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## INTELLIGENT MEN'S GUIDES TO ALBYN : (RE)DEFINITIONS OF IDENTITY AND THE (RE)NAISSANCE

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*That* is The Land out there, under the sleet, churned and pelted there in the dark, the long rigs upturning their clayey faces to the spear-onset of the sleet. That is The Land, a dim vision this night of laggard fences and long stretching rigs. And the voice of it – the true and unforgettable voice – you can hear even such a night as this as the dark comes down, the immemorial plaint of the peewit, flying lost. *That* is The Land – though not quite all. Those folk in the byre whose lantern light is a glimmer through the sleet as they muck and bed and tend the kye, and milk the milk into tin pails, in curling froth – they are The Land in as great a measure.<sup>1</sup>

*Scottish Scene or the Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn* (1934), written by Hugh MacDiarmid (pen-name of Christopher Murray Grieve) and Lewis Grassie Gibbon (pen-name of James Leslie Mitchell), represents a cornerstone in the development of Scottish critical thought during the Renaissance Movement. Even if new concepts had already been introduced in various essays, notably by Hugh MacDiarmid, these two celebrated authors raised a series of radical concerns on the theme of identity by tackling both the literary and the sociological points of view. Their considerations were to give rise to a flurry of books and articles between 1935 and 1936. We will consider MacDiarmid and Mitchell's essay in parallel with a series of

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<sup>1</sup> GIBBON, Lewis Grassie, "The Land" in GIBBON, Lewis Grassie & MacDIARMID, Hugh, *Scottish Scene or The Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn*, (1934), in: *Smeddum: A Lewis Grassie Gibbon Anthology*, Edited and Introduced by Valentina Bold, Edinburgh, Canongate Classics, 2001, pp. 82-83.

essays published by Routledge between 1935 and 1936 called the “Voice of Scotland.”<sup>2</sup> What I propose to do is to point out what Scottish writers wanted to define or redefine as elements relevant to a Scottish identity. This will also allow us to highlight the implications they wanted their books to have for their successors in the Renaissance and post-Renaissance Movements. Three themes highly relevant to the construction of a Scottish identity are expounded in *Scottish Scene* and in many of the “Voice in Scotland” books: the first one is Scottish history and the complicated relationships between Scotland and its past, then the nature of Scottish literature and finally the political side of the Renaissance Movement. These topics, even in the book written as a duet by MacDiarmid and Gibbon, are tackled in different and somehow contradictory ways, creating a polyphonic environment, to take up the voice metaphor of the series. This ends up producing contrasting analyses and conclusions, creating what we could describe as some sort of well-mannered twentieth-century flyting. It seems that it is Gibbon who is at the origin of the “Voice of Scotland” series or, if he is not exactly at the origin, he is certainly the one who approached different Scottish writers to ask them to contribute to the project, as we learn from a letter addressed to MacDiarmid and also from a couple of book dedications: “We’ve collected 8 out of 10 for the series, including Linklater and Mackenzie. You and I, alas, are the only Communists. I tried to foist James Barke upon them, but they wouldn’t have it. However, I imagine we’ll keep the red flag flying pretty

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<sup>2</sup> The “Voice of Scotland” series includes eight books all published by Routledge (London): LINKLATER, Eric, *The Lion and the Unicorn or What England has Meant to Scotland*, 1935; POWER, William, *Literature and Oatmeal. What Literature has Meant to Scotland*, 1935; GUNN, Neil M., *Whisky and Scotland: A Practical and Spiritual Survey*, London, Souvenir Press, (1935), 1977; MacCLURE, Victor, *Scotland’s Inner Man. A History of Scots Food and Cookery*, 1935; MACKENZIE, Compton, *Catholicism and Scotland*, 1936; NEILL, A.S., *Is Scotland Educated?*, 1936; MUIR, Willa, *Mrs Grundy in Scotland*, 1936; MUIR, Edwin, *Scott and Scotland or the Predicament of the Scottish Writer*. With an introduction by Allan Massie, Edinburgh, Polygon, (1936), 1982. MacDiarmid should have published a book, entitled “Red Scotland” in the series, but he accused Edwin Muir of having persuaded Routledge not to issue it. Only Gunn’s and Muir’s books have so far been reprinted. The title “Voice of Scotland” was later taken up by Grieve for a journal he edited from 1938.

efficaciously.”<sup>3</sup> Gibbon talks here about the Red Flag, not about the Saltire, thus illustrating the political slant their reflections were meant to have.

