Accompanying a drunk man from "coupin' gless for gless" to silence – An essay in translating Hugh MacDiarmid

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Abstract: This essay explores possibilities for translating the Scots language poetry of 20th cenury poet, Hugh MacDiarmid. Mirroring MacDiarmid's propensity to draw on and recontextualise other sources of poetry and to create new poetic language, the essay illustrates options of translation as (i) repurposing the ideas of the poem, and (ii) reworking events associated with the poem. Two examples are contextualised in an overview of MacDiarmid's prolific and intellectual Scots and English language poetry. MacDiarmid drew on both languages to create what he called synthetic Scots and synthetic English. This allowed him to explore Scottish cultural, social and political identity, in part to promote Scottish independence and autonomy, and in part to stimulate a new Scottish intellectual and literary tradition. His work typified what is known as Caledonian antisyzygy. Antisyzygy allows for borrowing, appropriation, reworking and decontextualisation of language, ideas and other writers' work. The essay describes my own appropriation of one poem, *On a Raised Beach*, to inform a discussion of future education (translation as repurposing). It closes on a contemporary retelling of the construction of the book-length poem, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (translation as reworking).

Key words: Hugh MacDiarmid, Scots language, Caledonian antisyzygy, translation as repurposing, translations as reworking

In this essay, I explore several threads loosely woven into a translation of poetry. The essay focuses on the 20th century Scottish renaissance poet, Hugh MacDiarmid, providing a MacDiarmidian ramble through possibilities of 'translation'. It is a ramble that is, perhaps, in keeping with MacDairmid himself and, especially, his propensity to draw on and recontextualise other sources of poetry. In this essay, I consider options of translation as repurposing of ideas of the poem, and translation as reworking or redrafting of events associated with the poetry. The essay ends in a translation as reworking of events of *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle.* This reworking mirrors an example I provide earlier in the essay of translation as repurposing of ideas. Neither is so much as translation from one language to another, but more from one context to another, one purpose to another.

I am not a translator of poetry, but rather a borrower of ideas. My translation is one of appropriation, a translation of poetry into other contexts as a tool for, and way of, exploring ideas, and translation as a reworking of events associated with the poetry. That is part of my scholarly tradition. However, as a person of Scottish heritage, I am also drawn to the Scots language. In this context, I am drawn to the Scottish poet Hugh MacDiarmid and his Scots language poetry. The challenge for me as an English-speaking Scot – English is my first language, Scots my lost language – is to return to my lost language. English speakers will be familiar with the Scots language as used by poets such as Robert Burns, even if they find it challenging to understand.

> Fair fa' your honest, sonsie face,
> Great Chieftain o' the Puddin-race!
> Aboon them a' ye tak your place,
> Painch, tripe, or thairm:
> Weel are ye wordy of a grace
> As lang 's my arm[i]

English speakers will also be familiar with the range of Scottish dialects of English – Glaswegian comedian Billy Connelly is well known, if not fully understood, globally. Scots is the lost language my forbearers would have spoken before "that is not the language we speak at school". It nevertheless articulates the culture of thought and understanding, the humour and seriousness, the relationships with people and land of my ancestors. And thus, I suspect, of myself. While the personal importance of engaging in one's lost language may lie in nostalgia[ii], I hope that it better reflects a more fundamental process, that the web of languages we grow up with defines and articulates our feelings[iii]. Exploring one's lost language is, therefore, less a process of linguistic nicety, but one of potentially fulfilling one's identity.

And so it is that I turn to the poet Hugh MacDiarmid. As I struggle to learn and understand the Scots he writes in, a slow realisation of the humour and irony he writes about dawns on me. As the joy and the pathos of his observations elevate my emotions, I come to realise that he is expressing ideas in one context that resonate for me in others. Indeed, it was during a period of writing a speculative article on the future of education[iv], to which I will return later in this essay, that I first immersed myself in MacDiarmid. His geological poem *On a Raised Beach* introduced me to his synthetic English, creating poetry out of a language I was familiar with: geological English. I am a scholar who has sought to find an intellectual home[v]. A geographer, archaeologist and geologist, I have migrated into the social sciences, and beyond them into postmodern and post-human cultural studies. I have sought frames of reference for understanding the present and exploring futures, and, as a consequence, have periodically drawn on the writings of Foucault, Bhabha, Said, Deleuze, Braidotti, and other European philosophers. Perhaps, as MacDiarmid drew on the European thinkers of his time to create an expression of a Scottish intellectual and literary sensibility, I too need to draw on a corpus of difference to find ways of expressing my nascent thoughts. And so it is to the Scots language, and to Hugh MacDiarmid in particular, that I turn.

