animal. / There were no gods and precious few heroes.'³

At the same time, Henderson wrote popular ballads for the soldiers. As a Military Intelligence Officer, he liaised with the Italian partisans and read and translated Gramsci. Understanding the value of folk song and popular culture, he collected such material during the war and later recorded material in Scotland, working for the School of Scottish Studies at Edinburgh University. He also contributed his own written songs to this anonymous tradition, for everyday use. 'The Ballad of the D-Day Dodgers' was a response to the comment ascribed to the aristocrat Lady Astor that troops on the Mediterranean front were having a fine time. The soldierly irony and bitter black humour comes through when sung to the tune of 'Lili Marleen': 'We're the D-Day Dodgers, out in Italy – / Always on the vino, always on the spree.'⁴ Other songs, such as 'The 51st Highland Division's Farewell to Sicily', 'The John MacLean March' and 'Freedom Come All Ye' are among the most famous, each long-lasting in popular currency. Folk song and balladry on contemporary topics extended throughout the period, including satiric anti-polaris and republican ballads by Andrew Tannahill (1900-86), comic renditions of Shakespeare ('Oor Hamlet') and conditions of skyscraper living ('The Jeelie Piece Song') by Adam McNaughton (b.1939), and other songs by Matt McGinn (1928-77), Hamish Imlach (1940-96) and Dick Gaughan (b.1948). The border between songs to be sung and poetry written to be read and considered is always permeable. Edwin Morgan wrote (and performed) the lyrics of 'in remote part / scottish fiction' for the band Idlewild, and when their album was released in 2002, he reached an entirely new audience of listeners and readers as a result.

³ Hamish Henderson, *Collected Poems and Songs*, ed. Raymond Ross (Edinburgh: Curly Snake Publishing, 2000), p.52.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.94.

In the immediate post-war ethos of hope and intention, to build a better future, the nationalist priority of the 1920s was merged with ideals of education and democracy. In Scotland, the value of juxtaposition – the grinning gargoyle beside the saint in the Gothic art of great cathedrals – was a poetic imperative, and every one of the pre-eminent poets of the second half of the twentieth century were engaged professionally in education, whether as teachers or university lecturers, journalists, cultural revivalists, editors or in other capacities. Many were founders of such organisations as the Saltire Society (founded 1936) or the Association for Scottish Literary Studies (founded 1970), or the first Department of Scottish Literature (at Glasgow University), founded 1971 with poet Alexander Scott as its Head, or the Scottish Poetry Library, founded by poet Tessa Ransford in 1984. These developments are the long-term fruits of the 1920s, and more closely, of the cultural regeneration energised since 1945.

This was not simply self-aggrandisement. Arguably, the major works of the 1950s were focused on the capacities, nature and limits of language generally. In 1955, MacDiarmid published *In Memoriam James Joyce*, a book-length work said to be only part of an ultimately unfinished poem on an epic scale, similar to Pound's *Cantos*. The central theme of the work is the endless variety of languages in the world, the diversity of poetic and artistic expressions of human creativity, from Shakespeare to Fred Astaire, and the limitations placed upon expressivity by political power and imperialism, and the need to balance energy and form. Its ideas were extended in *The Kind of Poetry I Want* (1961). Publication of MacDiarmid's *Collected Poems* (1962), first in America, showed the extent of his work for the first time. Even so, it was not until the posthumous *Complete Poems* (1978) that a full measure might be taken, as the *Collected* was effectively only an extended selection. The core of all his writing is a celebration of difference: 'The effort of culture is towards greater differentiation / Of perceptions and desires and values and ends' and all these are to be held 'from moment to moment / In a perpetually changing but stable equilibrium...'⁵ Post-war Scottish poetry is a rich demonstration of this diversity.

W.S. Graham (1918-86) made significant impact with *The Nightfishing* (1955) but it was not until his *Collected Poems 1942-1977* (1979) that his intensity of dedication was fully appreciated. He spent most of his adult life in Cornwall, his poems explorations of loneliness and searching, poignant appraisals of the use and uselessness of language. In 'The

⁵ Hugh MacDiarmid, *Complete Poems*, ed. W.R. Aitken and Michael Grieve (2 volumes), Volume 2 (Manchester: Carcanet, 1994), p.1138.