The Scottish historian Agnes Mure Mackenzie, who reviewed *Scottish Scene* for the *TLS*, and whom MacDiarmid refers to as “that silly bitch” in a letter to Gibbon, did not spare her criticism.<sup>4</sup> The book was, according to her, egotistic and extremely prejudiced and was deliberately written for what she called: “the denunciation of all things in Scotland except the very small body of the Elect [...],” namely Hugh MacDiarmid and Lewis Grassie Gibbon.<sup>5</sup> She also referred to the book’s structure as “a catalogue of subjects.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, *Scottish Scene* does appear to be a motley collection of poems, essays, short stories and even plays written by two of the most famous Scottish literary figures of the 1930s, and it also includes, serving as contextual examples, newsreels concerning the state of affairs in Scotland. So did that collection merely provide its authors with a means to express their own personal agendas or was it meant to be a palimpsest where each new writing erased or completed the previous ones and whose goal was the redefinition of an enduring Scottish identity?

The first redefinition presented in *Scottish Scene* is a historical review by Gibbon. Gibbon, who had already gained a good deal of notoriety with his *Scots Quair* trilogy, takes the opportunity to reaffirm his anarchistic views concerning the lost Golden Age of humanity, a blessed time brought to an end by the discovery of agriculture and the imposition of a so-called “civilisation” providing basic social rules and institutions. Gibbon takes up what was a fundamental anti-evolutionary view, the Diffusionist theory, propounded by Elliot Grafton

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<sup>3</sup> Letter to Hugh MacDiarmid, 12/1/1935. NLS MS26066. Quoted in Manson, John, “Hugh MacDiarmid and Lewis Grassie Gibbon’s Politics”, *Cencrastus*, n° 50, Winter 1994-95, p. 41. Willa Muir, Compton Mackenzie and Eric Linklater dedicated their books to Gibbon’s memory, also indicating that he was the one who had prompted them.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to James Leslie Mitchell, Saturday 1934, in MacDIARMID, Hugh, *New Selected Letters*. Edited by Dorian Grieve, Owen Dudley Edwards and Alan Riach, Manchester, Carcanet, 2001, p. 78.

<sup>5</sup> “To anyone who knows the Scottish pulpit of the seventeenth century, or who remembers *Old Mortality*, *Scottish Scene* will suggest ‘a performance in modern dress’ of the topical hortations of the time... though unluckily, from the aesthetic point of view, the Old Testament has left no mark on its style.” *The Times Literary Supplement*, n°1692, 5/7/1934, p. 474.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 474.

Smith who traced back to Egypt and to the accidental discovery of agriculture the end of the Golden Age of humanity and the relentless decline of our species.<sup>7</sup> These views chimed with Gibbon's personal traumas, that is to say growing up in a crofting community in the north-east of Scotland, which he brilliantly described in *Sunset Song*. What Gibbon reckons as the Golden Age of Scotland is therefore a pre-Christian era, in a way reminiscent of Macpherson's *Ossian* and also very close to the visions of the Golden Age developed by Gunn in *Sun Circle* (1933). However Gibbon's strongly-worded anarchist convictions give a clear ideological slant to his Golden Age concepts far remote from any nationalist tinge. Gibbon sets the tone of his essay from the start: "Few things cry so urgently for rewriting as does Scots history, in few aspects of her bastardized culture has Scotland been so ill-served as by her historians."<sup>8</sup> He then sets off to draw the true face of what he calls the "real people" hidden behind the romanticized images of Scotland, a social concern prevalent throughout his work but which is probably never more perceptible than in *Scottish Scene*. His objective in his essay is to erase the common clichés which pervade the notion of a Scottish identity. But despite this very commendable intention, Gibbon, as Agnes Mure-Mackenzie reminds us in her review, is no historian. He uses his piece to expand on pseudo-ethnographic theories about the identity of the Scottish people and to lambast his *bêtes noires*. The history of Scotland is riddled with invasions and acculturations: the true nature of the Scots should therefore be found underneath all these layers, and certainly not on the surface with the Celts whom, in a very famous statement, he describes as "one of the greatest curses of the Scottish scene."<sup>9</sup> Keen on redefining Scotland and the romantic vision some of its writers imparted to the world, Gibbon adds: "It is one of the strongest jests of history that they should have given