Christopher Murray Grieve was born Christopher Murray Grieve, but wrote himself into posterity as Hugh MacDiarmid. He – Hugh that is – was what the poet Edwin Morgan described as an "eccentric and maddening genius". A man of language and literature, MacDiarmid was an ardent Scottish nationalist, founder of the National Party of Scotland in the 1920s, the precursor to the modern Scottish National Party, and a communist. His agenda was for a Scottish literary and cultural renaissance, a revitalisation of Scottish intellectual culture and language. He wrote – extensively – from around the 1910s through to the 1970s.

MacDiarmid's earliest published poetry was a translation of Gaelic poems. His translation was received well by Gaelic scholars, which is no mean feat, as he was later to be received favourably by foremost Russian poet scholars for his translations or re-creations of Russian poetry, albeit derived from English and German versions[vi]. This early work was shortly followed, during the 1920s, by poetry and other writing in the Scots language. And this, in turn, was followed by a corpus of poetry in English. Neither the Scots writing nor the early English writing, however, was in a conventional version of either language, although later in his life, he tended towards writing in a more conventional English. MacDiarmid's early writing was in what he described as synthetic Scots and synthetic English. What did he mean by this? His Scots was a revival based on many forms of the Scots language. This was the working language of the lowlands of Scotland, based on language derived from the late medieval transactions of trade and commerce with Europe, a language bringing together elements of English, Dutch, German, French and other languages of the North Sea. It is a language that English speakers may recognise as familiar, yet incomprehensible.

MacDiarmid drew on a broad range of local dialect dictionaries and other sources, and as such drew on linguistic traditions from the border with England through to the northern isles, from the southwest to the northeast, and then added some. He would draw on the Scots language of my forbearers in Ayrshire. This was a very different form of Scots to which I, in my youth, encountered amongst shepherds in the glens of the east coast. MacDiarmid was born in, and later returned to, the southern borders of Scotland, but lived elsewhere in Scotland, including many years in Shetland. He could not have chosen two more contrasting places – the borders and Shetland – to live. The language of each was equally contrasting.

Where necessary, MacDiarmid's poetry includes his own words, or at least traditional words assigned new meaning. When he got to the English, his borrowing extended to the sciences. In his poetry, literary and everyday English becomes peppered with scientific technical terms. This, in many ways, was my introduction to MacDiarmid, since my early education had been in the sciences. His extensive borrowing of scientific terms, especially from the earth sciences, aligned with my own other 'language'. In his preface to MacDiarmid's book-length poem, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, Kenneth Buthlay[vii] talks about MacDiarmid's use of the Scots language thus:

> The difficulty of the Scots vocabulary deployed in *A Drunk Man* is not excessive, although it does contain a few set-pieces which were constructed on an armature of unfamiliar words assembled in the course of the poet's imaginative exploration of the Scots dictionary. … But most readers of poetry themselves tend to be word-fanciers to a sufficient extent to overcome the occasional obstacle of the sort which will confront them in the work itself, provided that their social and educational formation has not induced too rigid a prejudice against the very idea that forgotten Scots expressions are capable of imaginative revival in poetry of modern sensibility.

Buthlay concludes that, "If any writer can overturn such preconceptions it is MacDiarmid, and giving him a chance to do so can have rich rewards". And rich rewards there were to be. The Poetry Foundation[viii] acknowledged him as being "credited with effecting a Scottish literary revolution which restored an indigenous Scottish literature and has been acknowledged as the greatest poet that his country has produced since Robert Burns". MacDiarmid, by the way, was no great fan of Burns, considering his poetry to be lightweight and populist. But that was to be expected: MacDiarmid was a man to be reckoned with. He was described by Ian Hamilton[ix] as

a man who "makes his own rules, contemns[x] categories, cracks open water-tight compartments, bestraddles disciplines, scorns social, cultural and academic cliques and claques, and affirms … that is it not failure but low aim that is criminal".