Nightfishing' itself, and 'What is the language using us for?' the delicacy of his ear and the sensitivity of his judgement is at its best, and 'Loch Thom' is a magnificent epiphany describing the 'lonely, freshwater loch' in the hollow of hills above his native town, industrial Greenock, south-west of Glasgow, to which he would walk as a child. As an adult, his return visit is chilly, restrained, heart-wrenching.⁶

Seven poets have become iconic in Scottish poetry from the 1950s to the 1990s, each of them earthed in, arising from, and looking freshly at their favoured places, the terrain of their local attachments. The breakthrough volume for Somhairle MacGill-Eain / Sorley MacLean (1911-96) was *Dàin do Eimhir* (1943), heralding the regeneration of Gaelic poetry, but it was not until *Spring Tide and Ebb Tide: Selected Poems* (1977) that the scale of his achievement was recognised widely. This was followed by *Caoir Gheal Leumraich / White Leaping Flame: Collected Poems* (2011), edited by Christopher Whyte and Emma Dymock. Of the love poems, 'Coin is Madaidhean-allaidh' / 'Dogs and Wolves' stays in the memory, an extreme evocation of self-persecution, linking love and poetry, violence and unfulfilled desires, both personal and political, in an evocation of 'a hunt without halt, without respite.' After his first book, MacLean was recognised as the major force in modern Gaelic poetry. He translated his own poems, first written in Gaelic, into unforgettable English. His major subjects were love and war, but the range of MacLean's poems include the lyric-sequence 'An Cuilithionn' / 'The Cuillin' (1939) in which the mountain range on the island of Skye stands as a living symbol of heroic opposition to those forces that would foreclose life's potential, from the Clearances of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to twentieth-century fascism. The central poem of his career is 'Hallaig', a haunting elegy for a cleared township on his native island of Raasay, where the ruined homes of his ancestors can still be seen in a beautiful location redolent with its own tragedy. MacLean's poem is likened to a bullet that will kill the deer of time and preserve the memory of his people and his place forever: 'chunnacas na mairbh beo.' / 'the dead have been seen alive.' His later elegy for his brother Calum and his passionate denunciation of the authority of nuclear weaponry in 'Screapadal' are also required reading.⁷

A poet of the Orkney islands off the north coast of Scotland, George Mackay Brown (1921-96) evoked native land and seascapes, their history and legends, celebrating the

⁶ W.S. Graham, *New Collected Poems*, ed. Matthew Francis (London: Faber and Faber, 2005).

⁷ Somhairle MacGill-Eain / Sorley MacLean, *Gheal Leumraich / White Leaping Flame: Collected Poems*, ed. Christopher Whyte and Emma Dymock (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2011).

generations of his parents and grandparents. His central themes are of the essential rhythms of the everyday, the rites and rituals that help keep things sacred. The theme of sacrifice, and particularly the martyrdom of St Magnus, he returned to repeatedly. His poems follow liturgical patterns of repetition with patience and bright imagery. The themes were forming from the earliest work, in *The Year of the Whale* (1965) and *Fishermen with Ploughs* (1971). *Winterfold* (1976) includes portrait-poems of wry humour and characters – tinkers, seafarers, old and young, populate his poems (and fiction): ‘Ikey: His Will in Winter Written’ gives an entire life in its poised, retrospective, hopeful but plaintive account; ‘Hamnavoe’ is a portrait of his father and his home-town, Stromness. ‘The Old Women’ is a piercing depiction of grief after death at sea. ‘Uranium’ is one of the most powerful poems of the modern militarised era, poised tremblingly, after ages of stone and iron, farming and fishing, before ‘the door of fire.’⁸