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<sup>7</sup> SMITH, Eliot Grafton, *The Ancient Egyptians and the Origin of Civilization*, New and revised edition, London & New York, Harper & Brothers, 1923; SMITH, Eliot Grafton *The Diffusion of Culture*, London, Watts & Co, 1933.

<sup>8</sup> GIBBON, Lewis Grassie, "The Antique Scene", in GIBBON, Lewis Grassie & MacDIARMID, Hugh, *Scottish Scene or The Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn*, *op. cit.* (1), p. 4.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

their name to so much that is fine and noble, the singing of poets and the fighting of great fights, in which their own actual part has been that of gaping, unintelligent audition or mere carrion-bird raiding.”<sup>10</sup> By denouncing the Celts Gibbon here challenges one of the most iconic definitions of Scotland. But Gibbon leaves the best till the end. After the Celts from Ireland, he deplors the Norsemen’s invasions and the legacy which, according to him, they left:

[...] those dull, dyspeptic whey-faced clowns have figured in all orthodox histories as the bringers of something new and vital to Scottish culture, as an invigorating strain, a hard and splendid ingredient. It is farcical that it should be necessary to affirm at this late day that the Norseman brought nothing of any permanence to Scotland other than his characteristic gastritis.<sup>11</sup>

The debate had been particularly rife all throughout the nineteenth century and had likewise given rise to a flurry of racist and xenophobic comments, the stage being broadly divided between those who supported the Celts and those who supported the Norse. By denouncing both Celts and Norse and by allying himself to the Picts, Gibbon followed, in a way, the very racist pseudo-ethnographic and highly convoluted views of John Pinkerton for whom the Picts were Goths and had exerted a notable and good influence. This attitude is, maybe quite surprisingly, quite common amongst the Renaissance authors. MacDiarmid, on top of his rampant and bellicose anglophobia, had also more than once vented very racist comments against the Irish.<sup>12</sup> Gibbon must have been perfectly aware that this sort of prejudiced outlook was alienating some of the other contributors to the “Voice of Scotland” series: not only those who supported the Celtic tradition, but also authors who considered the Norse influence as part of the Scottish heritage. Willa and Edwin Muir were born in the northern islands and Linklater completely identified with the Orkneys. In a letter written in 1927, Edwin Muir, half jokingly, had declared that he did not follow the debates on Scottish nationalism with much

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup> GRIEVE, C. M., “Plea for a Scottish Fascism”, *The Scottish Nation*, vol. 1, n° 5, 5/6/1923, p. 7.

interest as he felt more Scandinavian than Scottish.<sup>13</sup> In his contribution to the “Voice of Scotland” series, Muir also vilified the whole Scottish Nationalist movement for bringing merely “a trivial response to a serious problem.”<sup>14</sup> Indeed if bitter wrangles over politics and political ideology pervade nearly all the debates held by the major authors of the Scottish Renaissance, the issues of the so-called ethnicity of the Scots and the genuine language of Scotland underlie, one way or another, most of the poetical or fictional productions of the Renaissance.

