Biographical Note

Hugh MacDiarmid was born Christopher Murray Grieve on August 11, 1892 in Langholm, a small Scottish town along the English border. Grieve's literary influences came early; among his first teachers in Langholm was the Scottish composer Francis George Scott who would later collaborate with him on a variety of projects. When Grieve enrolled in 1908 at the Broughton Junior Student Center in Edinburgh, his primary English instructor was George Ogilvie who became his most important literary mentor.

In 1910, following the death of his father, Grieve began working as a journalist. Like many others of his time, Grieve's life was interrupted by the onset of World War I and he enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps with which he served from 1915 - 1919. Following his demobilization in 1919, Grieve settled with his wife Peggy in Montrose, Scotland, where he had a job as a journalist with the Montrose Review. In addition to his journalism, Grieve's poetry and essays began appearing in a variety of journals and newspapers. In November 1920, Grieve launched the first of his many publishing and editorial projects, the anthology series Northern Number in which he published new poetry by contemporary Scottish poets. He was soon involved in other such efforts including The Scottish Chapbook (1922-1923), the Scottish Nation (1923), and the Northern Review (1924). In October 1922, Grieve brought out the first number of Scottish Chapbook and introduced a new author whose work exemplified the qualities that he felt were necessary for a regenerated Scottish literature. The author was Hugh MacDiarmid and in subsequent months his Scots lyrics were well received by poets and critics, including Grieve himself, who wrote glowingly of MacDiarmid's achievements. Within a few years, the literary world was generally aware that C.M. Grieve and Hugh MacDiarmid were the same person. By the 1930s, he had for the most part adopted his alter ego as his primary public persona, writing poetry and prose and even delivering speeches as Hugh MacDiarmid.

The figure of Hugh MacDiarmid also maintained a high profile in the world of Scottish politics. Grieve had been active in Fabian Society and Labour Party work as early as 1908 and was a contributor to A.R. Orage's The New Age where he began his lifelong fascination with the Social Credit economic theories of C.H. Douglas. Active in literary politics as well, MacDiarmid founded the Scottish center of PEN in 1927.

Although MacDiarmid remained active politically and wrote prolifically throughout the 1930's, the decade was one of great turmoil in his personal life. In 1929, MacDiarmid moved his family to London to serve as editor of Vox, a radio journal begun with great expectations by author Compton Mackenzie. Following the failure of Vox, MacDiarmid moved to Liverpool in May 1930 to work as a public relations officer. He left his family in London and the separation led to divorce the following year and, ultimately, complete estrangement from his two children.

In 1931 MacDiarmid married Valda Trevlyn and joined yet another literary enterprise. He accepted a directorship with the Unicorn Press, a London publisher which recruited him to serve as literary advisor. MacDiarmid's inability to pay his share of the directorship inevitably led to a financial dispute and he was asked to leave the press within the year. Faced with financial ruin and a state of physical and emotional stress, MacDiarmid, his wife Valva, and their infant son Michael moved to the island of Whalsay, one of the Shetland Islands off the Scottish coast. MacDiarmid lived on Whalsay in extreme poverty and often in poor health--he suffered a complete breakdown in 1935--for nearly ten years. During this period MacDiarmid produced some of his
finest poetry; however, he saw only three collections of his poems published--Stony Limits and Other Poems (1934), Second Hymn to Lenin and Other Poems (1935), and the slim retrospective Selected Poems (1934).

MacDiarmid may have remained on Whalsay even longer if he were not conscripted for National Service in 1941, at the age of forty-eight, to work in factories and in the Merchant Service until 1943. Following the war, MacDiarmid continued to struggle financially until 1950 when the British government awarded him a civil list pension honoring his lifelong achievement. MacDiarmid was now able to live with some degree of financial security and in 1951 he moved to Lanarkshire, Scotland.

Hugh MacDiarmid died on September 9, 1978, just two months before the publication of his Complete Poems 1920-1976, edited by his son Michael Grieve and his biographer W.R. Aitken. MacDiarmid lived to read final proofs for the book and was able to contribute an author's note before his death.