Iain Crichton Smith (1928-98) is closely associated with Lewis in the Outer Hebrides, where austere religion permeates social convention and forms a hard strata of judgement which ultimately he turned to his own advantage. From his first book, *The Long River* (1955), through *Thistles and Roses* (1961), *Deer on the High Hills* (1962), *The Law and the Grace* (1965) and many others, he elaborates a vision of polar dissension, austerity and plenitude, meanness and generosity, inanity and sophistication, banality and subtlety. Themes of belonging and exile are strong, while *A Life* (1986) is a verse-autobiography. In ‘Poem of Lewis’ the ‘fine graces of poetry’ are seen as irrelevant to his people, unless they come naturally, like water from the deepest well. The ‘Old Woman’ is a recurring figure in his poems, often denying human potential for regeneration, asserting the inadequacy of all human effort. And yet, through depression and breakdown, Crichton Smith recovered a capacity for quizzical humour and affirmation, and ‘Two Girls Singing’ celebrates wonderfully what he calls ‘the unpredicted voices of our kind’ – it is not only that they are ‘of our kind’ but also that they are, and always will be, ‘unpredicted’.⁹

Robert Garioch (1909-81), an unassertive, shy-seeming Edinburgh poet, depicting characters and encounters taking place there, went to school and university and became a schoolteacher there, then in London and Kent before retiring in 1964 and working as an assistant on the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*, describing himself as a

⁸ George Mackay Brown, *Collected Poems*, ed. Archie Bevan and Brian Murray (London: John Murray, 2006).

⁹ Iain Crichton Smith, *New Collected Poems*, ed. Mathew McGuire (Manchester: Carcanet, 2011).

‘lexicographer’s orra body’. He was writer-in-residence at Edinburgh University and on Radio Forth, composing poems on events of the day. His *Complete Poetical Works* (1983) collects poems from a number of slim, small-press publications, his first being a joint collection with Sorley MacLean from 1940, *17 Poems for 6d* (sixpence in old currency), hand-printed by his own press. Yet his achievement is substantial, both for the sharp perception and humour of the occasional poems, the seriousness and sober reasonableness of tragic enquiry into human destructiveness and waste in the war poems, ‘The Muir’ and ‘The Wire’, and for the impressive translations of the Roman poet Giuseppe Belli, whose sonnets of Rome Garioch transposed effectively to Edinburgh, nowhere more movingly than in ‘The Puir Faimly’, the unsentimental, heartbreaking monologue of a helpless mother attempting to comfort her starving children. Garioch’s ‘Edinburgh Sonnets’ are another masterly sequence full of elemental sympathy and civil grace. He is poet of vernacular wit, compassion and insightful urban humour.¹⁰

Sydney Goodsir Smith (1915-75), a flamboyant, lavish verbal profligate, was a New Zealander who adopted Edinburgh and the Scots language to produce vivid evocations of the old city and its raucous, sensitive, loving and drinking inhabitants in his poems and plays. If Garioch’s urban Edinburgh Scots is authentically vernacular, Goodsir Smith’s is rhetorically charged and gestural. While he is a fine lyric love poet he also developed a fluent, conversational Scots-language idiom in long-lined free verse, portraying characters and situations, in poems such as ‘The Grace of God and the Meth-Drinker’ and his masterpiece, the fabulous book-length sequence of love poems, *Under the Eildon Tree* (1948). This gathers the stories of the great lovers of world literature into a Rabelaisian company where he finds himself in an affinity of comic and tragic realisation. Deirdre and Naoise and Helen and Paris are here, but alongside them equal in importance and as pungently present is the ‘bonny cou’ (a prostitute) from the Black Bull o’ Norrway, an Edinburgh pub, and the dark bars and dingy alleyways and wynds of the historical old town are as populous with lusty lovers as the realms of fiction and myth. Grandiose gestures and declarations of love rub shoulders with massively reductive and deflating gutter-low perspectives. Elation is there, but so is the pox.¹¹

Norman MacCaig (1910-96) began with two books, *Far Cry* (1943) and *The Inward Eye* (1946), avalanches of language at the furthest remove from the lucid, understated,

¹⁰ Robert Garioch, *Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Robin Fulton (Edinburgh: Macdonald, 1983).