A Drunk Man was furnished with a running glossary, both in the original provided by Mac-Diarmid himself, and subsequently extensively elaborated by Buthlay in the 1987 edition of the poem[xi]. This, ironically, follows in the tradition of Robert Burns himself. To add piquancy to the experience, Buthlay[xii] explains that "the glossary is critical to the sense that the poet's usage of Scots expressions, and indications of their meanings in his own glossaries or elsewhere, have not been taken on face value … and … he would occasionally give words a meaning he wanted them to have, regardless of received usage".

MacDiarmid's poetry spans a vast universe of ideas, philosophies and perceptions of the world. In a wide-ranging introductory essay to his book-length Scots poem, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, Kenneth Buthlay reviews the depth and breadth of MacDiarmid's sources and inspirations[xiii]. Drawing widely on European intellectual thought, MacDiarmid finds himself translating from the Russian poets, for example, although he professes to not knowing Russian – his translation, in parts verbatim translation, in other parts more a translation of ideas – coming via English and German versions. Buthlay's heavily annotated volume of *A Drunk Man* provides ample evidence of MacDiarmid's translatory inspiration from English, Scottish, European, Russian and classical writers. In his drive to redress the woeful state, as he saw it, of lowland Scotland's national language – "We have the hopeless mass of Anglo-Scots to contend with, the virtual monopoly accorded to English literature on our schools and Universities, and the fact that our leading newspapers … give no space to our younger writers but in so far as they give space to poetry at all continue to give it only to the traditional post-Burnsian rubbish"[xiv] – he created his "gallimaufry in braid Scots"[xv], an extended contemplation of the state of the world, the Scottish world to be specific, through a logic of drunkenness. He opens his poem with:

> I amna fou' sae muckle as tired – deid dune.
> It's gey and hard wark coupin' gless for gless
> Wi' Cruive and Gilsanquhar and the like
> And I'm no' juist as bauld as aince I wes.[xvi]

It is hard work, in other words, getting drunk. And so he commences on a reflective lambasting of society, authority, intellectual snobbery, politics, and on and on – a typical drunken rant, one might suggest. In the course of his drinking, being thrown out of the pub, wandering home, communing with nature en route, he gives rein to an extensive contemplation on contemporary Scotland. As the drunk man emerges from the pub into the moonlight, his long walk home provides grist for his contemplative mind. The moon and the thistle become signifiers for Scotland and its society, triggers for further thinking. Some maudlin, some angry, some humorous, always intellectual and intellectually challenging, and always drawing on a wide range of sources. He finally, well over two and a half thousand lines later, arrives home, where he is brought to silence:

> O I ha'e Silence left
> -- 'And weel ye micht,'
> Sae Jean'll say, 'efter sic a nicht!'[xvii]

Whether this is a real logic, of course, is left open for speculation. The drunk man himself provokes scepticism. Close to arriving home, he questions the logic itself, oddly enough in English:

> But in this huge ineducable
> Heterogeneous hotch and rabble
> Why am I
> condemned to squabble?

His answer to himself is MacDiarmid's condemnation of the Scots:

> A Scottish poet maun assume
> The burden o' his people's doom,
> And dee to brak' their livin' tomb.
> Many ha'e tried, but a' ha'e failed.
> Their sacrifice has nocht availed.
> Upon the thistle they're impaled.[xviii]

And so on. Here we see a typical, for MacDiarmid, expression of a characterisation of the Scots he frequently references, and indeed appears to take to heart. Known as Caledonian antisyzygy, the term was first used by G. Gregory Smith to counter views that there was, at least in the early 20th Century, no value in Scottish provincial literature; nothing of coherence and foundational value. The argument was that the Scottish psyche is inherently complex and contradictory – a blend of ethos, pathos and logos, of joy and misery, diverse and yet capable of a union of opposites, relishing tensions between the transcendental and the mundane, disjoined from reality yet grounded in gritty reality, capable of ontological shifts. This "presence of duelling polarities within one entity", Smith argued, would all play seminal roles in how the Scot sees the world – The Concise Scots Dictionary considers this to be "characteristic of the Scottish temperament … In other words we Scots are thrawn [contrary, perverse, twisted or misshapen]"[xix]. For MacDiarmid, Caledonian antisyzygy provides the intellectually rigorous and challenging basis for Scottish literature. Indeed, an antisyzygial posture suits MacDiarmid well, and he taps into the contradictions he understands to be, or at least at great length claims to be, inherent in the Scottish character. An antisyzygial posture allows the borrowing, appropriation, reworking and recontextualising of language and languages, of ideas and philosophies, and of other writers' work. It also, perhaps, validates a logic that only a synthetic language can bring. In short, it allows for, and demands, synthetic language. And from a translation perspective, it challenges the notion of a linguistic translation from one language to another. Where the original is already second hand, modified and, one might argue, derivative, and where the original is expressed in a hybrid version of language – and indeed *A Drunk Man* also contains verses in both English English and Scottish English – what would the language look like after translation? How, for example, might one translate the following beautifully antisyzygial verse?

