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| Scottish Modernism |
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| Scotland participated in the European visual art modernism of the early twentieth century, when painters such as J. D. Fergusson and the Scottish Colourists set up studios in France, and the Glasgow architect CHARLES RENNIE MACKINTOSH and designers and painters including Margaret and Frances Macdonald exhibited in Vienna, Turin and other European cities. It was not until the post-1918 period, however, that Scottish literature saw a comparable transformation when C. M. Grieve, better known as the poet HUGH MACDIARMID, initiated the revival popularly known in its own day as the Scottish Renaissance, but now regarded as a Scottish contribution to literary modernism. MACDIARMID’s new movement was launched by the publication of his little magazine *The Scottish Chapbook* in 1922, the year also of JAMES JOYCE’s *ULYSSES* and T. S. ELIOT’s *THE WASTE LAND*. The *Chapbook*’s aim was both artistic and political: to encourage a new and modern literature in all three of Scotland’s indigenous languages: Scots, Gaelic and Scottish English; and to take Scottish literature (and in the longer term the Scottish nation) out of its current provincial North British status and return it to the mainstream of European culture where it had been before the Union with England. |
| Scotland participated in the European visual art modernism of the early twentieth century, when painters such as J. D. Fergusson and the Scottish Colourists set up studios in France, and the Glasgow architect CHARLES RENNIE MACKINTOSH and designers and painters including Margaret and Frances Macdonald exhibited in Vienna, Turin and other European cities. It was not until the post-1918 period, however, that Scottish literature saw a comparable transformation when C. M. Grieve, better known as the poet HUGH MACDIARMID, initiated the revival popularly known in its own day as the Scottish Renaissance, but now regarded as a Scottish contribution to literary modernism. MACDIARMID’s new movement was launched by the publication of his little magazine *The Scottish Chapbook* in 1922, the year also of JAMES JOYCE’s *ULYSSES* and T. S. ELIOT’s *THE WASTE LAND*. The *Chapbook*’s aim was both artistic and political: to encourage a new and modern literature in all three of Scotland’s indigenous languages: Scots, Gaelic and Scottish English; and to take Scottish literature (and in the longer term the Scottish nation) out of its current provincial North British status and return it to the mainstream of European culture where it had been before the Union with England.  Initially MACDIARMID believed that, given the current weak situation of the Scots language, any ambitious modern literary revival would of necessity use English as its medium, but an English that would be distinctively Scottish. This view changed when he himself began to experiment with Scots and his poem ‘The Watergaw’ was published under the pseudonym of ‘Hugh M’Diarmid’ in the October 1922 *Chapbook*. By his editorials of March and April 1923, he had convinced himself that not only was the Scots language capable of being the medium for an avant-garde Scottish poetry, but that it was ‘a vast storehouse of just the very peculiar and subtle effects which modern European literature in general is assiduously seeking’. (McCulloch 2004, 28)  The outstanding achievement of Scottish modernism in the 1920s was the publication of MACDIARMID’s revitalised Scots poetry in his two collections of short lyrics *Sangschaw* (1925) and *Penny Wheep* (1926), followed by his long dramatic monologue *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1926). In his lyrics, influences from French Symbolism interacted with POUND’s Imagism and the Scottish ballad tradition to produce poems that were distinctively Scottish yet belonged aesthetically and thematically to the wider modern world. The longer span of *A Drunk Man* allowed him to develop the implicit ideological content of the lyrics into a creative and philosophical journey of exploration, structured by a logic of the imagination and animated by its author’s eclectic borrowings and adaptations of creative influences. In addition to MACDIARMID’s new poetry in Scots, the 1920s saw EDWIN MUIR’s *First Poems* published by the Hogarth Press in 1925. MUIR had come to prominence with *We Moderns* of 1918 and in the 1920s his reputation was primarily as a critic of modern writing as in his *Transition* (1926). With his wife WILLA, he also produced the first English translations of the novels of FRANZ KAFKA, but his reputation as a significant modernist poet came later with collections such as *The Labyrinth* (1949) and *One Foot in Eden* (1956). A new Scottish fiction appeared with the publication of NEIL M. GUNN’s first novel *The Grey Coast* (1925), followed by later books such as *Highland River* (1937) and *The Silver Darlings* (1941) which continued to free the history of the Highlands from its previous romanticised fictional image. Women writers such as CATHERINE CARSWELL and WILLA MUIR brought new forms and female perspectives into fiction in this period, exploring self-determination in a gender as opposed to a national context.  Although the political had always been part of the Scottish modernist programme, in the 1920s formal innovations were at the forefront of the movement. In the increasingly politicised 1930s, the ideological dimension became more overt in creative as well as political writing. An outstanding example in fiction of this coming together of the political and the artistic was LEWIS GRASSIC GIBBON’s trilogy *A Scots Quair* which succeeded in communicating a Marxist perspective through a modernistic narrative form and language which equalled MACDIARMID’s earlier innovations in Scots. Unlike MACDIARMID, GIBBON did not attempt to extend or revitalise Scots, but created an illusion of Scots speech by the way he ‘foreignised’ his use of English. GIBBON’s achievement was to carry through his new formal and ideological methodology from the farming setting of the first book of the trilogy to the industrialised city of the last. Marxism and modernism also came together in James Barke’s cinematic narrative *Major Operation* (1936), and in MACDIARMID’s political poetry of the 1930s, although it could be argued that MACDIARMID’s most successful ideological poetry is to be found in poems where his method is implicit through metaphor and imagery.  The Scottish modernism of the interwar period extended into the 1940s and mid-1950s through a new phase of little magazine publication during World War Two, and especially through the late poetry of EDWIN MUIR, much of it inspired by his experiences in post-war Prague and Rome; by the publication of Sorley MacLean’s Gaelic-language *Dàin do Eimhir* (1943) and MACDIARMID’s *In Memoriam James Joyce* (1955), a long poem collaged from poetry written mostly in the late 1930s. These works bring to a close a vital period in Scotland’s cultural history which not only regenerated Scottish literature in ways that now identify it as a contribution to international literary modernism but also laid secure foundations for present-day Scottish literary achievement. List of Works Cited Muir, Edwin, *We Moderns* (1918)  Grieve, C. M., ed., *The Scottish Chapbook* (1922-24)  MacDiarmid, Hugh, *Sangschaw* (1925)  Muir, Edwin, *First Poems* (1925)  Gunn, Neil M., *The Grey Coast*  (1925)  MacDiarmid, Hugh, *Penny Wheep* (1926)  MacDiarmid, Hugh, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1926)  Muir, Edwin, *Transition* (1926)  Gibbon, Lewis Grassic, *Sunset Song* (1932)  Gibbon, Lewis Grassic, *Cloud Howe* (1933)  Gibbon, Lewis Grassic, *Grey Granite* (1934)  Barke, James, *Major Operation* (1936)  Gunn, Neil M., *Highland River* (1937)  Gunn, Neil M. *The Silver Darlings* (1941)  MacLean, Sorley, *Dàin do Eimhir* (1943)  Muir, Edwin, *The Labyrinth* (1949)  MacDiarmid, Hugh, *In Memoriam James Joyce* (1955)  Muir, Edwin, *One Foot in Eden* (1956) |
| Further reading:  (McCulloch)  (McCulloch, Scottish Modernism and its Contexts 1918-1959) |