¹¹ Sydney Goodsir Smith, *Collected Poems 1941-1975* (London: John Calder, 1975).

eloquent, razory poems that came later. It took ten years before the short poems of *Riding Lights* (1956) signalled the new, verbally succinct, MacCaig. The tight but conversational regular stanza structures gave way in the 1960s to free verse, but equally restrained, minimal and nuanced. Ultimately, the collected poems are a thesaurus of similes and metaphors: a thorn bush is ‘an encyclopedia of angles’, a sheepdog rushes through a fence ‘like a piece of black wind’ and a hen ‘stares at nothing, then picks it up’. Overtly descriptive of animals, birds, specific places in the north of Scotland around Lochinver and in Edinburgh, where he was a primary school teacher, and of particular people, his poems probe questions of the inadequacy, unreliability and limits of language itself, the borders of what language permits us to understand (his words, he says, are sometimes spoken not by him but by ‘A man in my position’). In this he is close to W.S. Graham. Yet he is one of the funniest poets, with an extraordinarily dry, ironic, humour and a shrewd sense of value. Precise annotation of trivia in ‘Five minutes at the window’ deliver a profound message about what political idealism always neglects at its peril. We are invited to note that a ‘seagull tries over and over again / to pick up something on the road’ while ‘a white cat sits halfway up a tree.’ Each observation invites the questions, ‘Why?’ and ‘What are trivia?’ And the answers come through silence, implication: ‘My shelves of books say nothing / but I know what they mean.’ He is suddenly ‘back in the world again / and am happy’ even though he acknowledges ‘its disasters, its horrors, its griefs.’ A master of tone, humour, irony, MacCaig is a great love poet of the natural world and a great elegist in the sequence, ‘Poems for Angus’.¹²

The title of Edwin Morgan’s first book, *The Vision of Cathkin Braes* (1952), announces two key co-ordinates: a specific local reference to a hillside overlooking Glasgow, and an idea that a ‘vision’ is required to arise from that locality, to see it new but move out from it, to go further. As a gay man returned from war, working as a lecturer at Glasgow University, in a country where disclosure of his sexuality would have meant immediate dismissal, the 1950s were a difficult decade for him. It was not until *The Second Life* (1968) that the breakthrough came, a breathtaking step into the new generation, heralding a long career. Festive poems like ‘Trio’ (a snapshot of three people with a chihuahua walking at night in Glasgow ‘under the Christmas lights’) rubbed shoulders with lyrical, autobiographical poems like ‘In the snack-bar’ (about helping a disabled man to a public toilet) and concrete or sound poems, like ‘The Loch Ness Monster’s Song’ which ends with the monster descending back into the loch: ‘Gombl mbl bl – / blm plm, / blm plm, / blm plm,

¹² Norman MacCaig, *The Poems* ed. Ewen McCaig (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2005).

/ blp.’ The poems in this book – depictions of Glasgow, lyrically autobiographical, coded narratives of homosexual encounter, experimental concrete poems, poems addressed to other key figures of the time, both nationally (Joan Eardley, Ian Hamilton Finlay) and in contemporary popular culture (Marilyn Monroe, Edith Piaf) – written over a number of years, comprised a major intervention in what poetry in Scotland could do. Morgan was the most voluminous and varied of all Scottish poets since MacDiarmid. A professor of English at Glasgow University, he drew on the American poets of the 1950s and 1960s, especially the Beats and Black Mountain poets, and on poets from the Eastern Bloc countries, translating work from there, including Soviet Russia’s Mayakovsky, to balance the emergence of his own vast florilegium of voices. Further experimentation continued in *Glasgow Sonnets* (1972), again, focusing closely on the city in a process of urban regeneration, and *Instamatic Poems* (1972), local and international snapshots of news images, momentary catches of events such as the funeral of Stravinsky observed by Ezra Pound in Venice, or a young couple being pushed through a plate glass window in Glasgow; *From Glasgow to Saturn* (1973), as wide-ranging as its title suggests, *The New Divan* (1977), which includes the long, meditative title poem drawing on his experience in North Africa in the Second World War, and *Star Gate* (1979), juxtaposing science fiction poems with personal elegies and playful, comic gestures. The achievement was confirmed in *Poems of Thirty Years* (1982) but then a different Morgan began to emerge. He had been thought of as predominantly an academic poet, gamesome (‘The Computer’s First Christmas Card’), ventriloquist (‘The Apple’s Song’, ‘Hyena’), curious and optimistic. Now came *Sonnets from Scotland* (1984), a key volume of the era, where national identity took first importance. This was not to be a self-glorifying parade, but rather an enquiry into possibilities, of how the past might be read anew, how the future might be made differently, what the implications of present urgencies might provoke. Like other major works of its time, in literary and cultural criticism and history as well as poetry, it was published in the context of national self-reappraisal in the aftermath of the disallowed devolution referendum and the election of the Conservative government in 1979. Morgan’s initiative was not to take an explicitly politicised stance but to reimagine Scotland from prehistory (‘There is no beginning’) to unknown futurity. His *Collected Poems* (1990) was republished with his *Collected Translations* (1996), confirming his stature while demonstrably engaging international poetic conversations across a multitude of languages and cultures. *Hold Hands Among the Atoms* (1991) addressed the end of the Communist era in cautionary terms while *Virtual and Other Realities* (1997) embraced the possibilities opening up with new technology. At the turn of the millennium, Morgan wrote three works of