Indeed these views not only alienated Gibbon from most of the “Voice of Scotland” writers but, paradoxically enough, were also fundamentally opposed to MacDiarmid’s uncompromising political agenda. The poet reacted to Gibbon’s sentiments much later, in an article published in 1946 which followed the publication of Gunn’s *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* (1944). Commenting both on Gunn’s latest novel and on one of Mitchell’s essays published in 1934 in the United States under the title *The Earth Conquerors* (known as *Nine against the Unknown* in Great Britain)<sup>15</sup> the poet declared:

It may not be surprising to find Mr Gunn carrying on this Peter Panism, this curse on Scottish literature of never growing up, but it is surprising enough to find Lewis Grassie Gibbon guilty of precisely the same thing, and no less affected than Mr Gunn with the Tir-nan-og complex. [...] The valuable part of Gibbon’s work is not this stuff about the Quest of the Fortunate Isles, but those portions of his work which actually discover the real Scotland.<sup>16</sup>

MacDiarmid had, of course, many doubts regarding Gibbon’s political allegiance and his commitment to the Nationalist cause. What MacDiarmid calls “the real Scotland” is not what Gibbon’s “Land” stands for. Indeed, Gibbon’s notion of the Land does not embrace the same

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<sup>13</sup> In a letter to George Thorburn, 14/5/1927. MUIR, Edwin, *Selected Letters of Edwin Muir*. Edited with an introduction by P. H. Butter, London, The Hogarth Press, 1974, p. 64.

<sup>14</sup> MUIR, Edwin, *Scott and Scotland, op. cit.* (2), p. 113.

<sup>15</sup> MITCHELL, James Leslie, *Nine against the Unknown. A Record of Geographical Explorations*, London, Jarrolds, 1934 ; MITCHELL, James Leslie, *Earth Conquerors. The Lives and Achievements of the Great Explorers*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1934.

<sup>16</sup> MacDIARMID, Hugh, “‘Lewis Grassie Gibbon’ – James Leslie Mitchell”, in, MacDIARMID, Hugh *The Uncanny Scot. A Selection of Prose by Hugh MacDiarmid*. Edited with an introduction by Kenneth Buthlay, London, MacGibbon & Kee, 1968, pp. 161-162.

concept one could find in Nationalist or even national propaganda or discourse where the word “Land” is imbued with almost sacred qualities. Gibbon is very careful to highlight the fact that he, as an intellectual, empathises with the common people and that their well-being is more important and fundamental than the noumenon of a national identity. Politics was probably one of his major disagreements with MacDiarmid; for the latter Gibbon was in fact an “emotional humanist”<sup>17</sup> or a “sentimental socialist”<sup>18</sup> far too removed from the true spirit of scientific Marxism or the rigid doctrines of Nationalism. Indeed, Gibbon goes further than Edwin Muir in denouncing Nationalism: for Gibbon, the Nationalist movement is only worthy of cynical derision:

I like the thought of a Scots Republic with Scots Border Guards in saffron kilts – the thought of those kilts can awake me to joy in the middle of the night. I like the thought of Miss Wendy Wood leading a Scots Expeditionary Force down to Westminster to reclaim the Scone Stone: I would certainly march with that expedition myself in spite of the risk of dying of laughter by the way. [...] But I cannot play with those fantasies when I think of the hundred and fifty thousand in Glasgow. [...] There is nothing in culture or art that is worth the life and elementary happiness of one of those thousands who rot in the Glasgow slums. There is nothing in science or religion. If it came (as it may come) to some fantastic choice between a free and independent Scotland, a centre of culture, a bright flame of artistic and scientific achievement, and providing elementary decencies of food and shelter to the submerged proletariat of Glasgow and Scotland, I at least would have no doubt as to which side of the battle I would range myself. For the cleansing of that horror, if cleanse they could, I would welcome the English in suzerainty over Scotland till the end of time. I would welcome the end of Braid Scots and Gaelic, our culture, our history, our nationhood under the heels of a Chinese army of occupation if it could cleanse the Glasgow slums, give a surety of food and play – the elementary rights of every human being – to those people in the abyss...<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>18</sup> Hugh MacDiarmid in a letter to James D. Young, 14/5/1966. MacDIARMID, Hugh, *New Selected Letters*, *op. cit.* (4), p. 417.

<sup>19</sup> Lewis Grassie Gibbon, “Glasgow”, in GIBBON, Lewis Grassie & MacDIARMID, Hugh, *Scottish Scene or The Intelligent Man’s Guide to Albyn*, *op. cit.* (1), pp. 101-103.