> Type o' the Wissenschaftsfeindlichkeit,
> Begriffmüdigkeit that has gar't
> Men try Morphologies der Weltgeschichte,
> And mad Expressionismus syne in Art.

I have, I will admit, included a few short translations of my own in the endnotes, but would argue that while they make sense, they cannot capture poetic qualities of the original.

I will not, however, enter into more than an initial discussion about language (linguistic) translation here – I have no authority in this regard. I do note, however, that, while there is a growing tradition of literary translation both between and into the native languages of Scotland – Gaelic, Scots and English – it seems that most translation relating to Scots is into Scots rather than from it[xx]. Furthermore, translating MacDiarmid is challenging. An example is a 2016 collection of French translations by the Breton poet Paol Keineg[xxi], which has been hailed as a "first and major step towards giving French poetry readers some access to the genius and linguistic experiments of Hugh MacDiarmid"[xxii]. It had, however, to accept that translating MacDiarmid's "wide range of linguistic experiments, from Synthetic Scots to scientific poetry, from Joycean portmanteaus to terse statements or found poetry, is a new and daring step towards poetic claims"[xxiii]. In noting that MacDiarmid's texts would challenge any translator, a reviewer[xxiv] of Keineg's work suggested that a translator would rewrite rather than translate the originals. Keineg's approach, however, was to translate directly into French. In doing so, he was acknowledging the identity of Scots as a language in its own right rather than as an English dialect. He could have differentiated MacDiarmid's English and Scots writing by adopting translation into French and, say Breton or Gallo. He apparently rejected this option, partly due to his dislike of modern synthetic Breton (a curious contrast to MacDiarmid's own cultural and linguistic views). His translations, it seems, rely much on his own prowess as a poet, and thus his poetic ability to resonate with MacDiarmid's ethos.

Given, therefore, the challenging and, typically, antisyzygial nature of MacDiarmid's poetry, it seems appropriate to explore alternative ways in which his work may be translated. To this end, I present two experiments in translation. The first is an appropriation of sorts — a repurposing of the ideas of the poem. The second is a reworking or redrafting of events associated with the poetry. I will first describe translation as repurposing by example from a prior publication of mine, in which I drew on the poetry of a contemplation of the insignificance of humanity in a world of infinitely greater size and age – Hugh MacDiarmid's 1934 *On a Raised Beach* – to frame a speculative article on future education[xxv]. I return to translation as reworking or redrafting of events towards the end of this article.

The example of translation as repurposing was included in my response to a call for articles on the theme of education in a post-human era. The central premise was the recognition of the Anthropocene, the contemporary geological era in which human forces play a significant, if not the most significant, role in shaping the world we live in. Intellectually, there are arguments around the de-centring of the human, the emergence of a new relationality between humans and the rest of the world. In short, the article was to address the nature of education in the future in which people are not at the centre of the endeavour. In seeking an anchor for my response, I stumbled upon *On a Raised Beach*[xxvi]. Among its opening lines the following sets a scene worthy of exploration:

> What happens to us
> Is irrelevant to the world's geology
> But what happens to the world's geology
> Is not irrelevant to us.
> We must reconcile ourselves to the stones
> Not the stones to us.