Sources:


Scope and Content Note

The Hugh MacDiarmid Papers, which consist of MacDiarmid's poetry, prose, and correspondence, date from the early 1930s. In addition to individual titled poems, the collection includes manuscripts of poems that eventually appeared in two of MacDiarmid's poetry collections, First Hymn to Lenin and Other Poems (1931) and the proposed collection Alone with the Alone (1932). The collection contains ca. 35 prose pieces, including essays, reviews, short stories, and sketches, most of which appear in both autograph manuscript and typescript form. Also included are five pieces of correspondence, material related to MacDiarmid's work as the director of the Unicorn Press, and three Scottish Nationalist newspapers in which MacDiarmid's work appears.

Related Collections:

Ms 225 Hugh MacDiarmid papers related to First Hymn to Lenin & Other Poems

Series List

I. Poetry

1. Material toward First Hymn to Lenin and other Poems
2. Material toward Alone with the Alone
3. Individually Titled Poems

II. Prose

III. Miscellaneous

1. Correspondence
2. Synopses of Proposed Books
3. Unicorn Press
4. Political Newspapers

Contents List

Box -- Folder -- Contents

1 Series I. Poetry.

Includes manuscript of poems that appear in First Hymn to Lenin and Other Poems and Alone with the Alone. Also included are individual titled poems.

Series I.1. Material toward First Hymn to Lenin and other Poems.


F1 Author's note. 1931 November. AMs, 2p. Signed "C.M. Grieve ("Hugh MacDiarmid")" at the bottom.

Author's note. 1931 November. Ts [carbon], 1p. Typed signature "C.M. Grieve ("Hugh MacDiarmid")" at the bottom.

Beyond Exile. [n.d.] Ts [carbon], 1p.  
“Salonika, 1916” written at the bottom.

F2  The Liquid Light and Country Folk [n.d.] AMs, 1 p.  
Two short poems appearing on the same page.

Religion and Love. [n.d.] AMs, 1 p.  
On Receiving a Copy of Gogarty's Splendid Poem on 
Leda, typed on paper most dubious in colour and 
texture, and suggestive in length. [n.d.] AMs, 1 p.  
Signed “H. McD.” at the bottom. This poem did not 
appear in the published collection.

The Whore. [n.d.] AMs, 1 p.  This poem appeared 
in the collection under the title “The Prostitute.”

F3  The Seamless Garment. [n.d.] AMs, 7 p.  The poem 
begin with a quote from Coleridge.

F4  Water of Life. [n.d.] AMs, 6 p.  
Water of Life.  [n.d.] Ts [carbon], 2 p. Only 
the first half of the poem.

F5  Excelsior. [n.d.] AMs, 3 p.  The fifth and sixth 
stanzas are missing.

Excelsior. [n.d.] Ts, 2 p.  The two pages are 
numbered “4” and “5.”

Series I.2. Material toward Alone with the Alone.  
Material toward Alone with the Alone  
[ca. 1932]. Consists of autograph drafts and 
carbon typescripts of poems to be included in this 
proposed collection which was never published.  
Included with each set of drafts is the “Author’s 
note.”

F6  Alone with the Alone [1932]. AMs, 33 p.  
"Author’s note" signed on the verso "Hugh McDiarmid.  
London, 1932." The Table of Contents lists 32 poems, 
22 of which appear in the manuscript. The poems, which 
are listed in the order they appear in the manuscript, 
are written almost entirely on Aster Publications 
stationery.

Cattle Show  
On a Lone Shore  
High over Beauty  
Within that Week  
Eden Regained  
Acme  
Valedictory  
The Windbags  
Allegiance  
La Belle Terre Sans Merci  
J.K. Huysmans  
In the Golden Island  
Amiel  
Of Two Bulgarian Poets  
Introduzione Alla Vita Mediocre  
Der Wunderrabbiner von Barcelona  
Spring; A Violin in the Void  
They Know Not What They Do  
Playmates  
Hymn to Sophia; The Wisdom of God  
The Monolith  
The Crown of Rock

F7  Alone with the Alone [1932]. Ts [carbon], 32 p.  
Contains the same poems as the previous manuscript. 
Also includes a title page and three additional poems:

The Aerial City  
The Flowing Bowl  
Autumn Nightfall

F8  Miscellaneous clippings. Each clipping contains 
one of MacDiarmid’s poems from the “Casual Column.” In 
each case, the words “Casual Column” have been crossed 
out. These clippings were gathered to be inserted in 
the autograph manuscript of Alone with the Alone.

