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Old Norse Influence in the
Poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid and
George Mackay Brown

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محرمة تصدرها كلية آداب المنوفية

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The traditional debate in Scotland over issues of language and cultural identity has centred largely around one basic question: Is Scotland a cultural domain of Gaelic, Scots or English? There are varying, often conflicting opinions when it comes to such a heated polemic. The linguistic characteristics and literary achievements of each of these cultural categories has been championed by several distinguished Scottish writers. Each viewpoint speaks in favour of one category but often at the expense of the other two. Douglas Young, for example, in response to the derogatory notion that Gaelic poets "were mainly preoccupied with twilight and moonshine, decay and death"¹ replies in defiance that Gaelic literature is "as vivid and realist and varied a body of literature as has been produced by any of the great languages and language-groups at comparable stages of social development."²

Hugh MacDiarmid, the initiator of what came to be known as the Scottish Renaissance, battled against many odds in defense of his native, vulnerable Scots against the predominant English language; a language he looked upon as imperfect in essence:

I wanted to re-establish it [Scots] as a language and work back to a complete canon of the language. English was in a worse position than Scots. There are more dialect differences in England than ever were in Scotland.... They treat their dialects shamefully, the English.³

This sense of belonging towards one language over the other was inculcated in MacDiarmid's childhood school memories as he experienced the cleavage between his native Scots and English:

... at school — I think we all spoke Scots, at home my parents spoke Scots — at school we were punished if we lapsed into Scots. We were supposed to speak what they would call “standard English” which is peculiar to Scotland, of course; you don't find it in England itself at all.⁴

MacDiarmid even joined forces with Gaelic to make his cause stronger and hopefully combat English. “I never believed in a real gulf between Scots and Gaelic,” He remarked. “I thought that had been accentuated for reasons of divide and conquer, you know — British Imperialism.”⁵ The similarities he perceived in the literature of both languages is reason for a better unity and understanding that can hardly accommodate the exotic English:

After all, Scottish Gaelic literature is very largely a song literature and the actual lyric curve of Gaelic songs is almost identical with the best of Scots songs so there was no fundamental difference between the two and I wanted to see a unification and an understanding....⁶

But such an argument is hardly tenable in an age when writers, Scottish in particular, are becoming increasingly convinced that Scots can no longer function as a viable literary medium. John Corbett is one such example:⁷

Although Scots is used as a literary medium by some, there is at present no written standard variety (i.e. there is no prescriptive form of Scots codified in dictionaries and grammar books, disseminated through and enforced by the education system and used as a matter of course in public documents). No, such variety has ever evolved in Scotland. Scots, therefore,

is largely restricted to speech and therefore is often equated with non-standard English.⁸

Ian Gordon is dubious as to which Scots dialect a Scottish poet is expected to adopt when writing poetry. Is it to be “ ‘Aiberdeen-Awa’, or Ayrshire, or Lothian or a *Kolvn* of them all? Or should he invent a Scots of his own?”⁹ Clearly, the issue is hardly resolved and, consequently, he “believes that the future lies along two lines — with the living Scots speech and with English.”¹⁰

Edwin Muir is without doubt the one Scottish poet who took a firm, resolute stance against his native tongue in favour of English. “Scotland can only create a national literature by writing in English,”¹¹ he remarked. He dismissed MacDiarmid’s attempts to revive the old language because, though it can result in “some remarkable poetry”, yet it lacks the pre-requisites to “create a unified diction.”¹¹ Scottish dialect poetry is a regression to childhood,¹² Muir continued his tirade, and its idols Burns and Scott “sham bards of a sham nation.”¹³ Such high tempers from a poet of Edwin Muir’s stature are certainly not to be taken lightly. His exasperation with Scots has certainly had its toll on the future of the language as a literary medium. The situation is possibly most aptly summarized by Scottish poet, Maurice Lindsay in the now well-known preface to his collection, *Snow Warning*:

During the fifties, the Scots tongue receded more rapidly than ever before under the impact of television, and has now been reduced to a mere matter of local accent. It is utterly unthinkable that this poor, wasted and abandoned speech, however rich in theory its poetic potential, can possibly express what there is to be expressed of the Scottish ethos in the age of beatnik and the hydrogen bomb.... It (Scots) has now become

an excuse in the hands of some writers for not saying anything, and in the hands of others who extol its supposed virtues but have long since ceased to employ it.¹⁴

II

Such is the heated debate on Scotland's cultural and linguistic identity. It focuses specifically on three categories that have been disputed fervently until the present day all over Scotland without the least sign of a general consensus. It is remarkable, however, that in the midst of this debatable issue there has hardly been any focus on the influence of old Norse on the Scots linguistic and literary identity. This is a surprisingly underestimated influence; one which has significantly been pointed out by Edward J. Cowan:

Most commentators have overlooked the distinctively Scottish interest in Icelandic literature, concentrating mainly on England, although Scotland's links with the Northern countries were both stronger and more numerous than those of her southern neighbour.¹⁵

Scotland's links with Scandinavian countries were "strong" and "numerous" indeed. The story goes a long way back in history and is aptly recited by Julian D'Arcy:

The ninth to eleventh centuries are often referred to in European history as the Viking Age, the period which saw the remarkable overseas expansion of the warbards, armies, pirates, traders, explorers and settlers from Scandinavia. For more than three hundred years the Danes, Norwegians and Swedes, collectively known as Vikings, Northmen, Norsemen, terrorized or conquered peoples and kingdoms all over

Europe.... The British Isles were no exception to the Norse expansion, and various parts of England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales were harried, conquered or settled by the aggressive and acquisitive men from Scandinavia.¹⁶

The Norse presence in Scotland, in terms of recorded history, can be dated from 795 A.D. with the pillaging of Skye and Iona, until 1468-69 when the Orkney and Shetland Isles were mortgaged to the Scottish Crown in lieu of a dowry for princess Margaret of Denmark on her betrothal to King James III of Scotland.¹⁷ Scandinavian presence in parts of Scotland in this respect, continued for more than six hundred years unabated by any other internal or external force. But slowly, however, a Gaelic resurgence undermined and finally replaced the Norse linguistic and political hold on the Hebrides and "they were finally ceded to the Scottish Crown by the Treaty of Perth in 1266."¹⁸ In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the Norse domination of the Northern Isles was gradually eroded by the Scottish language, society and politics; the two gradually coming under Scottish rule in 1468 and 1469. There is no denial, however, that four to six centuries of Norse presence in western and insular Scotland have left their political, social and cultural mark.