I drew on this verse to commence speculation on what would become an experiment in Deleuzian writing. Using Giles Deleuze's methodological concept of the fold[xxvii] I explored the stimulatory effects of a range of writing, largely around our relationships with the past as signifiers

of potential relationships with the world in the future. My early and enduring interests in archaeology and geology were mined for new purpose. Hugh MacDiarmid's long 1934 poem ranged widely through what is now understood as a post-human age[xxviii]. His poem, I asserted, may be read as a post-human educational manifesto. If so, it comes with a cost, a natural consequence of a true mergence of humanity and nature, a true recognition of nature's primacy over humans. It ends in death, the human returning to nature, the ultimate realisation of the integrated, relational position of humanity in the world. While this may be an education of participation, integration, inseparability, it is also an education of reality, the reality of oneness. MacDiarmid does not seem to see this eventuality negatively. Rather, he celebrates optimism. I closed my engagement with his poem by suggesting that this is the true and virtuous inevitability of an honest post-human engagement, the natural graduate outcome of a post-human education.

Why did I translate the poem in such a way? The poem is a deep contemplation of the relevance of humanity and nature, a potentially grim vision, at least to a contemporary society fixated on its own primacy. For MacDiarmid the stone is all, having" dismissed / All but all of evolution, unmoved by it", while "… the essential life of mankind in the mass / Is the same as their earliest ancestors yet". He reveals the folly of modern humanity, celebrating the absoluteness and infinity of nature," the unsearchable masterpiece, the music of the spheres". This provided a springboard for me to seek insights that may be relevant to a new education: we must be humble; we must be aware of death; we are increasingly losing control — the stones will have their revenge. Pragmatically, MacDiarmid seeks an opening of eyes, an acknowledgement of the inseparability of humans and the world, and an acknowledgement of nature's primeval character. I asked the question, "Is this the beginning of a manifesto for a new education?". I am sure that MacDiarmid did not conceive of his words in this way.

And yet, nearly a century later, his words resonate as the urgency of a significant shift in human-nature relations becomes blindingly clear. There is a growing need for (in my words elsewhere) a

> multi-dimensional perspective on social and ecological systems – and most importantly on our engagement with them – one in which properties of interconnectedness, flows of energy and materials, linkages, feedback, relationships, and agency play central roles … a perspective borne of Deleuze and Guattari's[xxix] concept of … the interrelatedness of everything … in which learning is all encompassing and ceases to be pedagogically – and disciplinarily – bound[xxx].

The language differs, but the sentiments parallel MacDiarmid's insights. He argues for what might be read as a true, embedded, relational (post-human) environmental education, an education built on participation, interaction and faith, a post-human future in which

> the binaries of human-nature, adult-child, person-animal, public-private … are rendered obsolete ... the concept of milieu asserts its relational self as an honest framework for a productive response to the Anthropocene … [and] of real, continuing and experiential learning, by all parts of the world, located in the interstitial space that is the anthropocene world[xxxi].

Hence my confidence in a justified appropriation or translation as repurposing. It provided an excellent frame to explore contemporary ideas from an historical perspective, untainted by post-modern or post-human thinking.

What, however, I did not do in that exploration was consider the geological side of the synthetic English. *On a Raised Beach* opens with the lines:

> All is lithogenesis — or lochia,
> Carpolite fruit of the forbidden tree,
> Stones blacker than any in the Caaba,
> Cream-coloured caen-stone, chatoyant pieces,
> Celadon and corbeau, bistre and beige,
> Glaucous, hoar, enfouldered, cyathiform,
> Making mere faculae of the sun and moon,

And so on. Here we see the "eccentric and maddening genius" in full flight, making his own rules, treating categories with contempt, cracking open water-tight compartments, bestraddling disciplines, scorning social, cultural and academic cliques and claques, and certainly not aiming low, to paraphrase Hamilton's characterisation of the poet.

In seeking more MacDiarmid, my introduction to *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* invited me to reconsider this opening section to *On a Raised Beach*, and to better appreciate what may be seen to be clumsy juxtaposition of technical, scientific and everyday language. Importantly, it helped me open up to the possibilities of other hybrid writing — a functional extension of the translation as repurposing I summarise above. As a consequence, I have more recently drafted a short piece in my own synthetic Scots – probably more Scottish English than Scots *per se* – reworking or redrafting an account of the creation of *A Drunk Man*. This is the second mode of translation I mention above.