startling contrast, beginning with *Demon* (1999), an extended credo for the outlaw status all poetry demands. When tranquillity and serenity threaten to become complacency, in comes the *Demon. A.D. A Trilogy of Plays on the Life of Jesus Christ* (2000), a provocative, historical account, was followed by *The Play of Gligamesh* (2005), a version of the oldest story in western literature (from c.1700 BC). Largely written in verse, the plays should be considered as part of his poetic *oeuvre*. He continued with *Cathures* (2002), a book of poems focused on Glasgow, of which he had been appointed Poet Laureate (1999-2005), and *A Book of Lives* (2007), collecting his late, more openly personal poems in the sequence 'Love and a Life'. He was appointed Scots Makar, or National Poet of Scotland, on 16 April 2004, a post he held till his death in 2010.¹³

With Morgan's example and encouragement a new generation of Scottish poets began publishing in the 1970s, pre-eminently Liz Lochhead (b.1947), who was appointed to the position of National Poet of Scotland on 19 January 2011, succeeding Morgan. From the 1970s on, Lochhead opened the way for a number of Scottish women poets to be more widely appreciated, beginning with poems exploring her own experience as a young woman in Lanarkshire in the 1960s and 1970s and developing her skills in creating personae and characters through writing dramatic monologues, original plays and translations of classic drama, including *Medea* (2001). This is clear from her first, best-selling book, *Memo for Spring* (1972), her poetic encounter with the Hebrides, *Islands* (1978), her excursus into myth and folk-tale revised for contemporary bearings in *The Grimm Sisters* (1981) and *Dreaming Frankenstein & Collected Poems* (1984). Her attention to relationships, domestic situations, emotions in local or intimate contexts, is not an evasion of serious questions but a different approach to them. Her contemporary Veronica Forrest-Thomson (1947-75), in *Collected Poems and Translations* (1990), brought together fierce intellectual passion with refreshingly clinical engagement in the sharpest of focal concentrations on the purpose, dynamics and artifice of language. The forensic intellectualism in her work is complementary to Lochhead's warmth and sympathy.

Meg Bateman (b.1957), writing in Gaelic and translating her poems into English, published some of the most essential representations of feminine experience in *Aotromachd agus dàin eile / Lightness and other poems* (1997), *Soirbheas / Fair Wind* (2007), and *Transparencies* (2013). As editor and translator of anthologies of early Gaelic poetry,

¹³ Edwin Morgan, *Collected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1996).

Bateman also provided both new versions of ancient texts but new ways of contextualising new writing.

From her first book, *The Adoption Papers*, Jackie Kay (b.1961) used different voices to depict her own experience of growing up in Glasgow, a black child adopted by committed socialist parents. She later would go further into the autobiography, exploring themes of belonging, family, local, national and ancestral identity and questions of sexual disposition and social prejudice. Sensational as this seems, the subtlety of her versification is as impressive as her continuous good humour, humanistic sympathy and sheer eloquence. For Carol Ann Duffy (b.1955), appointed British Poet Laureate in 2009, otherness is present in various poems: born in Scotland, she moved to England as a child, recollecting not only places and people from childhood but much more intimately a language, idiom and music foreign to the environment which her mature choices and adulthood had grown into.