The influence of Old Norse on the languages of Scotland can in no way be underestimated. Magnus Maclean remarks that "the Norse invasions were ... directly responsible for the rise of Scottish Gaelic and our native vernacular literature as distinct from the Irish."¹⁹ John Geipel has noted that Carl Marstrand was the first scholar to suggest the possibility that "Scandinavian speech habits may be ultimately responsible for certain traits in the pronunciation of Scots Gaelic,"²⁰ especially in connection with pitch patterns. There are, as Magne Oftedal also demonstrates, around 400-500 Norse loanwords in

Scottish Gaelic, mostly connected with agriculture, boat-building and navigation, as might be expected.²¹ The Norse influence on the Scots language was also quite considerable. The Viking invasions and consequent settlements of Scotland led to "the intensification of the Norse elements in the local dialects and the eventual distinction between English and Scots, the latter retaining elements of Norse grammar, phonology and vocabulary which were gradually discarded in English."²² John Jamieson, for example, when initiating his research on his Scottish dictionary was surprised to find in the county of Angus "a vast number of words", many of which were "classical terms in the languages of Iceland, Sweden and Denmark."²³ George T. Flom has listed over 500 Scots loanwords from Old Norse and has traced Scandinavian elements in Barbour's *Bruce*, Blind Harry's *The Wallace* and the poetry of Dunbar.²⁴ There are also distinct features of the pronunciation of Scots consonants, vowels and diphthongs that are clearly attributable to Old Norse influence. It is hardly an exaggeration, therefore, when David Murison argues that "the legacy of the Norsemen can hardly be overestimated in modern Scots and it is in the main their contribution that differentiates our speech from the standard English."²⁵

The Viking influence, in this respect has indeed been quite influential in the formation and development of the Scottish languages and dialects. True, it is not quite evident in modern Scotland, yet its impact remains a legacy in the Scottish tongue:

Much of the Viking legacy in Scotland has been so well assimilated or transformed that it is virtually unnoticed in everyday life, but a careful analysis of this legacy shows a deep-lying Norse influence on various aspects of Scottish language, taxonomy and nomenclature, and in insular Scotland

especially, a lasting effect on local dialect, custom, ways of living and folklore.²⁶

As Magnus Maclean has nostalgically noted : “The Norseman is still with us in hidden and often unknown corners of our life, our literature, and our history.”²⁷ In consequence to this long, Norse heritage in Scotland, many of its distinguished writers have turned, in varying degrees of course, to Old Norse themes and subject matter in the hope of nurturing a more definite sense of identity.

III

Two of those renowned Scottish writers, or rather poets as I should say, who have distinct Old Norse influence in their works are Hugh MacDiarmid (1892-1978) and George Mackay Brown (1921 – 1996). Both have had the impact of this ancient culture impinged mainly upon their poetry and somewhat upon their prose work. Yet, not unlike other Scottish writers, one common feature characterizes their influence by this predominant, ancient culture; namely their primary inspiration by Old Norse history rather than by its mythology. D'Arcy elaborates:

Whereas English poets from Gray onwards tended to find inspiration, in the Eddic poetry (i.e. in Old Norse *mythology*), Scottish writers seemed to seek their material in the *Heimskringla* and Family Sagas (i.e. Old Norse *history*). This is not, of course, a hard and fast rule.... Indeed this is not entirely unnatural or surprising when it is born in mind that Old Norse sagas are considered vital historical sources for early medieval Scotland, in some cases being virtually the only sources available (e.g. for the Northern Isles, Caithness and Moray). Any Scotsman seriously interested in the early history

of his country simply could not avoid becoming acquainted with Old Norse literature. This emphasis on the historical rather than the mythical has remained a feature of Scottish writers' interpretation and application of Old Norse culture until the present day.²⁸

As this paper unfolds, the reader will detect the predominance of historical influences, notably the sagas, over mythological aspects of the Norsemen. There can be no denial as to the impact of mythology on Scottish writers of course but it is the historical influence that assumes the upper hand.

Hugh MacDiarmid, considered by many as the greatest figure in twentieth century Scottish literature, was born Christopher Murray Grieve in Langholm on 11 August, 1892. He is generally looked upon as a man of genius who asserted the poet's role as a transformative force in society. His dictum was "not precedence, but innovation" and, consequently, in the 1920s he initiated a revival of Scottish as a serious literary language capable also of sounding philosophical, political and religious notes. His name has almost become synonymous with the Scottish Renaissance itself. In 1926, he published the first modern classic in the Scots tongue, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, followed in 1930 by the long poem sequence, *To Circumjack Cencrastus* (i.e. "to enfold the snake"). MacDiarmid used numerous, obscure dialect words discovered largely in Jamieson's *Dictionary of the Scottish Language* to create a poetic language which came to be known in the forties as Lallans (Lowland Scots) and which was central to his "Scottish Renaissance" movement.²⁹

Such introductory facts can create a great deal of scepticism towards any suggestions of Old Norse influence on his poetry. For a poet who vehemently championed the cause of a Scots culture, it

seems an implausible gesture to presume an Old Norse influence on his works. Surprisingly, however, there is a distinct, yet not so immense an influence of Old Norse on his poetry; an influence which can be recorded in the early years of his career. In his autobiographical *Lucky Poet*, he records how he discussed a variety of subjects including:

Icelandic sagas and their bearing
On the population of the Moray Firth;
Relics of the Norse language in Lewis speech;
Points of resemblance between Bewulf and
the *Grettla* or *Grettis Saga*
William Herbert and his Scandinavian poetry.³⁰

Such pedantic exaggeration this might seem for a young man still in his teens, but it is a clear indication of MacDiarmid's awareness of the existence of an Old Norse heritage in Scotland and its impact on Scottish culture.

The first traces of Old Norse influence on MacDiarmid is found in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* which is the direct product of his plea for a Scottish revival. It is a highly comic satire which is described by Tom Crawford as "a verse anatomy of the condition of Scotland."³¹ The symbolical connotations of the thistle in the poem are as fertile and abundant as any reader's imagination can generate. Observe Iain Crichton's interpretations:

Is he himself [MacDiarmid] the thistle or the thistle him? The thistle is his 'ain skeleton'—'The munelicht ebbs and flows wi' his thocht.' The thistle is transformed by an extraordinary series of images into bagpipes, alligators, bellows, Mephistopheles in heaven, a skeleton at a sea-meeting, the

missing link, and so on. It breeds roses of perfection. It is also the thistle in a bride's hand instead of roses.... It reminds him also of the Cross. It is like a horse's skin—'aneth a cleg' or the Northern Lights. It is astonishing how fertile MacDiarmid's imagination is at this stage so that by using the simplest props; a thistle, a drunkman and moonlight, he can juxtapose them perpetually in new combinations. It is like something Charles Chaplin might do with a hat, a stick, baggy trousers and a moustache.³²

Amongst its numerous symbolic functions, as previously noted, the thistle also represents Yggdrasil, the cosmic tree of Old Norse mythology: "The roots of Yggdrasil thrust through and beyond the earth and its branches extend beyond heaven; like life itself it is unlimited and unfathomable and subject to all the powers of good and evil."³³ It is true that this reference to the thistle as the tree of life or an organic symbol of the universe is a common feature of many cultures, yet the interpretation of this symbol from an Old Norse perspective has largely been overlooked.

One symbolical function of the thistle, noted previously by Iain Crichton Smith, is that of the "Cross" and the consequent identification of the poet with Christ himself. MacDiarmid must suffer in order to gain "The secret that I'd fain find oot/O'this bricht hive, this sorry weed, / The tree that fills the Universe ..." (II.1 347-49, p. 104). This is a task that can hardly succeed:

A Scottish poet maun assume	(must)
The burden o' his people's doom,	
And dee to brak' their livin' tomb.	(dare)
Mony ha' e tried, but a' ha' e failed.	(many)
Their sacrifice has nocht availed	(not)
Lipon the thistle they're impaled.	(Lie upon) (II.2638-43, p. 190.)