Much is written about MacDiarmid's poem, and much is speculated about its origins and original intent. The original manuscript is, apparently, lost. It may or may not have been intended to be a very long or a somewhat shorter poem – there are several published editions varying from around 600 lines to 2,685 lines. It may or may not have been written as individual poems, and individual sections may or may not have had titles. Buthlay's extended essay in *A Drunk Man* canvasses all these possibilities, and MacDairmid himself comments on these possibilities in his author's note for the 1926 edition. "It would have been further misleading," he tells the reader,

> if I had (as, arbitrarily enough at best, I might have done) divided my poem into sections or in other ways supplied any of those 'hand-rails' which raise false hopes in the indigenous minds of readers whose rational intelligence are all too insusceptible of realising the enormities of which 'highbrows' of my type are capable – even in Scotland[xxxii].

He further explains,

> I would suggest, on the other hand, if I may, that they [the readers] should avoid subtleties and simply persist in the pretence that my 'synthetic Scots' presents insuperable difficulties to understanding, while continuing to espouse with all the impressiveness at their command the counter-claims of 'sensible poetry'.

Returning to Buthlay's account, however, it is pertinent to read of the role one of MacDiarmid close friends, Francis George Scott, played in the eventual publication of *A Drunk Man*[xxxiii]. Scott was a Scottish composer associated with the Scottish Renaissance. He wrote more than three hundred songs, including musical versions of MacDiarmid's poems. MacDiarmid opens *A Drunk Man* with a poem dedicated to Scott, and makes it clear that *A Drunk Man* could not have been completed without his help. Buthlay explores Scott's help. Based on diverse accounts – the more that is written, the more opaque reality becomes – it seems that much of the structure of the poem, and indeed some of the content, was down to Scott. Indeed, there is a claim that the closing lines quoted above ("O I ha'e Silence left …") were Scott's suggestion for a closure. There was urgency in getting the draft to the publishers – MacDiarmid was notoriously awkward with his publishers, in part due to a perfectionism that impeded his willingness to finalise a poem. According to Buthlay, Scott's contribution to the actual manuscript "has become legendary". There was a meeting (which true to form for MacDiarmid, Buthlay says was Glasgow, while Scott, decades later, describes as being held in the east coast town of Montrose) between Scott and MacDairmid in which

> the poet … had bits of the manuscript stuffed in all his pockets, from which they were transferred to a bed, where Scott proceeded to demonstrate his principle that 'a work has to have a beginning, a middle, and an end. … [by one account] the poet was sunk in alcoholic slumber while Scott spent the night in editing and putting in order the 'fragments' of his work. … by 'unifying them into a complete whole', Scott ensured that 'a masterpiece was born'.

Scott's account differed in detail, but the essence prevails:

> … we sat down to a table, a great heap of scribbled bits of paper and a bottle of whisky … we spent until day-break sorting out the items worth keeping, Christopher [Hugh] arranging them on the table like a pack of cards in the order that I indicated as likely to give the best sequences, climaxes, etc. …

Buthlay's (and Scott's) account, therefore, provoked my version of translating MacDiarmid. This essay is a long way round, a MacDiarmidian ramble, through possibilities of considering 'translation', a ramble that is perhaps in keeping with MacDairmid himself, and with his propensity to draw on and recontextualise other sources of poetry. I close, then, with an offering: a translation of *A Drunk Man* not so much as translation from one language to another, but more from one context to another, one purpose to another. In turning to a suppressed language – the Scots that is the native language of lowland Scotland, and the same Scots that is my own lost language – MacDiarmid reminds me of other modes of language, encouraging me to draw on my own other languages – the scientific languages of my education and profession, and the Scottish version of English that is my own everyday language. In turning in this direction, I find an opportunity to liberate my own thoughts, and, especially as a scholar, seek other ways of building knowledge.

So let us return to *A Drunk Man*. The following is entitled *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle – A Re-Telling of a Poem*. It is my translation of the poetic giant, Hugh MacDiarmid.

> I'll tell yous a story. It's true. Weel, least based on true events. Perhaps.
> It's a story o' a Poet. An' a story o' his mate. The Critic. Irascibles, Drunks and Scotsmen, the pair o' them. Aye, you say, so what? It is a story of a Drunk Man and of the Moon and of the Thistle.

It was the evening afore The Book was due at the publishers. A Masterpiece. A Book o' Poetry unlike any ever conceived. A single poem, the length o' a Book. In Scots. The Critic was in the Poet's parlour. Collecting the manuscript. He'd tak it up the City i' the morning.

