

Hugh MacDiarmid (Christopher Murray Grieve)

1892 - 1978

Poet, nationalist and socialist. Born Christopher Murray Grieve in Langholm (Dumfries and Galloway), the son of a postman. Educated at Langholm Academy and in Edinburgh, his father's radical republicanism and his school teacher's love of literature had a great influence on the young MacDiarmid. This teacher was the composer, Francis George Scott (1880 - 1958). MacDiarmid worked as a newspaper reporter in Forfar in 1914 and lived in Montrose during the 1920s, where he was both a Town Councillor and Justice of the Peace.

His best known work is the epic poem "A drunk man looks at the thistle". MacDiarmid was a great promoter of the Scots language and Scottish culture; indeed he was also a founder of the Scottish National Party, while remaining a radical socialist throughout his life. He lived at Brownsbank Cottage, near Biggar, from 1952 until his death, and this is now preserved by the MacDiarmid Museum's Trust.

He lies buried in Langholm.

<http://www.geo.ed.ac.uk/scotgaz/people/famousfirst227.html>

Hugh MacDiarmid (born Christopher Murray Grieve)

1892-1978

Born: Langholm, Dumfriesshire

PIONEER of the Scottish literary renaissance. MacDiarmid was a pupil-teacher at Broughton Higher Grade School in Edinburgh before becoming a journalist.

After serving in Greece with the RAMC in the First World War, he became a town councillor in Montrose and edited anthologies of contemporary Scottish writing, in which he began to publish his own work. *Sangschaw* (1925) and *Penny Wheep* (1926) were followed by *A Drunk Man Looks At A Thistle* in 1926, which established him at the top of his field as a Scottish poet and polemicist.

A founder of the Scottish National Party and a periodically active communist, MacDiarmid's other works include *To Circumjack Cencrastus* (1930), the two *Hymns To Lenin* (1932), and numerous essays.

He dedicated his life to the rebirth of the Scottish literary language, using a vocabulary drawn from all regions and periods.

In 1931 he married for the second time and went into self-imposed exile on the Shetland island of Whalsay in 1933.

After the Second World War, when he was a munitions worker, he moved to a cottage at Brownsbank, near Biggar. His autobiography is in two volumes, *Lucky Poet* (1943) and *The Company I've Kept* (1966).

<http://heritage.scotsman.com/profiles.cfm?cid=1&id=38832005>

Grieve, Christopher Murray (**Hugh MacDiarmid**)

1892 - 1978

Poet

Born in Langholm in Dumfriesshire on 11 August 1892 Christopher Murray Grieve is justly regarded as one of the giants of Scottish literature. Best known under his pseudonym Hugh MacDiarmid he led the Scottish Renaissance movement and promoted the use of Scots as a poetic language.

The first son of Elizabeth Grieve and her postman husband James, he was educated at Langholm Academy before becoming a pupil teacher at Broughton Higher Grade School in Edinburgh.

He then turned to journalism and worked in Scotland and Wales until joining the army during the First World War and serving in France and Greece as a member of the Royal Army Medical Corps.

After the war he settled in Montrose with his first wife Peggy Skinner and worked as an editor and reporter for the Montrose Review. While there he also edited literary magazines and anthologies of Scottish writing including The Scottish Chapbook which also featured his own poetry. It was in the Chapbook that the name Hugh MacDiarmid first appeared.

In 1923 his first book Annals of the Five Senses was published. Three years later in 1926 he published his epic poem A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle, arguably his finest work.

Other early works include the poem To Circumjack Cencrastus (1930) and First Hymn to Lenin (1931), a poem which is said to have deeply influenced a number of English poets including WH Auden and Cecil Day Lewis.

Grieve was as passionate about politics as he was of literature and his beliefs run through his work. A founder member of the National Party of Scotland (the forerunner to the Scottish National Party) he was also a communist and stood as a Communist candidate in 1964.

He was also a passionate advocate of Scottish culture while deploring Scottish provincialism. In the words of his biographer Alan Bold Grieve was a "nationalist with a poor opinion of the nation he lived in." He was also, according to Bold, the "poetic voice of the nation."

A prolific writer he published more than 30 books in his lifetime. He was married twice and had three children, two with his first wife Peggy and one with his second wife Valda Trevlyn. He died on 9 September 1978 and was buried in his hometown of Langholm.

<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/content/help/index.aspx?r=546&1115>

Siol nan Gaidheal

Christopher Murray Grieve
Hugh MacDiarmid

If any single individual deserves the credit for the Twentieth Century's renaissance of Scottish Literature and Philosophy, it would be Christopher Murray Grieve. He was contemporary and closely associated with Tom MacDonald (Finn MacColla), George Davie, Sydney Goodsir Smith, Norman McCaig, Sorley MacLean, Douglas Young and Hamish Henderson, all of whom acknowledged his undisputed primacy.