Even if Gibbon, in a letter addressed to Gunn in 1934, admitted to not being totally opposed to Nationalism, he could clearly see a link between Nationalism and Fascism. Gibbon was keen to add that Fascism could encompass a large variety of dangerous stances and ideas.<sup>20</sup> The other writers involved in the “Voice of Scotland” series were of course quite divided on this subject. The scene was quite large, encompassing pro-Nationalist writers like William Power and Eric Linklater but also, on the other side, the famous educationalist A. S. Neill for whom Nationalism was merely a time-warp which would take Scotland back to the Dark Ages.<sup>21</sup> MacDiarmid’s often inconsistent declarations and stances, ranging from Revolutionary Marxism, Communism, Douglasism, Macleanism to Nationalism, are of course too widespread to allow a swift qualification or broad generalisations: his main objective was to achieve a Workers’ Republic of Scotland and in a way, he was probably closer in this to Gibbon’s most cherished goal.<sup>22</sup> However, the means by which they proposed to accomplish this were quite different; according to MacDiarmid, Gibbon’s social and political ideologies were naïve and utterly counterproductive, a trend that unfortunately had also spoilt his literary work. Referring to the passage quoted above on the Glasgow slums, MacDiarmid ruthlessly commented:

A Purple passage of emotional humanism – the very antithesis of the way in which these evils can ever be overcome. As I have said, in one of my poems, I on the other hand would sacrifice a million people any day for one immortal lyric. [...] This inadequate, because utterly undialectical, attitude of Gibbon’s vitiated his whole work.<sup>23</sup>

Relations were thus tense on the political front between all the Renaissance authors or intellectuals involved in the Movement. In 1934 Linklater also published his novel *Magnus*

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<sup>20</sup> “I loathe Fascism and all the dirty things that hide under the name.” Letter to Neil Gunn, dated 2/11/1934. NLS, DEP 209, Box 17, Folder 2. Quoted in MANSON, John, “Hugh MacDiarmid and Lewis Grassie Gibbon’s Politics”, *op. cit.* (3), p. 41.

<sup>21</sup> NEILL, A. S., *Is Scotland Educated?*, *op. cit.* (2), p. 163.

<sup>22</sup> See for instance: MacDIARMID, Hugh, *Albyn. Shorter Books and Monographs*. Edited by Alan Riach, Manchester, Carcanet, 1996, p. 276.

<sup>23</sup> MacDIARMID, Hugh, “Lewis Grassie Gibbon – James Leslie Mitchell”, in MacDIARMID, Hugh, *The Uncanny Scot. A Selection of Prose by Hugh MacDiarmid*, *op. cit.* (16), p. 161.

*Merriman*, in which he took a very critical view of the Nationalist elements in Scotland despite being himself a genuine supporter of the Nationalist cause. In his novel, MacDiarmid is clearly recognizable under the features of Hugh Skene, a young versatile trailblazer in the field of poetry, who is either a misunderstood genius or a talentless conceited forger.<sup>24</sup> The Nationalists appear as a bunch of people replete in political intrigues and devoured by personal ambitions with no clear political agenda to speak of.<sup>25</sup> Linklater's contempt is discernible throughout the novel: "Magnus was uneasily aware that his new Scotland was borrowing the unsubstantial foundations of Utopia."<sup>26</sup> James Barke also wrote severe and indicting articles and letters addressed to Gunn whom he accused of promoting Celtic superiority and, as such, of endorsing Hitler's Nazism.<sup>27</sup> However, the main stumbling block for the "voice in Scotland" series, or to pursue the voice metaphor, the frog in the Scottish writers' throat, was the nature of language and the definition of a specific Scottish literature. This had always proved a difficult topic, and one could easily refer to Macpherson's *Ossian* and Johnson's bitter comments to see the first tremors regarding the issue of language in Scotland. However it is true that this particular aspect of Scottish identity was to assume gigantic proportions with the nationalist issues in the 1920s. The ground was shifting and MacDiarmid's inconsistency can also be felt here.