Here, the image of a god sacrificed upon a tree/thistle is comparable to an image in Old Norse mythology of "Odin hung for nine days on Yggdrasil, exposed to hunger and the wind, his side pierced by a spear."³⁴ This was a personal sacrifice on the part of Odin to gain knowledge of the magic of written signs. This use of the Yggdrasil myth is aptly used by MacDiarmid to refer to his self-sacrificing struggle to establish his modern Scottish Literary Renaissance.

Old Norse influence is next found in MacDiarmid's second epic poem *To Circumjack Cencrastus*. Lacking the stylistic and conceptual unity of *A Drunk Man*, this epic poem has been largely ignored and neglected by readers and critics alike. Hugh MacDiarmid himself once confessed that he "should have done better."³⁵ The poem consists of three principal themes which often merge with each other: the exploration of material and transcendental reality through the symbol of the serpent; Scotland's lost identity and cultural heritage; and the ever-prevalent theme in MacDiarmid's poetry of the role of the artist. Jamieson's *Dictionary* appears to have contributed to the name "Cencrastus", but its relevance, however, ends with the name.³⁶ The serpent coiled, tail in mouth, is the Celtic symbol of wisdom and eternity and the poet himself describes Cencrastus as "the snake symbolizing the fundamental pattern of the universe."³⁷ Some indication of the potential power this spirit may have over man is indicated by "and Man / Shudders to see you slippin' into place"³⁸

A Celtic symbol, therefore, of knowledge and eternity, Cencrastus is also, in the words of Kenneth Buthlay, "conceived to be the original manifestation of the life-force which emanated from the divine creative power."³⁹ The poet, therefore, assumes the role of a fisherman throughout the poem, desperately trying to catch the serpent of wisdom and imagination: "Flashing, wise, sinuous,

dangerous creature, / Offspring of mystery and the world without end” (I, 285). In Old Norse mythology, the serpent encircling the world is a dangerous and elusive creature. Thor almost catches it on a fishing trip, but the monster only manages in the final moments to cut loose. The two rivals eventually destroy each other at the end of the world as the myth reveals.⁴⁰

Another Old Norse influence on MacDiarmid's poetry, especially his early work, can be detected in his interest in the *Landsmaal* ('National Language') movement in Norway to revive an older purer form of Norwegian. MacDiarmid is thought to have come to knowledge of this movement from a lecture delivered by W.A. Craigie to the Vernacular Circle of the London Burns Club in 1921 in which Craigie suggested that this movement could provide a good example for the revival of the Scots language.⁴¹ MacDiarmid's interest in this idea is reflected in his references to the Norwegian poet, Henrik Wergeland in his poems: "Gairmscoile" (I,73) and *To Circumjack Cencrastus* (I, 208):

Wergeland was the first Norwegian poet who attempted to break away from the Danish literary language then in use in Norway (which had been under the Danish crown 1349-1814) by bringing into his poems words and rhythms from the Norwegian spoken dialects, especially when he considered they represented the oldest and purest extant forms of the original Old Norse language.⁴²

This must have represented an inspiring example for MacDiarmid as he endeavoured to revitalize his Scots in the 1920s. It is important to note, however, that although he acknowledged the importance of Old Norse as a viable source for a purer form of Norwegian, he was reluctant to accept the existence of Old Norse elements in the Scots

tongue despite arguments, such as R.L. Cassie's, that northern dialects should provide the basis of a new revitalized Scots, largely because its origin is "the primitive Norse (Urordisk) of the Jutish and Anglican colonists of Northumbria, between the Forth and Humber." Later, this was "reinforced by the distinctive Norse of the Vikings, and gradually assimilated many Gaelic words and idioms."⁴³ MacDiarmid stood firmly against this idea believing in the excessive contamination of the dialects of the north of Scotland by foreign influence:

But however large the accession of Norse and Gaelic terms in Northern Scots, its interest so far as a movement for the revival of the Scots vernacular is concerned, must surely depend not upon its difference from,—but upon its connections with — Scots in other districts.⁴⁴

This is an opinion which was later, especially in the 1930s, to undergo a distinct change as MacDiarmid gradually came to recognize the validity of more recent research which advocates the notion that it is precisely the Old Norse element in Scots which has helped differentiate it from English.⁴⁵ It is also ironical that Jamieson's *Etymological Dictionary*, on which MacDiarmid depended in his early poetry "was inspired by G.J. Thorkelin's collection of the many Scots words of Old Norse origin."⁴⁶

In the early thirties, MacDiarmid had not really succumbed to the notion of Old Norse influence on Scots. In his poetry, especially *Circumjack Cencrastus*, he reiterated the conviction that "the main hope of a Scottish revival" lay not in Lowland Scotland, but "in the Gaelic heritage which Scotland shared with the other Celtic countries, most notably Ireland", and in this respect, "Scottish Scotland must be a Gaelic Scotland."⁴⁷

One would assume that at this point, MacDiarmid would have put aside any further interest in old Norse history and culture being replaced henceforth by this Gaelic idea. But this was not to be. He was soon influenced by the theories of the amateur historian L.A. Waddell as published in his well-known *The British Edda* (1930). Waddell amazingly formulated a group of theories “in a fantastic attempt to link together all the myths of Thor and Odin, Cain and Abel, Adam and Eve, King Arthur and the Round Table, the search for the Grail, and St. George and the Dragon.”⁴⁸ His assumption, as is clear from the title of his book, is stated in a far – fetched manner:

The translators [of the Edda] have totally failed to recognize that the Edda is not at all a medley of disjointed Scandinavian mythological tales of gods as has been imagined; but that it forms one great coherent epic of historical human heroes and their exploits, based upon genuine hoary tradition; that it is an ancient British epic poem written with lurid realism in the ancient British language.⁴⁹

This is a statement which stands in stark contradiction to any serious literary or historical studies of the *Edda* or the whole matter in question.