Kay, Duffy, Lochhead and others, men as well as women, have written poems specifically on the theme of linguistic dislocation, and this extends questions of previous generations into a newly politicised context. The women who published increasingly from the 1970s made use of the achievements of their predecessors in the development of their own distinctive work. Meg Bateman learned from, respected, honoured and made creative use of the example of MacLean, as Liz Lochhead made of Morgan, or any younger poet made of that generation of men, much as they did of MacDiarmid. But none of them emulated anyone.

Characteristic of the generational change that took place in the 1970s and 1980s is Liz Lochhead's 'Mirror's Song', which begins with the command to the reader and the poet's persona and the mirror of the poem's title: 'Smash me looking-glass glass...' and ends with the line, 'a woman giving birth to herself'.¹⁴ It is as if in such an act of self-generation, and regeneration, the exemplary struggle enacted in the poem, takes its place along with the work of all the poets named in the process of a nation giving birth to itself. The sustained strength of character of Lochhead, the clever turns and challenges of Carol Ann Duffy, the self-assurance and poise of Jackie Kay, the balance of self-centredness and vulnerability of Meg Bateman, the personal, historical and universal themes of Janet Paisley, the gingery decisions and tentative annotations of experience of Kathleen Jamie, constitute a range of poetic voices and techniques and approaches to experience. One of the most accomplished poets of this generation, Elizabeth Burns (b.1957), from her first collection *Ophelia* (1991), and most

¹⁴ Liz Lochhead, *A Choosing: Selected Poems* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 2011).

effectively in *Held* (2010), has quietly but with immense assurance, established an inimitable tone and timbre.

A poetics of linguistic juxtaposition in modern Scottish poetry by many of these women is characteristic: in their different spellings, sounds, vocabulary, forms of address and structures of composition, they prompt active interpretation of how language operates in terms not only of the subjective lyrical voice but the power structures of society. This was emphatically the provenance of the first little book, *Six Glasgow Poems* (1969) by Tom Leonard (b.1944), whose collections *Intimate Voices* (1984) and *Outside the Narrative* (2009) insist upon the validity of working-class experience and language, and demonstrate that validity with untiring moral ferocity and sometimes wild humour.

The continuities across the entire period, as much as the diversities of theme, language and range of individual sensibilities, outline the terrain most clearly: Gaelic poets contemporary with Sorley MacLean warrant full recognition in themselves: George Campbell Hay (1915-84), fluent in Gaelic, Scots and English, a songwriter and intellectual whose extended sequence *Mochtàr is Dùghall* (1982) explores an encounter between a Highlander and a North African soldier in the Second World War; Derick Thomson (1921-2012), not only a major Gaelic poet but Professor of Celtic at Glasgow University and editor of the Gaelic literary magazine *Gairm* from 1953, tireless proponent of the language and all its capabilities. Pre-eminent poets of the 1960s include Tom Buchan (1931-95) and Alan Jackson (b.1938), whose books, respectively, *Dolphins at Cochin* and *The Grim Wayfarer* (both 1969) remain among the iconic *livres de cachet* of that era. Ian Hamilton Finlay (1925-2006), whose English and Scots poems and concrete poetry, most extensively realised in the garden of Little Sparta at Stonypath, his home in the Lanarkshire hills, remains to be visited and explored every summer. The poetry-reading scene, since the Heretics group of the 1970s, includes festivals and regular events all over Scotland, such as St Mungo's Mirrorball in Glasgow. So many individuals have their own growing oeuvres: Ron Butlin (b.1949), Edinburgh Makar, 2008-14; Stewart Conn (b.1936), whose *Stolen Light: Selected Poems* combines a true craftsman's care for structure and poise with a countryman's understanding of the hard realities of the farming world; Kenneth White (b.1936), beginning with *The Cold Wind of Dawn* (1966), whose collected longer poems appeared in *The Bird Path* (1989); and collected shorter poems 1960-90 in *Handbook for the Diamond Country* (1990); Douglas Dunn (b.1942), whose account in *Northlight* (1988) of his own transition back into Scotland from previous residence in England remains seminal, while earlier collections speculate on the nature of loss, regret and survival, and whose *Elegies* (1985) demonstrates how self-