The Aerial City. [n.d.] “Prelude; The Hydra” 
and "I" are written at the top. The printed signature 
of "Hugh McDiarmid." has been crossed out.
The Flowing Bowl. [n.d.] "II" is written on the top, and the printed signature "C.M. Grieve" has been crossed out.

An October Nightfall. [n.d.] "V" is written at the top. The words "An October" have been crossed out and "Autumn" written above them. The printed signature "Hugh McDiarmid." has been crossed out.

Series I. Individually titled poems.
Consists of manuscripts of primarily undated poems arranged alphabetically.

F9 Black Rainbow. [n.d.] Ts [carbon], 1 p. Typed signature "C.M. Grieve" at the bottom. Typed on verso of a small fragment of C.M. Grieve's stationery. This poem was published under the title "The Black Rainbow over the Minch."

By Wauchopeside. 1932 January 27. AMS, 3 p. Signed "Hugh MacDiarmid" at the bottom.

By Wauchopeside. [n.d.] Ts [carbon], 2 p. Typed signature "Hugh McDiarmid" at the bottom.

F10 Cauld Kail Het Again. 1932 January 25. AMS, 1 p. Signed "Hugh MacDiarmid" at the bottom.

Cauld Kail Het Again. [n.d.] Ts [carbon], 1 p. Typed signature "Hugh MacDiarmid" at the bottom.

Empty Vessel. [n.d.] AMS, 1 p. Signed "Hugh MacDiarmid" at the bottom. On verso is printed "One of fifty special copies. This is number ---." Signed "Hugh MacDiarmid" again on verso.

F11 Heel Tap. [n.d.] AMS, 2 p. Signed "C.M. Grieve" at the bottom. On verso is an autograph manuscript of his poem "Unfathered Through Divorce" that has been crossed out.

Heel Tap. [n.d.] Ts [carbon], 1 p. Typed signature "C.M. Grieve" at the bottom.

The Hidden Scotland. 1932 January 25. AMS, 2 p. Signed "Hugh MacDiarmid" at the bottom.

The Hidden Scotland. [n.d.] Ts [carbon], 1 p. Typed signature "Hugh MacDiarmid" at the bottom.

F12 The Mouse That Bit the Cat. 1932 January 27. AMS, 2 p. Signed "Hugh MacDiarmid" at the bottom.

The Mouse That Bit the Cat. 1932 January 27. Ts [carbon], 1 p. Typed signature "Hugh MacDiarmid 27.1.32" at the bottom.

The New Makars. 1932 January 25. AMS, 3 p. Signed "C.M. Grieve" at the bottom.

The New Makars. [n.d.] Ts [carbon], 2 p. Typed signature "C.M. Grieve" at the bottom.


The Roaring Game. [n.d.] Ts [carbon], 1 p. Typed signature "Hugh MacDiarmid" at the bottom.

Scotland. [n.d.] Ts, 1 p. Autograph corrections and signature "C.M. Grieve" at the bottom. Typed on verso of his stationery.

F13 Scotland To Her Lovers. [n.d.] Ts [carbon], 1 p. Typed signature "C.M. Grieve" at the bottom. On verso of his stationery.


The Shifting Shadow. [n.d.] AMS, 2 p. Signed "Hugh MacDiarmid" at the bottom. Written on verso of Aster Publications stationery. This poem was published under the title "Fly Down, Eagle..."
The Shifting Shadow. [n.d.] Ts [carbon], 1 p. Typed signature "Hugh McDiarmid" at the bottom.


F15 Unfathered Through Divorce. [n.d.] AMs, 1 p. Signed "C.M. Grieve" at the bottom.


The Vital Fact. 1932 January 25. AMs, 3 p. Signed "C.M. Grieve" at the bottom.

The Vital Fact. [n.d.] Ts [carbon], 1 p. Typed signature "C.M. Grieve" at the bottom.

Series II. Prose.
Manuscripts of MacDiarmid’s articles, essays, reviews, short stories, and sketches. Publication information has been ascertained for only a few of the pieces; therefore, they are arranged alphabetically by title.