It is interesting, however, that a poet of MacDiarmid’s stature could accept such theorizing so complacently. Observe the following quotation from his poem, “Ceol Mor” :

Remembering how the ‘Norse’ epics of Thor (Icelandic)
Were compiled in the British Isles
And were Known to the ancient Britons
Whose traditional hero, Arthur,
Is the Icelandic ‘Her Thor’

Ultimately identifiable by his exploits
With the Sumerian King, Dur. (I,682)

“Cornish Heroic Song for Valda Trevlyn” is another example:

And I know King Arthur-pace Layamon,
Chaucer, Malory, Spenser, Dryden, Wordsworth,
Tennyson, and all the rest of the romancing bards-
Is none other than Thor, Her-Thor, Ar-Thur,
Thor Eindri of the Edda, the Indian Indra... (I,708)

In other words, “Old Norse history and mythology were really Celtic and the Norsemen perhaps a ‘lost tribe’ of Gaeldom.”⁵⁰ But MacDiarmid does admit in one instance the inaccuracies of Waddell’s assumptions remarking in a letter to D.G. Bridson in 1956 that his ideas on the Edda are “in some respects quite heretical ” and that “waiving the question of scholarly accuracy altogether, elements could be drawn from him which could be worked up in verse – drama form very effectively.”⁵¹ Yet, despite such a confession, MacDiarmid was harshly criticized for adopting such a theory. Alexander Scott, for instance, remarks that MacDiarmid’s “hovering on Celtic subjects, where he accepted forgeries as gospel and reiterated the inaccuracies of unreliable scholars as if they were novel revelations, are embarrassingly awful.”⁵²

Moving to Shetland in 1933, allegedly the most Norse part of Scotland, MacDiarmid came into closer contact with its Scandinavian heritage. Earlier, he had written in lament of the Shetlander's “vague notion of their connection with the Viking period”,⁵³ but now his views changed completely. He saw in the Norse heritage of the Shetland a necessity to preserve a linguistic and cultural independence:

We watch o'er the sea-steed
 When o'er the stout gunwale
 The billow breaks wildly.
 Thus duty is done.
 Wile the lazy land-lubber
 Sleeps by some maiden
 Soft-skinned and kind,
 Over my shoulder
 I gaze towards Crete.
 (Taylor, p. 298.)

Night. Sheets of salt.
 Armod on watch.
 A heave and wash of lights
 from the island
 The lads of Crete
 Toss in hot tumbled linen.
 This poet on watch
 Cold, burning, unknissed.
 (*Orkney Tapestry*, p. 117.)

Mackay Brown's laconic style is capturing in a way that Taylor's alliterative patterning hardly achieves. This is a truly positive touch on the part of Mackay Brown; one that makes his poetry more appealing than the somewhat word – for – word translation by Taylor. It is interesting to note Mackay Brown's skillful and effective use of imagery in his skaldic poetic renderings. "Feeling unable to mimic all the linguistic patterns of skaldic poetry in modern verse forms", D'Arcy remarks, "he cleverly seized on implied images in the strophes and used them as structural matrixes, often contrapuntally."⁸⁷ Observe, for example, the images of drinking and horse – riding in a strophe in *An Orkney Tapestry* (pp. 104 – 5). These images are turned in the second half of the strophe into metaphors through "hogsheads of salt" as the earl "spurs the ship". Similarly, the red wine and silver – white hair of Ermengarde are contrasted with the redness of blood and the "sharp whiteness" of swords (*Orkney Taperstry*, p. 109 ; Taylor, p. 290).

Mackay Brown's own versions of Rognvald's strophes are also open to comparisons. Observe how different the following two examples are (Taylor, p. 286):

The insistence that the Shetlanders are Scandinavians is stirring and presents a tendency which ought to be encouraged by all possible means, and especially by a recovery of the old Norn tongue and an effort to build up a vigorous cultural movement on that basis, since that can only help them to preserve and develop a distinctive life. ⁵⁴

MacDiarmid was also impressed by the local Shetland dialect and its remnants of Shetland Norn as recorded in Jakobsen's *An Etymological Dictionary of the Norn Language in Shetland* and *The Dialect and Place Names of Shetland*. ⁵⁵ This fascination with the Shetland dialect made him as eclectic in his study of language as his reading of literature: "There is no language in the world/That has not yielded me delight" ("In Memoriam James Joyce", II, 818). This tendency eventually led him to the far – fetched idea of the necessity to search for a new international language that would cross all boundaries; national or linguistic . This demanded, of course, a re-evaluation of Old Norse, both as a language for Scotland: "We must have Gaelic and Old Norse and Latin and much else"⁵⁶ and also as part of a world language . With Joyce as his inspiring mentor, he saw "a Joycean amalgam of Scots, Gaelic, and English, plus Gothic, Sanskrit, Old Norse , seems to me [MacDiarmid] a medium through which a great deal could be done to advance this world – wide experimentation and bring language abreast of modern psychological requirements." ⁵⁷

MacDiarmid's stay in the Shetland from 1933 to 1942, therefore, has yielded in him a more receptive attitude to Old Norse language and literature as a result of his diverse readings and experiences there. He even reached the point where ideas about Old

Norse influences transcend a Pan-Celtic world view into a Pan – Northern or Pan – Nordic – Celtic one .⁵⁸

... the ancient Thulean continent, and coastal connection between Scandinavia, Iceland, the Faroes, the Orkneys, Shetlands, Hebrides, Island of Man, Wales, Cornwall, and Ireland- a framework for all my chief enthusiasms and my sense of the inter-relationships, the underlying design, of all these.⁵⁹

Finally, it is interesting how MacDiarmid synthesized his experiences and interpretations of Waddell's theory, the Shetland and his plea for a world language, in the image of Audh; the mythical mother of a pan-Northern civilization:

The Muse with whom I am concerned ... is not Deirdre, but (one of the greatest , yet least - known , women in Scottish History) Audh, the 'deep – minded' wife and mother of chieftains, Gaelic and Scandinavian , who , at the end , left the Hebrides and voyaged, via the Faroes, where she landed to see some of her grandchildren, to Iceland, where she died and lies buried in one of its cold *jokulls*.⁶⁰

She is consequently “a woman of Norse origins who lived in Norway, Orkney, Caithness, the Hebrides and Iceland and who married and gave birth to Nordic and Celtic chieftains, and who freed and gave land to Celtic slaves in Iceland.”⁶¹ It is possibly worth noting that MacDiarmid wrote two poems on Audh, “Choice” (II,1340) and “Audh and Cunaide”, a poem in praise of her life-giving force:

Oh , the cry might be found even yet
To bring Audh back to life again,

To quicken that resourceful heroic old body
Lying there like a cameo under glass.
A cry might be found to bring back
Audh, wife and mother whose intrepid blood
Still runs in far generations
Of her children's children. (II, 1047-48)

Old Norse influence on Hugh MacDiarmid, though somewhat limited in scope when compared to the bulk of his poetry, yet is quite distinct and influential. It had its effect on two of his early epic poems and provided a model for the revitalizing of a Scots language. His appreciation of Old Norse literature encouraged him to expand, possibly over-stretch his Gaelic idea into a Pan-Northern dream. It is possibly true, therefore, that he is, by large, the one Scottish poet who "suggests the most intriguing and idiosyncratic synthesis as a possible compromise in the divisive feuding over the Nordic and Celtic origins of the Scottish people."⁶²

IV

Younger and belonging to a somewhat different generation, George Mackay Brown (1921 – 96) is another Scottish figure whose poetry and to a lesser degree, his prose, bear distinct features of Old Norse influence. He was born and for the most part lived in the far north port of Stromness, Orkney which in fact made him closer to Oslo than London. His post-war books of poetry, plays, novels and collections of short stories celebrate the fertile beauty of the Orkney Islands in a style that is as simple and sincere as its ordinary inhabitants of farmers and fishermen. Prolific and versatile as he truly was, Mackay Brown has continuously employed a deceptively simple style loaded with mythic overtones derived mainly from the Norse Sagas so as to express archetypal patterns of human experience. It is

no surprise that the impact of Old Norse history and literature was quite significant on Mackay Brown's poetry. Orkney has an immense Norse heritage which had a direct impact on his literary aptitude. Observe his comment:

I discovered with great joy that I would not have far to look for themes. I have always lived in the Orkney Islands, which have been conquered and inhabited for years by a succession of people — Stone Age folk , early Celts, Picts, Norsemen (Vikings), Scots. The languages and legends of the earliest Orcadians are lost . The Norsemen were avid and brilliant story – tellers; we have in the *Orkneyinga Saga* a full record of the exciting doings of their earls and chiefs and skippers for three centuries. Those earlier Orkney folk had left behind them huge deposits of narrative. I felt rather like Aladdin in the enchanted cave. Nothing remained to do but to use my imagination to fill out blank or obscure places, and deploy modern techniques to make the old stories enjoyable to readers of the 20th century.⁶³

It becomes increasingly evident as the reader wades through the bulk of his literature the distinct impact of Viking history and literature; the sagas in particular, for which he developed a deep admiration .

In his poetry Mackay Brown experimented with an Old Norse form of imagery called “rune” or “Kennings” “Whereby two unrelated words are juxtaposed to create a more poetic name for the more common and elemental facts of Viking life and literature.”⁶⁴ In his poem, “The Sea: Four Elegies” , for example, Brown lists a number of kennings for the sea: “Swan's Path”, “Whale's Acre”.⁶⁵ This is a feature that is quite significant in his poetry, functioning as a powerful device for the compression of meaning and imagery. Observe for example: “salt-furrow” (boat ploughing through the sea),

“hawkfall” (death), “cargoes of summer” (harvest) and “blue-hills” (whales). In his poetry, this cryptic style engenders a high level of poetic symbolism, often resonant and striking in its effect:

The sun-dipped isle was suddenly a sheep
Lost and stupid, a dense wet tremulous fleece.

These runes can also serve a humorous purpose:

A man – of – war enchanted
Three boys away.
Pinleg, Windbag, Lord Rum returned.

and they can be quite brutal:

Here lies Sigurd the fisherman
Dead of hooves.⁶⁶

The influence of Old Norse Sagas on Mackay Brown was far – reaching and had an impact that remained with him for the rest of his life. He cherished the *Orkneyinga Saga* and *Njal's Saga*, the latter, he remarked, being “amongst my greatest treasures.”⁶⁷ His admiration for these sagas was profound and sincere, growing out of his desire to capture the direct, raw experiences of humanity:

I admire the pure art of the sagamen; everything extraneous, such as detailed descriptions of people and places and comments by the author on what is happening, is ruthlessly excluded.⁶⁸

Later, he remarked that these Scandinavian Sagas “confirmed that a well – told story is conceived in simplicity and grows surrounded by

silences. ”⁶⁹ Both his poetry and prose emulate this simple, impersonal style.⁷⁰

Perhaps the most palpable Old Norse influence on Mackay Brown was that of subject matter. The themes of his poems are derived mainly from the sagas and Viking history in general. But it is important to note here that Mackay Brown was hardly impressed by the Viking military power for as he once stated, racial myths and the blind adoration of physical power had produced in Germany “the greatest nightmare in history”:

If the Viking myth is true, it is true with so many reservations and qualifications as to be almost meaningless. No harm is done, except that the corridors of history get filled with unreal figures and hollow voices, and so we ourselves become part of a phantasmagoria. In this book an attempt is made to see the Vikings plain.⁷¹

And they were for ever plain in his poetry. He never glorified their violent invasion of Orkney, for example. In “The Stone Cross”, he voiced the horror of monks as they were mercilessly massacred by Viking raiders.⁷² In other occasions, he stressed the peaceful mingling of Celts and Vikings through trade and art as in the short story “The Stone Rose”, or through Christian worship as in “The Nativity Bell and the Falconer.”⁷³ The basis for Mackay Brown’s adamant stance against Viking brutality was, as D’Arcy notes, a religious creed that can hardly tolerate unaccountable violence:

Mackay Brown’s critical presentation of the Viking’s use of aggression was indeed highly influenced by his Christian point of view. (Converted to Roman Catholicism in 1961, he consistently deprecated the wanton use of violence, both in Viking and

- 10 Ibid., p. 142.
- 11 Quoted in George Kitchin, "The Modern Makars," in James Kinsley (ed.), *Scottish Poetry: A Critical Survey* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1955), p. 275.
- 12 Ibid., p. 270.
- 13 Ibid., p. 270.
- 14 Maurice Lindsay, Preface to *Snow Warning* (Arundel: Linden Press, 1962), p. II.
- 15 Edward J. Cowan, "Icelandic Studies in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Scotland," *Studia Islandica*, Vol. 31 (1972), p. 109.
- 16 Julian Meldon D'Arcy, *Scottish Skalds and Sagamen*: (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1996), p. 7.
- For a good survey of Viking history, see Gwyn Jones, *History of the Vikings*, 2nd rev. edn. (Oxford, 1984); P.G. Foote and D.M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement* (London, 1971); H.R. Loyn, *The Vikings in Britain* (New York, 1977); Else Roesdahl, *The Vikings*, trans. Susan M. Margeson and Kirsten Williams (Harmonsworth, 1991).
- 17 Ibid., p. 8.
- 18 Ibid., p. 8.
- 19 Magnus Maclean, *The Literature of the Celts* (Glasgow and Dublin: Scotsoun, 1992), p. 209.
- 20 John Geipel, *The Viking Legacy: The Scandinavian Influence on the English and Gaelic Languages* (Newton Abbot: Chambers, 1971), p. 83.
- 21 Magne Oftedal, "Gaelic : Norse Influence," in Derick S. Thomson (ed.), *The Companion to Gaelic Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 98 – 99.
- 22 Julian D'Arcy, *Scottish Skalds and Sagamen*, p. 11.
- 23 John Jamieson, Preface to *An Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language* (Edinburgh, 1808), p. vi.
- 24 George T. Flom, *Scandinavian Influence on Southern Lowland Scotch* (New York, 1900), pp. 24 – 74.

modern times, regarding it as inhuman and essentially
contradictory to the basic message of Christianity.⁷⁴

As a result of this religious stance that rejected violence, Mackay Brown was quite ironic of the Norsemen's desire to achieve fame with the sword. In a poem like "A Battle in Ulster", Rolf tries in vain to receive a serious wound in order to impress the girl he is courting. But at the end of fighting he speaks in despair:

All I have got
Is a broken tooth, an eye blue as an oyster,
And my pinkie scratched.
From now on, Gudrun,
I will court less particular girls.

(*Winterfold*, p. 20.)