constraint holds depths of sorrow and a fundamental sense of human decency; John Purser (b.1942), writing with incomparable immediacy of life as a crofter on Skye, and out of extensive knowledge of Scotland's composers and music; Aonghas MacNeacail (b.1942), born on Skye but long resident in the Scottish Borders, committed to free verse, influenced by the American Black Mountain poets, therefore distinct from more traditional Gaelic forms, whose politics come through most forcefully in personal application: 'when i was young / it wasn't history but memory'.¹⁵ Andrew Greig (b.1951) established his reputation as an iconoclastic yet highly sensitised poet with *Men On Ice* (1977), consolidating it in *This Life, This Life: Selected Poems 1970-2006* (2006). John Burnside (b.1955) began with *The Hoop* (1988) and his most memorable collections include *Common Knowledge* (1991) and *Black Cat Bone* (2011).

Since the 1990s online technology has changed the conditions of poets and people generally, in terms of composition, publication, acquisition of information and stimulation of the imagination. The conditions of Scotland's history, geography and politics have their own impositions, through and beyond new technologies, and every poet publishing in the first decade of the twenty-first century shows them at work. The early poems of Peter McCarey (b.1956) are in *Collected Contraptions* (2011) and his vast project *The Syllabary* (online at: <http://www.thesyllabary.com/>) has generated an epic for the age of information technology. W.N. Herbert (b.1961) begins his poem, 'Dingle Dell' with the line: 'There is no passport to this country, / it exists as a quality of the language.' The singularity of that last word belies its indicating not one but a plurality of languages, voices, and forms of articulation.

This plurality is evident in the range of poets working in the early twenty-first century: David Kinloch, meditating on the relation between poetry and painting, travel and language; Thomas A. Clark, emphasising the values of taking your time and walking in landscapes experienced not as possessions but visceral quotidian experiences; Robert Allan Jamieson and Jen Hadfield in similar address but more focused on their chosen place, the Shetland archipelago; Ian Stephen in relation to Lewis and the wild places around it; Angus Peter Campbell and Rody Gorman, carrying forward Gaelic priorities; Don Paterson, turning domesticity into zircon-hard realisations of tenderness and relativity; Jim Carruth, appointed poet laureate of Glasgow in 2014; Richard Price, keeping the tentative nature of all such domestic relations in suspense, both in address to his subjects and his choice of forms and tones; Gerda Stevenson, also prioritising domesticity but equally in a fully politicised world;

¹⁵ Aonghas MacNeacail, *A Proper Schooling* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1997).

Graham Fulton, bristlingly satiric in social contexts, often based in Paisley; Rab Wilson, serious or flamboyant in Ayrshire Scots; Gerrie Fellows, exploring senses of displacement and belonging from her own experience, both as a New Zealander adopting Scotland and as a mother writing about in vitro fertilisation and the virtues of family, art and medicine; Robert Crawford, poet and professor, and Robin Robertson, poet and publisher; multiple-prizewinning Roddy Lumsden; Mick Imlah (1956-2009), poet and editor, whose last book, *The Lost Leader* (2008), carried strength and poignancy in equal measure; Kathrine Sowerby, who, in these lines from 'Coastline Disturbance', might be writing for generations yet unborn: 'We emerge after midnight filling the darkness with living. / Disappointments seem further across the ice'.¹⁶

If MacDiarmid proposed a multi-faceted national identity, and the 'seven poets' generation created their work from the geographical places each one distinctively favoured, then the gendered, class-conscious, increasingly politicised world of the following generations has made the national identity an even more complex home to different diversities, accommodating – not always easily – nature and domesticity, chaos and order, cynicism and wonder, states and movements, self and others, internationality and self-determined nationality.

¹⁶ Kathrine Sowerby, 'Coastline Disturbance', accessed online 28/2/2015 at: <http://glasgowreviewofbooks.com/2015/02/06/new-poetry-by-kathrine-sowerby/>

Further Reading

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Marshall Walker, 'Poets of the Scottish Renaissance from Hugh MacDiarmid to Edwin Morgan', in *Scottish Literature Since 1707* (Harlow: Longmans, 1996), pp.277-317