Grieve, MacDiarmid's Doppelgänger, for instance declared in 1922:

If there is to be a Scottish literary revival the first essential is to get rid of our provinciality of outlook and to avail ourselves of Continental experience [...]. Most of it [Scottish literature] is, of

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<sup>24</sup> "Those who admired his writing declared him to be a genius of the highest order, and those who disliked it, or could not understand it, said that he was a pretentious versifier who concealed his lack of talent by a ponderous ornamentation of words so archaic that nobody knew their meaning." LINKLATER, Eric, *Magnus Merriman*. Introduced by Douglas Gifford, Edinburgh, Canongate Classics, (1934), 1990, p. 35.

<sup>25</sup> "The normal preamble to a revolution or separatist movement is a phase of violent oppression by some foreign power or social minority, and the Scottish Nationalists were unfortunate in not being able to point to any gross or overt ill-use at the hands of England." *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* p. 221.

<sup>27</sup> See: BARKE, James, "Lewis Grassie Gibbon", *Left Review*, vol. 2, n° 5, February 1936, p. 220; see also a letter addressed to Neil Gunn, 20/5/1938 (James Barke Archive, Mitchell Library, Glasgow). Cited in McCULLOCH, Margery Palmer (ed.), *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland 1918-1939*, Glasgow, ASLS, 2004, pp. 370-371.

course, and must continue to be, written in English. [...] But it is no more English in spirit than the literature of the Irish Literary Revival, most of it was written in the English language, was English in spirit.<sup>28</sup>

It is of course crucial to note that it is Grieve, the literary critic, who makes that statement and we could easily describe this as an “*erreur de jeunesse*.” The same year, Grieve also praised MacDiarmid for “addressing himself to the question of the extendability of the Vernacular to embrace the whole range of modern culture.”<sup>29</sup> This divorce between a language and its common use in contemporary Scotland was the crucial point in (re)defining a Scottish identity through the medium of a genuine Scottish language, be it Scots or Scottish Gaelic. Nearly everybody, with the exception of MacDiarmid of course, was keen to show that this state of affairs was somehow too artificial and that English was the language most commonly used, and indeed the language of literary criticism.

If MacDiarmid wanted to pursue the Irish example, he also later urged the Scots to take the opportunities offered by the Second World War to achieve what Ireland had achieved after the First World War, that is to say to break away from England and Great-Britain.<sup>30</sup> Edwin Muir was probably his most outspoken critic and was keen to show that the Irish example was not relevant to Scotland. According to him, Ireland possessed exactly what Scotland lacked and what would be the necessary constituents of a literary revival: first of all a literary and critical centre, provided by Dublin, and secondly a major international literary figure, like W. B. Yeats (a view also supported by a small number of Scottish intellectuals such as J. H. Whyte).<sup>31</sup> Quite a number of Scottish intellectuals also agreed about the lack of any Scottish critical centre or critical writing. Muir went as far as to say that Scottish literature was due to

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<sup>28</sup> GRIEVE, C. M., “Scottish Book and Bookmen”, *Dunfermline Press*, 5/8/1922. Cited in McCULLOCH, Margery Palmer (ed.), *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland 1918-1939*, *op. cit.* (27), p. 23.

<sup>29</sup> GRIEVE, C. M., “Causerie”, *The Scottish Chapbook*, I:3, October 1922. Cited in McCULLOCH, Margery Palmer (ed.), *Modernism and Nationalism: Literature and Society in Scotland 1918-1939*, *op. cit.* (27), p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> MacDiarmid wrote: “The last War was Ireland’s opportunity; the next must be Scotland’s.” In *Scotland; and the Question of a Popular Front against Fascism and War*, Dunfermline, J. B. Mackie & Co Ltd, 1938, in MacDIARMID, Hugh, *Albyn. Shorter Books and Monographs*, *op. cit.* (22), p. 353.