F16 At Sixes and Sevens (Essay). [n.d.] Ts [carbon], 8 p. Typed signature "by C.M. Grieve" follows the title.

F17 Burns and "Sodjer Hugh" (Essay). [n.d.] AMs, 13 p. At the top is written "If They Came Back Again Series." Signed "by C M Grieve ("Hugh McDiarmid")" after the title.

F17 Burns and "Sodjer Hugh" (Essay). [n.d.] Ts [carbon], 4 p. "If They Came Back Again Series" typed across the top. Typed signature "by C.M. Grieve. ("Hugh McDiarmid")" following the title.


F31 DeMontalk Case. Prejudice Masquerading As Justice (Essay) [n.d.] AMs, 4 p. Signed "by Hugh McDiarmid" after the title. Includes a short blurb written by and about the author.


A Female MacGonagall (Review of Lucy Watkin's "Unholy Music and Other Verses") [n.d.] Ts [carbon], 4 p. "Book Page Article" typed at the top. Typed initial "A.I." at the end.


F33 The Genius of Scotland (Essay) [n.d.] AMs, 6 p. Signed "by C.M. Grieve" after the title.

The Genius of Scotland (Essay) [n.d.] Ts [carbon], 3 p. Typed signature "by C.M. Grieve" after the title.


F34 Invitation to Scottish Poets (Essay) [n.d.] AMs, 11 p. Signed "by Hugh McDiarmid" after the title.

Invitation to Scottish Poets (Essay) [n.d.] Ts [carbon], 4 p. Typed signature "by Hugh McDiarmid" after the title.


F36 A Low Review (Reply to a review of "Frank Harris on Bernard Shaw" by Sir Sidney Low) [n.d.] AMs, 7 p. (4 l.). Signed "by CM Grieve" after the title.

A Low Review (Reply to a review of "Frank Harris on Bernard Shaw" by Sir Sidney Low) [n.d.] Ts [carbon], 3 p. Typed signature "by C.M. Grieve" after the title.

F37 Mrs. Annand Taylor's Dunbar (Review) [n.d.] AMs, 8 p. Signed "A.K.L." at bottom.


The Murder (short story) [n.d.] Ts [carbon], 2p.


A New Scottish Publishing Firm (Essay) [n.d.] AMs, 5 p. Signed "C.M. Grieve" at the end.

Ranier Maria Rilke (Review of Frederico Oliver's "Ranier Maria Rilke") [n.d.] AMs, 7 p. "Book Page Article" at the top. Signed "A.K.L." at the end. This review was published in New Britain, vol. 2, no. 41, February 28, 1934.

Scotland and the French Exhibition (Essay) [n.d.] AMs, 7 p. Written on verso of Aster Publications stationery. Signed "by Maillaw" after the title. "From CM Grieve, 321 High Holborn WC 1" written across the top.


Some Notes on Hugh Mcdiarmid's Poems (Essay) [n.d.] AMs, 8 p. Written on verso of Aster Publications stationery. Signed "James Maclaren" at the end.

The Tent Pole; Parables for Scotland Today (Essay) [n.d.] AMs, 8 p. Signed "by C.M. Grieve"
Series III. Miscellaneous.

Includes correspondence, synopses of proposed books, material from the Unicorn Press, and political newspapers.

Series III.1. Correspondence.


To Bill (?) 1946 July 7. ALs, 3 p. Signed "Yours, Chris". MacDiarmid discusses his latest publications.


F51 To Neusome (?) [n.d.] AL, 5 p. Draft of letter concerning recent publications of the Unicorn Press.


A collection of drafts of press releases, lists of addresses, and other material related to the author's work as the director of the Unicorn Press.

F53 Draft of a deed of assignment. [n.d.] AMS, 6 p. This draft vested in C.M. Grieve the sole agency for dealing with the publication of American editions and foreign translations of Major C.H. Douglas' published works.


F54 Miscellaneous items. [n.d.] 23 p. Drafts of press releases, list of addresses, and other material pertaining to the Unicorn Press.
Series III.4. Political Newspapers.
Consists of three Scottish Nationalist newspapers containing MacDiarmid's work.


F58 Forward Scotland. 1963 November. 8 p. Contains MacDiarmid's article "Tribute to Harry Miller."