In "Voyager", an old Viking is made sarcastically to languish in Ireland, forced to speak Gaelic and missing his home town dearly.⁷⁵ His prose is no less ironic. In his story "Tartan", four Vikings storm a small Scottish clachan and are nearly outwitted by the peasants. They finally escape with two sheep and a roll of tartan. The arrogant Viking Kol, however, has his throat cut whilst drunk.⁷⁶

These forms of what may be called ironic anti-sagas, focusing primarily on the misadventures of ordinary norsemen rather than on Viking carts, kings or chieftains result in a compassion for those common norsemen that accords with the Christian values of Mackay Brown. "The common people ... make rare appearances."⁷⁷ he once remarked on the *Orkneyinga Saga*: The often gruesome fate of ordinary Norsemen was consequently his concern, not the victories and conquests of their leaders:

This is the other side of the Norse heroic coin, for what the saga-writers recorded as bringing fame and glory to kings and earls could also bring an agonizing death, fearful disfigurement or years of slavery and humiliation to other Norsemen. Mackay Brown thus sets the record straight and reveals that many Vikings were as much victims as heroes, ordinary Orcadians or Norwegians who shared and suffered the vicissitudes of medieval life with the rest of mankind.⁷⁸

One of the dominant features of Mackay Brown's use of Old Norse is the recurrent contrasts between past and present. His poem sequence, "The Masque of Princes" (*Selected Poems*, pp. 77 – 88) "presents the cruelty, vanity, and indifference of royal leaders (beginning with the Old Norse 'Sea Jarl') through the ages and ends with a prose – poem on the poverty – stricken circumstances surrounding the birth of the one true King of Jerusalem."⁷⁹ In the short story, "The Three Islands,"⁸⁰ three modern fishermen are collecting lobster – creels off three Orkney Isles . As they work, they comment on how dull and miserable the islands look. Between their depreciatory remarks, the author inserts a brief glimpse of the lively and thriving life on these islands in the times when the Norsemen were present. The story thus offers a stark contrast between the poverty and ignorance of the modern – day fishermen and the wealth and prosperity of the Viking Age.

This historical contrast between contemporary and Old Norse civilization, favouring the past over the present, has been challenged by critics like Robin Fulton who views Mackay Brown's glorification of ancient Norse times over contemporary life as narrow-minded and somewhat simplistic:

He [Mackay Brown] is liable to make references backing time in order to gain a stance from which he can militate against the kind of society most of us in North Europe and North America now live Over against the alleged false gods of the new age he sets qualities derived from religious tradition both pagan and Christian, but again such reference is utilized to show that all the rest of us are out of step.⁸¹

Elsewhere, Fulton argues that Mackay Brown's "pseudo - historical reconstructions are least credible when they are manipulated to show that the new life is shabbier than the old."⁸² In the case of "The Three Islands" mentioned above, Fulton is obviously off point. Observe D'Arcy comment:

Mackay Brown is not here implying that the present is shabbier than the past, but that the past can enrich the present. The sheer ignorance of the fishermen of their own history and heritage deprives them of a whole spectrum of emotions and values. a knowledge of the three islands' histories would have given them another way of seeing them, helped enliven a dreary fishing - trip, and provided them with a more satisfying emotional and intellectual experience to compensate for their poor catch.⁸³

Another prominent Old Norse influence on Mackay Brown was the character of Earl Rognvald Kolsson in the *Orkneyinga Saga*. Rognvald (1136 - 58), as he is widely known, was a brave, generous man both to his people as well as to his enemies. He is renowned for the founding of St. Magnus Cathedral in 1137 which still survives in Orkney. Mackay Brown's fascination by the earl is recorded in the "Crusader" section of *An Orkeny Tapestry* (pp. 102 - 23) "in which he lovingly retells the saga story of Rognvald, dwelling especially on his

pilgrimage to Jerusalem , including the romantic interlude with Princess Ermengarde in Norbonne, the defeat of a tyrant in Galicia , and the sinking of a dromond in the Mediterranean . Mackay Brown ends his account with an entirely fictitious description of Rognvald and his men participating in the Stations of the Cross in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.”⁸⁴

Writing about Rognvald provided Mackay Brown with the impetus to compose modern versions of Skaldic verse. It is true that he knew no Old Norse and, therefore, was thus incapable of translating such poetry. His Skaldic verse was actually modern versions of A.B. Taylor’s translations. Mackay Brown himself explained:

I have had to wrench Skaldic verse into a shape acceptable to modern readers. Any attempt to reproduce something like the original is impossibly difficult I expect no delight at all for my very free paraphrase; only that perhaps it is more in accord with modern taste. ⁸⁵

Skaldic verse is, of course, difficult to understand; even more difficult to translate. “Mackay Brown’s versions of Earl Rognvald’s and his skald’s strophes”, therefore, “must be judged on their own terms: a comparison between the two writers is revealing.”⁸⁶

It is true that Taylor’s translations are accurate versions of the Skaldic verse, but are neither capturing nor striking as poetry. Mackay Brown’s poems are terse and compressed in effect. Compare the following two versions of a strophe by one of Rognvald’s skalds (Armod) on a sexually frustrated seaman on watch over a community oblivious to his yearnings:

Golden one,	Your hair, lady
Tall one	Is long, a bright waterfall
Moving in perfume and onyx,	You move through the warriors
Witty one,	Rich and tall as starlight
You with the shoulders	What can I give
Lapped in long silken hair	For the cup and kisses brought
Listen: because of me	to my mouth?
The eagle has a red claw.	Nothing.
	This red hand, a death-dealer.
<i>(An Orkney Tapestry, p. 106.)</i>	<i>(Winterfold, p. 23.)</i>

“Here we can see” as D’Arcy notes again “a distinct shift in emphasis; in the earlier version the ‘redclaw’ of Rognvald is clearly meant to impress the princess, whereas in the later version the earl has become more demure and unsure of himself.”⁸⁸

Once again, observe the differences in the following strophes, also translations of compositions by Rognvald (Taylor, p. 287):

The small mouth of Ermengarde	The summer mouth of Ermengarde
Commands two things -	Commands two things -
A sea strewn with wreckage	A sea of Saga-stuff, wreckage, gold,
As far as Jordan,	As far as Jordan,
And later, in autumn	And later, at leaf-fall,
With other migrant wings	On patched homing wings
A returned prow.	A sun-dark hero.
<i>(An Orkney Tapestry, p. 111.)</i>	<i>(Winterfold, p. 23.)</i>

The sexual undertones implicit in the “small mouth of Ermengarde” is quite obvious in the earlier version. The “returned prow” says it all. There is hardly any sensuality, on the other hand, in the later version where the hero returns as “a sun—dark hero” rather than a lover. The reasons for this shift are personal and bear religious undertones:

Mackay Brown clearly wished to present a gentler, more chivalrous crusader in *Winterfold* than the more aggressive earl in *An Orkney Tapestry*, probably reflecting Mackay Brown's increasing interest in the religious than military aspects of Rognvald's saintliness. Indeed, Mackay Brown's concern with presenting Rognvald and his men as true Christians often seems to result in his creating meanings and nuances completely at variance with the original Old Norse versions.⁸⁹

Such "variance with the original Old Norse version" appears in instances like the one in which a group of monks are described by Rognvald, in translation that is, as "sixteen young women ... with heads bald and bare" (Taylor, p. 252). Mackay Brown depicts them as "sixteen walkers" with heads "bare as stone" and only on the last line does he remark: "Demure and harmless as girls" (*Winterfold*, p. 21). Being the religiously conservative man he is, this light simile saves Mackay Brown the embarrassment of comparing the monks to girls. It is interesting how the religious-oriented Mackay Brown stresses the Christianity of Rognvals, thus diverging from the original text and altering the last few lines of the earl's strophe on Rognvald's departure from the Holy Land for Constantinople:

Let us take the bounty
Of the mighty Monarch
Push on to clash of sword,
Redden the wolfs jaws,
And honour the King.