Wet the baby's heid? Says the Critic. Aye. One for the road. Out comes the Macallan[xxxiv]. Two glasses. Three fingers. Clink. Sláinte. Aye, that's good. Warms the heart. The comfortable silence of auld friends. Easy in a shared love of the uisce beatha.

So whar's yon book says the Critic. Aye. The only answer. Anither? Three fingers. Clink. Sláinte. Come oan, says the Critic. I've no goat a' night. Aye. Anither? No until the Book is in ma ain hauns. A vague pointing finger. The mantelshelf. A box. An auld shoebox. That it? Pass it o'er. An auld shoebox wi' a thoosan slips. Scraps. Bits 'n' bobs. Yer joking says the Critic. Did I ever joke says the Poetic. That's the Book. Just needs tae be put in order. The big city printers willnae get oot ae bed for this. Yer oot yer mind. Aye. Anither? Three fingers. Clink. Sláinte. A fumble o' passin hauns. The box went heid o'er heels, aw o'er the floor.

A thoosan scraps o' genius. Aw o'er the floor. A thoosan scraps o' the Scots language so beloved of the Poet. O' a Drunk Man. The Moon, The Thistle. Thinkings 'n' thoughts. Philosophisings 'n' cries o' anger. Humour 'n' piss-taking. Political commentary on the State o' the Nation. Snooks at politicians. Lambastations. A thoosan scraps aw o'er the floor. I'll be buggered says the Poet in his finest eloquence. Aye fuck me sideways says the Critic. Anither? Three fingers. Clink. Sláinte.

Fit we'll do noo? Aye, it's easy. Put them together. Yon is the start, then this, then, na, no that one, the ither. Haw aboot these couple o' verses. They're for the ending. No makes sense. And back and forth and back and forth and back and forth. Twa auld irascables, twa auld drunks getting drunker, more maudlin, more creative, as the hours crept by. Anither bottle, something else frae the Speyside. Three fingers. Clink. Sláinte. The sun crept intae the collective consciousness o' twa auld drunks. Intae the consciousness of the Drunk Man Looking at the Thistle, sitting there looking fine and dandy twixt the Macallan 'n' the ither. The Critic was sober enough to scoop up their collective work. Pack it into the shoebox, more or less in order. Anither? Aye. Three fingers. Comoan, no so miserly. A finger or twa mair. Clink. Sláinte.

The Book goat to the Big City. The Poet and the Critic goat to their beds.

An mony years later, the Drunk Man still howls at the Moon. The Moon still shines through the Thistle above the Drunk Man. A work o' genius by ony meesure.

The academics an' the scholars an' the smartypants an' the clever clogs o'er at the learn-ed establishments are still debating The Book. A work of unmitigated genius? The likes of which we will never see in our day? Or the ramblings of a couple of old drunks? The three a. m. result of an uisce beatha fuelled night?

They'll never know.

Good on yez, ye auld buggers.

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[i] Address to a Haggis: The Scottish Country Dancing Dictionary web site (www.scottish-country-dancing-dictionary.com/to-a-haggis.html) provides two English translations, an idiomatic translation and a free translation. The idiomatic translation is: Nice seeing your honest, chubby face, / Great chieftain of the sausage race! / Above them all you take your place, / Belly, tripe, or links: / Well are you worthy of a grace / As long as my arm. The free translation is: May good fortune attend your honest jolly face, / O King of Puddings. / You are superior to / Tripe and all other offal. / You are also worthy of a paean of praise / Even longer than a Presbyterian sermon. Neither translation, in my opinion, does justice to the original, nor to the haggis itself.

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ii I have explored my own search for identity as a Scot living in Australia in Boyd, B. 2013. (Hardly) anyone listening? Writing silent geography. *Coolabah*, 11, 97-113. This exploration was triggered by a single word of Scots – driech – that found its way into a poem entitled *Verdant Memory: Celtic Dreaming*, in which nostalgia for my 'Geographic Origins' induced the lines 'Celtic verdant at the other end of this continent? / I wade through tropical downpours and think: Driech'.

iii Campbell, M. & Szilágyi, A. 2014. Introduction: how Scotland translates. Pp. vii-xxv in: *Quaich: An Anthology of Translation in Scotland Today*. Westport: Evertype. ISBN 9781782010692

iv Boyd, W.E. & Horstmanshof, L. 2019. A meditation on what a post-human education might look like: "Touching something beyond myself and my time". *Education in the North, 26*(1), 56-70. http://www.abdn.ac.uk/eitn.

