
With this new Scottish Writers Series, under the general editorship of David Daiches, Scottish Academic Press has provided the first four titles of an attractive series of compact little studies (120-140 pp.), elegantly produced, reasonably priced, and very useful for student and specialist alike.

The first in the series Thomas Crawford's Walter Scott (a revision of his 1965 study) is an attempt to provide a broad overview of Scott's life and works, showing how he tried to reconcile his Toryism and the democratic side of his folk sources, plus his role as an artist and his need to make money. The fact that Scott produced so much, without discriminating enough, combined with his tendency to compromise his art to meet the needs of the market place, has resulted in the underestimation of his work by modern day critics. In seven neatly arranged chapters Crawford treats Scott's life and works: "The Balladist" traces the evolution of his prose fiction up through the ballad collections and epics; "The Poet" relates the history of his country through poems like "The Lay of the Last Minstrel", "The Lady of the Lake", etc. In fictional terms "The Novel--Intentions and Themes" treats his various kinds of fiction, English, English-European, and Scots (his best) which, though dealing with national themes, reach universal heights, concerned as they are with necessity and heroism, and the themes of old versus new, heroism versus commercial civilisation, and the "sublimity of Highland honour". In "The Novels--Character, Method, Style", we learn, Scott's characterisation, not deemed to be very analytical, tends to be more pictorial, as in The Heart of Midlothian which Crawford considered Scott's masterpiece, demonstrating his sense of history and nationality, linked to one of the greatest human concerns, the relationship between Justice and Truth. To conclude, Crawford looks at Scott in the light of modern criticism, from the Marxist standpoint of the 1930s (Lukacs) right up through non-Marxist historicists (Daiches), as well as various ideographic and formalist approaches. It is to be regretted that Northrop Frye did not pursue his archetypal and generic approach to Scott's novels, initiated as early as the 1950s. As R. Fox succinctly states, although Scott did not succeed totally, he was a "glorious failure". Useful seven-page Select Bibliography.

No series on Scottish literature would be complete without a study of Hugh MacDiarmid, and there is none more worthy than Kenneth Buthlay's revised version of his 1964 classic, a suitable epitaph, though certainly not the last word on MacDiarmid, who died in 1978. Buthlay traces MacDiarmid's development as a poet from his early verses in which, like so many other atheists, he demonstrates a great deal of concern for a non-existent God. Particularly useful is Buthlay's analysis of A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle (1926), superior to the longer work To Circumjack Cencrasstus (1930) whose serpent imagery is less successful than the earlier thistle motif. The Stony Limits collection (1934) underscores MacDiarmid's growing tendency to write increasingly in English. By the end of his life his work suffers, as Buthlays puts it, the limitations of what Coleridge would call mere Fancy. Though not all of us have felt the impact that MacDiarmid's poetry had on Compton MacKenzie in 1927--a tremendous explosion that revealed a sublime landscape--we all recognise this contribution to Scottish poetry, despite the general lack of appreciation of his work by English critics. Useful Select Bibliography.

From MacDiarmid to Robert Henryson (c. 1436-c. 1503) is a giant but logical leap back to one of Scotland's first great "makars", schoolmaster and lawyer, about whom we know more through speculation than fact. Matthew P. McDiarmid's study, a valuable contribution to Henryson and fifteenth-century Scotland, also shows the poet's situation within the literary, religious and philosophical picture of Europe (e.g. Chaucer). Although the detective work on the biographical aspects of Henryson's life is interesting and useful, one appreciates keenly McDiarmid's analysis of Henryson's poetry e.g. The Tale of Orpheus.
and Erudices His Quene," which reflects more the priest and the scholar, whilst The Testament of Cresseid reveals the "man who had the care of the hospital at the town's gates." An essential vademecum for any student of Henryson, despite the occasional stylistic infelicities, McDiarmid's study lacks a bibliography.

David Daiches, the general editor of the series, a specialist in eighteenth-century culture, is responsible for the detailed critical study of the poetry of Robert Fergusson, who first published in The Weekly Magazine (Edinburgh) in 1772 e.g. "The Daft Days", a clue to the literature and temperament of this tragic and tormented joker who was to be the predecessor of, but eventually eclipsed by, Burns. Although one remembers individual poems about his "auld brees" and whisky and brandy, plus the many lurid stories of his insanity, Dr. Daiches prudently reminds us of other concerns, like his agonising over religious matters, and his social awareness in his poetic celebration of the city he loved, "Auld Reekie". In the fact of the nineteenth-century traditional view of Fergusson as the "poor, white-faced, drunken, vicious boy that raved himself to death in the Edinburgh madhouse," as R.L. Stevenson portrayed him (despite the latter's affinity with the tragic poet), the twentieth century has seen the emergence of a more balanced and judicious view of Fergusson as an important, if not widely popular, poet who has influenced contemporary figures like Sidney Smith and more importantly Robert Garioch, the modern poet of Edinburgh. With a meticulous examination of individual poems, David Daiches argues for, and surely contributes, to the reassessment of this neglected eighteenth-century poet. Useful annotations and glosses to the poems, but no bibliography.

Scottish Academic Press is to be commended for making available, especially in these difficult publishing times, these four very different volumes of the new Scottish Writers Series, covering figures from the fifteenth to the twentieth century. Scott, MacDiarmid, Henryson and Fergusson have all been well served by the new accessible and eminently readable studies. One awaits eagerly further volumes in a series that can only enhance our knowledge and appreciation of Scottish literature.

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