(Taylor, p. 301.)

We will be the Emperor's
husbandmen,
Winnowing chaff from the holy
grain
May we be worthy at last
For the glory of Christ the King
To break bread in the white
churches.

(*An Orkney Tapestry*, p. 122.)

Here, the secular “King” of the original becomes “Christ the King” in Mackay Brown’s version; a shift which underlies the influence of religion on Mackay Brown. In *Winterfold* (p. 24), the strophe is again changed; this time introducing a chant from the Mass:

Sin darkens the grain – hold.
We have branded their coasts with rage and lust,
The old dragon – breath.
No end to sorrow, soul troth, seeking, still.
Kyrie, Christe, Kyrie eleison
The Golden Harvester
Comes out to grace, with robe and ring,
the swineherd.

The underlying tone of guilt over Rognvald’s violent actions are by no means present in the original strophe. The verse has been transformed here by Mackay Brown from what would be a heroic Norse yearning for battle into a regretful remorse over such action. Rognvald’s warrior instincts have been suppressed in favour of a more benign Christian sensibility.

The impact of Old Norse history and literature on the work, especially the poetry of Mackay Brown is pervasive and quite profound. It represents an integral part of his literary consciousness, not a mere intellectual ornament which might serve a pedantic purpose. His nostalgic longing for the Norse past in his Scottish home region has influenced his poetic experience to the extent that one at times sees him as a descendent of these Norsemen trying to revive their literary and historical past.

Though belonging to two different generations and obviously not closely acquainted on a literary or personal level, yet Hugh MacDiarmid and George Mackay Brown have been similarly influenced by Old Norse heritage. Each is distinct in his Old Norse borrowings, but their deep admiration for the source remains virtually the same. MacDiarmid's symbolic interpretation of the thistle and the serpent in his *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* and *To Circumjack Cencrastus* reveal the impact of Old Norse mythology on his poetry. His plea in the 1920s for a Scots revival in his homeland received a boost from the *Lansmaal* movement in Norway to revive an older, purer form of Norwegian; a movement which proved an inspiring example for what he deemed a national quest. MacDiarmid's adoration for this ancient culture reached its zenith when he willingly adopted Waddell's inaccurate theory that Old Norse history and mythology were part of a collective pan - North culture; thus constructing a far-fetched framework that can hardly accommodate such a notion. These ideas gradually developed into a more eclectic perspective until eventually we find MacDiarmid calling in the 1930s for a European tongue that would include, among the many other languages of northern Europe, a reasonable place for Old Norse.

George Mackay Brown proved an equal match to MacDiarmid. His devotion to Old Norse was deep and personal. His experimentation with the Old Norse "rune" or "kennings" and his influence by the terse, impersonal and concentrated style of Old Norse proved quite revealing in his poetry. His admiration for the sagas, though depicting heroes who live by the sword, has not deterred him from twisting the violent, tumultuous lives of those heroes to fit the more benign Christian Creed he adopted. In consequence, we see in his poetry Norsemen depicted as Christians more than pagans; as

peacemakers rather than warmongers. Mackay Brown has also focused in his poetry on the ordinary day – to – day Norsemen rather than heroes or chieftains. This has created a totally believable, though neglected in the original sagas, new class of people whom the reader can easily relate to. So, instead of reading about the stereotypical all-conquering king or earl , we encounter more down – to earth Vikings: peasants, fishermen, boat rowers , wounded soldiers and even monks. The impact of such poetic renderings is certainly positive as the reader gradually grows intimate with Mackay Brown's depiction of the lives of those ancient Norsemen.

As we become emotionally and intellectually involved with the poetry of both Hugh MacDiarmid and George Mackay Brown, we gain a deeper insight into the realization and interpretation these two poets provided for the Old Norse heritage of Scotland.

Notes

- 1 Douglas Young, "A Note on Scottish Gaelic Poetry" in James Kinsley (ed.), *Scottish Poetry: A Critical Survey* (London: Cassel and Company Ltd., 1955), p. 28.
- 2 Ibid., p. 28.
- 3 "An Interview with Hugh MacDiarmid" conducted by Alexander Scott in Ross Roy (ed.) *Studies in Scottish Literature* (Columbia, South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 1978), p. 7.
- 4 Ibid., p. 1.
- 5 Ibid., p. 13.
- 6 Ibid., p. 13.
- 7 John Corbett is a professor at Glasgow University and the Convener of the ASLS Language Committee. He is dedicated to the investigation of Scots both as a communicative and literary language. His most recent contributions include a paper: "Literary Language and Scottish Identity" presented in the ASLS Conference: 13 May 2000, and a report: "The Current State of Scots" submitted to a Scottish Executive Committee investigating Scots Language Provision.
www.arts.gla.ac.uk
- 8 John Corbet, "The Current State of Scots," www.arts.gla.ac.uk, p. 1.
- 9 Ian A. Gordon, "Modern Scots Poetry" in *Edinburgh Essays on Scots Literature* (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1986), p. 142.
"Aiberdeen-Awa" is a dialect of the city of Aberdeen in the north of Scotland situated between the mouths of the Dee and Don rivers. "Ayrshire" is the dialect of Ayrshire, a south west county of Scotland and is most famous for being the dialect of many Burns poems. "Lothian" is the dialect of Lothians district on the south side of the firth of Forth which includes the coasts of Haddington, Edinburgh and Linlithgow which are called respectively E. Lothian, Mid. Lothian and W. Lothian.
Athelstan Ridgway (ed.), *Everyman's Encyclopedian*, Third Edition, Vols. 1,8 (London: Readers Union, 1953), pp. 21, 570, 693.