<sup>31</sup> WHYTE, J. H., “The drift south”, *Left Review*, vol. II, n° 14, November 1936, pp. 759-761.

disappear, sucked up by London and English literature, and that that was a natural process against which it was pointless and futile to struggle. Muir's conclusion is merciless and he plants the final nail in the coffin of the Renaissance movement in *Scott and Scotland*: to write literary works in a language, Scots or Gaelic, and be forced to use another one, obviously English, to criticise them was totally inconsistent and would not put Scotland or Scottish literature on any literary map.

Even Gibbon, in *Scottish Scene*, holds a very critical view of his contemporary Scottish literary fellows and their desire to be part of a Scottish literature movement. Most of them, according to Gibbon, because they write in polished English, merely belong to the "interesting English county of Scotshire."<sup>32</sup> Despite being fiercely opposed to political nationalism, Gibbon cannot help showing some streaks of what one could call "cultural nationalism," or, maybe more crudely, "linguistic jingoism." In order to prove his point Gibbon takes the example of Conrad who, despite being born a Pole, would never be considered as part of the Polish literary tradition. Gibbon is quite adamant in concluding that: "[...] there is not the remotest reason why the majority of modern Scots writers should be considered Scots at all."<sup>33</sup> The only solutions were of course provided by Gibbon and MacDiarmid and, to a lesser extent, by Lewis Spence, with their use of Braid or Synthetic Scots.

Edwin Muir's vociferous reaction was predictable, although Eric Linklater had also pointed out MacDiarmid's paradoxical linguistic stance in one of the first books in the "Voice of Scotland series":

His [MacDiarmid's] literary Scots, despite its power and ingenuity, was insufficient for any purpose larger than the expression of fairly simple emotions. No man, out of dictionaries and his own virtue, can make a whole language. A language requires communal effort. And when Mr

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<sup>32</sup> "The chief literary lights which modern Scotland claims to light up the scene of her night are in reality no more than the commendable writers of the interesting county of Scotshire." GIBBON, Lewis Grassie, "Literary Lights", in *Scottish Scene*, *op. cit.* (1), p. 129.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

Grieve was impelled to present ideas instead of images, to argue rather than to sing, to describe not a tree but a concept, he had to write in English.<sup>34</sup>

In *Scott and Scotland*, Muir also denies the possibility, the congruity and the relevance of a literature written in Scots. This was obviously anathema to Grieve as Hugh MacDiarmid and, to a certain extent, Lewis Grassie Gibbon, had come into being as writers and thrived by proclaiming and using the vernacular. Muir, in very simple and concise terms, was trying to put everything to rest by claiming:

The real issue in contemporary Scottish literature is between centrality and provincialism; dialect poetry is one of the chief supports of the second of these two forces; the first one can hardly be said to exist at all. And until Scottish literature has an adequate language, it cannot exist. Scotland will remain a mere collection of districts.<sup>35</sup>

Most writers in the “Voice of Scotland” ventured opinions regarding Scots and Scottish literature, but one of the clearest and most concise was expressed by A.S. Neill, the famous educationalist and founder of Summerhill: “There is no Scots language. Gaelic is Celtic, and the so-called Scotch tongue is English with provincial pronunciation and provincial words.”<sup>36</sup>

MacDiarmid, although widely congratulated for his linguistic efforts and literary achievements, seems to have been left in a league of his own by the other contributors who, with the possible exception of William Power and Neil Gunn, were not extremely confident about the success of the poet’s linguistic, cultural or political ventures and prowess.

Christopher Murray Grieve also chose a national figure through whom to retaliate. Many years later, in his article “Burns today and tomorrow”, he was keen to point out Muir’s contradictions in denouncing MacDiarmid’s use of a so-called Synthetic Scots and then praising him for rejuvenating Scottish poetry in other articles.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> LINKLATER, Eric, *The Lion and the Unicorn or What England has Meant to Scotland*, *op. cit.* (2), p. 24.

<sup>35</sup> MUIR, Edwin, *Scott and Scotland*, *op. cit.* (2), p. 112.

<sup>36</sup> NEILL, A. S., *Is Scotland Educated?*, *op. cit.* (2), p. 160.

