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THE LITERATURE OF SCOTLAND

Roderick Watson

M
MACMILLAN

To my mother and father and Olive Mackie

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First published 1984

Published by
Higher and Further Education Division
MACMILLAN PUBLISHERS LTD
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 2XS
and London
Companies and representatives
throughout the world

Typeset by
Wessex Typesetters Ltd
Frome, Somerset

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Watson, Roderick
The literature of Scotland. – (Macmillan history of literature)
1. English literature – Scottish authors – History and criticism
2. Scottish literature – History and criticism
I. Title
820.9'9411 PR8511

ISBN 978-0-333-26924-4 ISBN 978-1-349-86111-8 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-86111-8

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Editor's preface

THE study of literature requires knowledge of contexts as well as of texts. What kind of person wrote the poem, the play, the novel, the essay? What forces acted upon them as they wrote? What was the historical, the political, the philosophical, the economic, the cultural background? Was the writer accepting or rejecting the literary conventions of the time, or developing them, or creating entirely new kinds of literary expression? Are there interactions between literature and the art, music or architecture of its period? Was the writer affected by contemporaries or isolated?

Such questions stress the need for students to go beyond the reading of set texts, to extend their knowledge by developing a sense of chronology, of action and reaction, and of the varying relationships between writers and society.

Histories of literature can encourage students to make comparisons, can aid in understanding the purposes of individual authors and in assessing the totality of their achievements. Their development can be better understood and appreciated with some knowledge of the background of their time. And histories of literature, apart from their valuable function as reference books, can demonstrate the great wealth of writing in English that there is to be enjoyed. They can guide the reader who wishes to explore it more fully and to gain in the process deeper insights into the rich diversity not only of literature but of human life itself.

A. NORMAN JEFFARES

Preface

IN my researches for this book I owe a debt of gratitude to my colleagues at Stirling University, especially Felicity Riddy and Professor A. N. Jeffares; also Douglas Mack and the Stirling University Library, and Sarah Mahaffy of Macmillan. They were all most patient and helpful. Since many older translations of Gaelic poems adopted a rather tired poetic diction, I have quoted from the most contemporary available English versions whenever possible. In this respect I am indebted to translations made by Iain Crichton Smith, Ian Grimble, and Professor Derick Thomson in his book *An Introduction to Gaelic Poetry* (London: Gollancz, 1974). Finally, my thanks go to my wife Celia for her unfailing support during this project.

Acknowledgements

The author and publishers wish to thank the following who have kindly given permission for the use of copyright material:

Canongate Publishing Ltd, for the poems 'I Do Not See . . .', 'Calvary' and the extract from 'The Cry of Europe' from *Spring Tide and Neap Tide: Selected Poems 1932–72* by Sorley Maclean.

The Executors of the Hugh MacDiarmid Estate, for the poem 'The Eemis Stane'.

Ian Hamilton Finlay, for his poem 'The Cloud's Anchor'.

Macdonald Publishers, for the extract from 'Queer Ongauns' from Robert Garioch's *Collected Poems*; for the extracts from 'Old Woman' and 'What is Wrong' by Iain Crichton Smith from *Selected Poems 1955–1980*, and for the extracts from 'Steel', 'Between Summer and Autumn' and 'Coffins' by Derick Thomson from *Creachadh na Clàrsaich/Plundering the Harp: Collected Poems, 1940–1980*.

The Trustees of the National Library of Scotland, for the extract from 'Song' by William Soutar.

Scotland