Christopher Grieve was a living link between the Roland E. Muirhead generation of no-hope Scottish Nationalist candidates (usually drawn from the ranks of our country's artistic community) and the modern independence movement of SNP by-election victories, professional SNP politicians with assumed electoral credibility and *Siol nan Gaidheal*. Grieve was an agitator before the event and, thankfully, lived to savour the victories of the 1970's.

From the writings and general records of those earliest Nationalists, and most specifically of Grieve himself, who left no doubt regarding his deeply held beliefs, it is demonstrably clear that these people, through their identification of culture as the core concept crucial to Scotland's rebirth, are the spiritual ancestors of our own *Siol nan Gaidheal* Movement.

Current political advances for the party of independence and the emergence of a plethora of amorphous quasi-political bodies all seeking some form of self-government are the manifestation of a rising Cultural Awareness. Christopher Murray Grieve, more than any other, gave form and substance to the notion of a Scottish National Cultural Ethos, unified in its diversity, and upon which the very existence of the idea and ideal of Scotland has its foundation. *Siol nan Gaidheal* today, more than any other body of people serves to highlight the fundamental significance and the full implications of this culturally.

So it is that we claim Christopher Murray Grieve as our very own.

Writing about Christopher Grieve contains an inherent contradiction. He made it very clear that his "message" about Scottish Culture and the essential spirit of our nation, was the thing which he wanted to impart to people of his own generation and those following. He had no time for personality cults and was particularly scathing in his criticism of the cult of Robert Burns which he condemned for avidly preserving the man's furniture while totally neglecting his message.

Grieve was a citizen of that Scotland of the mind, which, though barely tangible in terms of the surviving fragments of our former statehood, had an enduring idealised existence which is lent vitality by the intellectual nourishment of our living commitment.

Christopher Murray Grieve created an alter-ego whose destiny was to deliver the intellectual warheads which Grieve had contrived for his merciless and unrelenting attack against the supine hypocrisies and passive treasons which were then, as they yet remain, the watermarks of popular respectability in Scotland.

In 'The Dunfermline Press' of 30th September 1922, C.M. Grieve presented a poem by an anonymous friend. The author of this piece, 'The Watrigaw' was later identified as 'Hugh M'Diarmid' (as Mac was then abbreviated).

In the notional persona of Hugh MacDiarmid in 1923 or 1932 or 1944 or 1949 are as relevant today as they were on publication day. His poetry, whether in Scots or English, is the naturally outflowing product of a huge intellect which has captured the spirits of both languages, married to a genuine passion. His intense language is of a certain quality which resists all process of aging while his propositions, although fashioned for Scotland and the Scots, are influenced by such a comprehensive spectrum of human philosophical reflection as to have rendered them an immediate enthusiastic universal recognition.

Hugh MacDiarmid embraced Socialism before we were all aware of the seventy year nightmare which this flawed philosophy was to impose upon Eastern Europe. However, it must be stated that MacDiarmid never condoned a Socialism which would demand the acquiescent and obedient submission of an intimidated population. His vision, illucidated in his work, was one of a dynamic Socialism, tuned to local conditions, which would serve The Scottish People, acting as a catalyst to allow the natural healing of their cultural wounds by redressing the economic and social imbalances of the national life of our community. It could be argued that Socialism may yet be credited with achievements along these lines which will only receive open recognition as the entrenched demarcations of the former East-West confrontation fade into insignificance.

Thus, also, MacDiarmid's flirtation with Fascism can be forgiven in the context of the 20's and better understood through a full analysis of the closely and lucidly argued case which he made for its specific application to function as a radical stimulant towards Scotland's rebirth. However, in 1922 Fascism had not yet murdered 20 million Russians, 6 million Jews and 1 million Gypsies among other statistics, nor had it yet been seen to tend, more than any other leftist political revolutionary trend before or since, to limit rather than to extend human freedom.

It is clear from his work that Hugh MacDiarmid's interest in foreign political ideologies was stimulated by the desire to isolate that one great idea which would best serve Scotland in its crisis of identity. In this position he bears no relation whatsoever to the 'toadies' (his word) in the Scottish branches of the British political parties whose interests in their country is limited to just how far Scotland can be usefully drawn into the service of their favoured respective ideologies.

Having said all this about Christopher Murray Grieve and his intellectual offspring Hugh MacDiarmid, it remains the aim of this article that Siol nan Gaidheal members should come to an awareness of his timeless message of a Scotland reborn in vital self-confidence and playing a full part in the international forums of humankind.

Thus, you are not particularly encouraged to visit his house in Biggar, fully furnished and preserved just as he left it.

However, you are strongly advised to acquire and to read:

Hugh MacDiarmid — 'SELECTED PROSE', Ed. Alan Riach, Published by Carcanet in 1992, and
Hugh MacDiarmid — 'SELECTED POETRY', Ed. Alan Riach and Michael Grieve, Published by Carcanet in 1992.

On-Line Copyright © Siol nan Gaidheal 1995 - 2006, All Rights Reserved

<http://www.siol-nan-gaidheal.com/hugh.htm>