<sup>37</sup> MacDIARMID, Hugh, “Burns Today and Tomorrow” (1959), in MacDIARMID, Hugh, *Albyn. Shorter Books and Monographs*, *op. cit.* (22), pp. 262-265.

Gibbon therefore suggested a redefinition of the Scottish Renaissance along linguistic lines, with writers who used English having no right to claim their affiliation to the Renaissance group, probably to the utter dismay of those concerned. His suggestion also brings us back to the linguistic issue, which is indeed inseparable from literature; was therefore Scottish identity to be expressed only in Scots or Gaelic ... or English?

Gibbon and MacDiarmid's *Scottish Scene* and the "voice of Scotland" series do not only represent or reflect the social, political and linguistic forces at work in Scotland in the 1930s. They also, because of the broad range of writers published, explore the critical and ideological questions which have always arisen in the literature of Scotland. Paradoxically enough, this lack of coherence served MacDiarmid's personal ambition, as it illustrates one of the founding concepts developed by the poet: namely the Caledonian antisyzygy.<sup>38</sup> The Renaissance Movement is thus composed of contradictory elements and values whose goal is nonetheless the same: the redefinition of a Scottish identity far from the clichés and prescriptive paradigms relayed worldwide by Ossianism, Kailyardism and Twilightism. One of the writers of the "Voice of Scotland" series attributed the creation and diffusion of those romantic clichés to the Scots, therefore clearly alluding to the Renaissance movement, i.e. to themselves, as a self-redeeming instance.<sup>39</sup> The books in the series, however, instead of giving answers to those questions, might have raised further questions on the sensitive issue of Scottish identity, resulting in a controversial aporia: there is no such thing as A Scottish identity, but rather a relatively wide spectrum of identities.

I will conclude by quoting Linklater's conclusions to his "Voice of Scotland" contribution, which articulate his views about the direction and future of the movement for Scotland, and

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<sup>38</sup> A concept MacDiarmid borrowed from the Scottish academic Gregory Smith. SMITH, Gregory G., *Scottish Literature: Character & Influence*, London, Macmillan & Co, 1919, p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> "The blame, nevertheless, for most of the false ideas held universally regarding Scotland must be laid at the feet of the Scots themselves. They eagerly accepted pictures of their country and its people that were made fashionable by Scott, and in the bulk of them have since done everything to foster and perpetuate those tinsel conceptions." MacCLURE, Victor, *Scotland's Inner Man. A History of Scots Food & Cookery*, op. cit. (2), p. 12.

what the solution to the questions concerning Scottish identity might be. For Linklater, a loyal Nationalist writer, the first step was probably a political one but the answer to the question of identity might still take a long time to be resolved:

Our little renaissance, that we discuss so earnestly, and our new politics, that do not yet interest many, may be the prelude to a new era. It will require some expert readjustment to begin with, but devolution is only another phase of evolution, and the experiment should be interesting. As Agnes Mure Mackenzie has charmingly said: *Il faut cultiver notre chardon*.<sup>40</sup>

Indeed, beyond Agnes Mure Mackenzie's thistle and Voltaire's garden one finds Grassie Gibbon's Land. For most Renaissance writers, Scottish identity (or identities), whether national or personal, is first and foremost to be looked in the relationship the Scots have with their forebears and also in their communion with the Land. Like the ethnic assumptions seen before, these were very doubtful concepts to voice in the 1930s and indeed most Scottish intellectuals abandoned them after the War. The Renaissance and the quest for a Scottish identity undertaken in the thirties had proven anyway that the true answer to Scottish identity was somewhat elusive. MacDiarmid and Gibbon's *Scottish Scene* was therefore to serve as a basis, a cultural and political platform from which different authors would be able to provide their own visions of Scotland or, as William Power was to say in his *Literature and Oatmeal*, "to split the Caledonian atom."<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> LINKLATER, Eric, *The Lion and the Unicorn or What England has Meant to Scotland*, op. cit. (2), p. 192.

<sup>41</sup> POWER, William, *Literature & Oatmeal. What Literature has Meant to Scotland*, op. cit. (2), p. 181.