- 25 David Murison, "Norse Influence on Scots," *Lallans*, Vol. 13 (1979), p. 34.
- 26 Julian D'Arcy, *Scottish Skalds and Sagamen*, p. 13.
- 27 Magnus Maclean, *The Literature of the Celts*, p. 215.
- 28 Julian D'Arcy, *Scottish Skalds and Sagamen*, p. 30.
- 29 "Christopher Murray Grieve ("Hugh MacDiarmid") in
www.users.globulnet.co.uk, p.1
- 30 Hugh MacDiarmid, *Lucky poet* (London: Routledge & Kegan Poul, 1943),
p. 328.
- 31 www.arts.gla.ac.uk, p. 1.
- 32 Iain Crichton Smith, "Hugh MacDiarmid : *Sangschaw* and *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*," in Ross Roy (ed.), *Studies in Scottish Literature*, Vol. VII, No. 3 (Columbia, South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 1970),
p. 176.
- 33 Julian D'Arcy, *Scottish Skalds and Sagamen*, p. 94.
- 34 Kevin Crossley – Holland, *The Norse Myths* (London, 1980), pp. 186 – 88.
This is comparable to the myth of the Greek Titan, Prometheus who stole fire for mankind from heaven. He was punished by Zeus for his rebellious conduct by having him chained to a lonely rock where an eagle daily fed on his liver which was restored each succeeding night.
Paul Harvey (Comp. and ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), p. 348.
- 35 Quoted in Margery McCulloch, "The Undeservedly Broukit Bairn : Hugh MacDiarmid's *To Circumjack Cencrastus*," in G. Ross Roy (ed.), *Studies in Scottish Literature*, Vol. XVII (Columbia, South Carolina: The University of South Carolina Press, 1982), p. 165.
- 36 Jamieson's *Dictionary* describes Cencrastus as "a serpent of a greenish colour, having its speckled belly covered with spots resembling millet seeds." Its source, "The Passage of the Pilgremer" by John Burel in James Watson, *A Choice Collection of Comic and Serious Songs* (Edinbwhg , 1706), p. 21, refers briefly to Cencrastus as " a beist of filthy braith."

- 37 Hugh MacDiarmid, footnote to "Man, the reality that makes all things possible, even himself" in *More Collected Poems* (London: Martin Brian & O'Keefe, 1970), p. 49.
- 38 Michael Grieve and W.r. Aitken (eds.), *The Complete Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid*, 2 Vol. 5. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 181. All further references to MacDiarmid's poems from this edition except *A Drunk Man*.
- 39 Kenneth Buthlay (ed.) notes to *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987), p. 17.
- 40 Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, Trans. Anthony Faulkes (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), pp. 46-47.
- 41 Alan Bold, *MacDiarmid: Christopher Murray Grieve: A Critical Biography* (London: John Murray, 1988), p. 125.
- 42 Julian D'Arcy, *Scottish Skalds and Sagamen*, p. 96.
- 43 R.L. Cassie, Letter to *Scottish Educational Journal* 17.7.25 (1925), p. 10.
- 44 C. M. Grieve [Hugh MacDiarmid], Letter to *Scottish Educational Journal*, 24.7.25 (1926), p. 13.
- 45 See David Murison, "Norse Influence on Scots," pp. 31 – 34.
- 46 Julian D'Arcy, *Scottish Skalds and Sagamen*, p. 98.
- 47 Kenneth Buthlay, *Hugh MacDiarmid*, Scottish Writers Series 2 (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1982), p. 62; *Lucky Poet*, p. 201.
- 48 Julian D'Arcy, *Scottish Skalds and Sagamen*, p. 98.
- Thor, in Teutonic mythology, is the god of thunder and the Scandinavian Vulcan. Odin comes at the head of the Teutonic pantheon. He is the All-Father who presides over the destinies of both gods and men. He possesses all the characteristics of a sun and sky god.
- Athelstan Ridgway (ed.) *Everyman's Encyclopedia*, Vol. 9, p. 496.
- 49 L. A. Waddell, *The British Edda* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1930), p. V.
- 50 Julian D'Arcy, *Scottish Skalds and Sagamen*, p. 99.
- 51 Alan Bold (ed.), *The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid* (London, 1984), p. 657.

- 52 Alexander Scott, "Review of Alan Bold's *The Terrible Crystal*," in *Scottish Review*, Vol. 32 (November, 1983), p. 34.
- 53 Alan Bold (ed.) *The Letters of Hugh MacDiarmid*, pp. 292 – 93.
- 54 Hugh MacDiarmid, *The Islands of Scotland* (London, 1939), p. ix.
- 55 For details of MacDiarmid's use of Jakobsen's works, see Ruth McQuillan, "MacDiarmid's Other Dictionary," *Lines Review*, Vol. 66 (1978), pp. 5 – 14.
- 56 Hugh MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet*, p. 364.
- 57 *Ibid.*, p. 364.
- 58 Julian D'Arcy, *Scottish Skalds and Sagamen*, pp. 102 – 3.
- 59 Hugh MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet*, p. 60.
- 60 Hugh MacDiarmid, *The Islands of Scotland*, pp. 41 – 42.
For more details of Audh's story see *Laxdaela Saga*, trans. Magnus Magnusson and Hermann Palsson (Harmondworth, 1969), chs. 4-7. pp. 51 – 59.
- 61 Julian D'Arcy, *Scottish Skalds and Sagamen*, pp. 103 – 4.
- 62 *Ibid.*, p. 105.
- 63 www.maxopus.com, p. 2.
- 64 Julian D'Arcy, *Scottish Skalds and Sagamen*, p. 243.
- 65 George Mackay Brown, *Winterfold* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1976), p. 30.
- 66 Mackay Brown, "Weather Bestiary" and "Runes from a Holy Island", *Selected Poems* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977), pp. 44 – 89 ; "Grave Stone", *Fishermen with Ploughs: A poem Cycle* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1979), p. 30.
- 67 Mackay Brown, *Letters from Hamnavoe* (Edinburgh: Mainstream, 1975), p. 86.
- 68 Mackay Brown, Introduction to *Witch and Other Stories* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1977), p. x.
- 69 Mackay Brown, "Writer's Shop" in *Chapman*, Vol. 16 (Summer 1976), p. 22.
- 70 Observe, for example, such poems as "A Battle in Ulster" (*Winterfold*, p. 28.) and "Five Voyages of Arnor" (*Selected Poems*, pp. 67 – 68).
- 71 Mackay Brown, *An Orkney Tapestry* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1978), p. 20.
- 72 Mackay Brown, *Winterfold*, pp. 51 – 52.
- 73 Mackay Brown, *The Masked Fisherman and Other Stories* (London: John Murray, 1989), pp. 111 – 26 ; 145 – 51.

- 74 D'Arcy, *Scottish Skalds and Sagamen*, p. 248.
- 75 Mackay Brown, *Voyages* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1983), pp. 40 – 42.
- 76 Mackay Brown, *A time to Keep and Other Stories* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1976), pp. 135 – 40.
- 77 Mackay Brown, *The Masked Fisherman*, p. ix.
- 78 D'Arcy, *Scottish Skalds and Sagamen*, p. 250.
- 79 *Ibid.*, p. 250 – 51.
- 80 Mackay Brown, *A Calendar of Love* (London: John Murray, 1987), pp. 52 – 60.
- 81 Robin Fulton, *Contemporary Scottish Poetry: Individuals and Contexts* (Loanhead: Macdonald, 1974), p. 113.
- 82 Robin Fulton, "Argus: A Scottish Survey," *New Edinburgh Review*, Vol. 4 (1969), p. 6.
- 83 D'Arcy, *Scottish Skalds and Sagamen*, p. 254.
- 84 *Ibid.*, p. 257.
- 85 Mackay Brown, *An Orkney Tapestry*, pp. 2-3.
- 86 D'Arcy, *Scottish Skalds and Sagamen*, p. 258.
- 87 *Ibid.*, p. 259.
- 88 *Ibid.*, p. 260.
- 89 *Ibid.*, pp. 260 – 61.

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