v Boyd, B., Rall, D., Ashley, P., Laird, W. & Lloyd. 2013. Finding a home: Harnessing biographical narrative in teaching and learning in cultural geography. *Coolabah*, 11, 187-204.

vi Much of this general introduction to Hugh MacDiarmid is derived from Kenneth Buthlay's extended introductory essay to the 1987 edition of Hugh MacDiarmid's *A Drunk Man Looks at a Thistle* (Scottish Academic Press, Edinburgh).

vii Buthlay, *op. cit.*, p. vii.

viii Poetry Foundation, 2020. Hugh MacDiarmid, 1892–1978 https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/hugh-macdiarmid

ix Poetry Foundation, *op. cit.*

x Appropriately, Hamilton uses an archaic verb, meaning to treat or regard with contempt.

xi MacDiarmid, H. 1987. *A Drunk Man Looks at a Thistle*. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press. This is an annotated edition, edited by Kenneth Buthlay.

xii Buthlay *op. cit.*, p. viii.

xiii Buthlay *op. cit.*

xiv Hugh MacDiarmid's 'Author's Note to the Second Edition (1953)', p. 247 in MacDiarmid, 1987 *op. cit.*

xv A gallimaufry is a confused jumble or medley of things; the braid Scots, of, course, is broad Scots or, simply, the Scots language.

xvi I am not so much drunk as dead beat / It is very hard work downing glass after glass / With Cruive, Gilsanquhar and others / And I am not as healthy as I once was. This is my own translation.

xvii Oh, I have left is silence / "As well you might" / So Jean [his wife] will say, "after such a night!". This is my own translation.

xviii A Scottish poet should assume / The burden of his people's doom, / And die to break their living tomb. / Many have tried, but all have failed. / Their sacrifice never prevailed. / Upon the thistle they are impaled. This is my own translation.

xix https://www.scotslanguage.com/articles/view/id/5260

xx Campbell & Szilágyi, *op. cit.*

xxi Keineg, P. 2016. Hugh MacDiarmid, *Un Enterrement dans l'île*, traductions de Paol Keineg. Brest: Les Hauts-Fonds. 122pp. ISBN: 978-2-919171-14-9

xxii Noirard, S. 2017. Hugh MacDiarmid, Un Enterrement dans l'île, traductions de Paol Keineg. *Études écossaises*, 19, 1-3. http://journals.openedition.org/etudesecossaises/1159

xxiii Noirard *op.cit.*

xxiv Noirard *op.cit.*

xxv Boyd & Horstmanshof, 2019, *op. cit.*

xxvi MacDairmid, H. 1934. On a Raised Beach. *Stony Limits, and Other Poems.* London: Victor Gollancz.

xxvii Deleuze, G. 1988. *Foucault.* Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press. See also Tom Conley's clear exposition on Deleuze's concept of the fold: Conley, T. 2011. *Gilles Deleuze: Key Concepts* (2nd edition). London: Routledge.

xxviii Boyd & Horstmanshof, 2019, *op. cit.* pp. 57-58.

xxix Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. 1987. *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. London: Continuum.

[xxx] Boyd, W.E. 2020. "It is not a question of either/or, but of 'and ... and'": The socioecological learner as learner-teacher-researcher. Pp. 99-138 in Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, A., Lasczik, A., Wilks, J., Logan, M., Turner, A. & Boyd, W. (eds) (2020). *Touchstones for Deterritorializing Socioecological Learning: The Anthropocene, Posthumanism and Common Worlds as Creative Milieux*. Palgrave Macmillan, London. xxix & 283 pp. ISBN 978-3-030-12212-6 (e-book), ISBN 978-3-030-12211-9 (hardcover), DOI 10.1007/978-3-030-12212-6.

[xxxi] Boyd, 2020, *op. cit*.; the reference to interstitial space is from Bhabha, H. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

[xxxii] MacDiarmid, 1987, *op. cit.,* p. 245.

[xxxiii] Buthlay *op.cit.*, pp. 7-13.

[xxxiv] I have used The Macallan as a signifier of the single malt whisky that I must assume MacDiarmid would have enjoyed. It is a Speyside whisky of fine repute. I have, however, no knowledge of MacDiarmid's whisky of preference. The Macallan just seems to fit.

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