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Scottish and Irish Second World War Poetry

In 1938, looking to the war that was to come, Louis MacNeice wrote:

> And now, and last, in London
> Poised on the edge of absence
> I ask for a moment's mention
> Of days the days will cancel,
> Though the long run may also
> Bring what we ask for.[1]

For MacNeice, being on the cusp of war is being at the edge of absence, looking at a future which promises cancellation, annulment, negation. Balanced against this absence is the poet's representative pleading – the repeated 'I ask for ... we ask for' – and his desire for the briefest utterance, the 'moment's mention'. Today I will be looking at Scottish and Irish war (and wartime) poetry, and in particular at images of absence, cancellation, annulment and denial (and where these leave poetry). The yoking of Scottish and Irish here is very much to the point, as notions of the nation, and the relationship between the poetic and the national are crucial to how war poetry is perceived and interpreted (especially given the fraught nature of the relationship between the state and the nation in Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, as it would come to be known).

War poetry tends away from a focus on artifice and artistry and towards practise and experience. In what Fran Brearton caricatures as a '"one size fits all" approach to war poetry', personal experience and participation, as well as public purpose, are to the fore:

> war poetry is soldier poetry; war poetry is always anti-war poetry; war poetry is experiential; war poetry, if it is to be any good, speaks from disillusionment, not patriotism; war poetry is meant to shock the complacent public; the war poets have some kind of shared agenda.[2]

'War poetry', like the more inclusive 'wartime poetry', is pictured as a (transparent) response to material, social and emotional conditions. General Sir John Hackett, writing of wartime poetry, suggests that it 'need not be concerned only with experience of battle' but should

> be such as would be unlikely to be written except in wartime. It is the product of the pressures and tensions, the pangs and passions, the fears and frenzy, the loneliness, excitement, boredom and despair, the disgust, the compassion and the weariness, and all the other stimuli to self-expression which, though they are not uniquely found in wartime, react then upon the human condition with special force.[3]

Suggestions of poetry as creation or artefact are replaced by notions of poetry as social tool or individual testament, poetry which witnesses, reflects, worries, remembers. The poetry of the war anthology is a communal act of remembrance, regret and celebration; it is a poetry in which the *poetic* (the created, the linguistic, the linguistically troubling) and the tangential relationship between literature, history and philosophy, is elided.

There is a sense, that is, that the autonomy or independence of poetry (or literature in general) is threatened by the conditions of war itself. In an atmosphere where loose talk costs life, precise talk takes on renewed (political) importance, with the possibility of poetry becoming propaganda; this possibility does not usually exist simply because in peace time poetry (and precise talk) tends not to be given the same level of political or social weight. It is only when it is infused with an accepted social (rather than poetic) significance that poetry has the possibility of becoming propaganda; during war, in other words, the relationship between poetry and the polis is close and fraught. MacNeice sets the terms of the debate well (he is also trying, against all the odds, to allow poetry to have both political force and freedom):

> Art, though as much conditioned by material factors as anything else, is a manifestation of human freedom. The artist's freedom connotes honesty because a lie, however useful in politics, hampers artistic vision. Systematic propaganda is therefore foreign to the artist in so far as it involves the condoning of lies. Thus, in the Spanish Civil War some English poets were torn between writing good propaganda (dishonest poetry) and honest poetry (poor propaganda). I believe firmly that in Spain the balance of right was on the side of the government; propaganda, however, demands either angels or devils. This means that in the long run a poet must choose between being politically ineffectual and poetically false.[4]

One should always be wary, however, if poetry is ever described as 'free', 'not being allowed to be itself' or 'finally being allowed to be itself' after, for example, political devolution or independence, or war (periods, in other words, in which poetry has *stood in* for something else, such as a displaced nation or democratic process). As well as being a historically blind treatment of poetry as an ahistorical force, this reification and setting apart of poetry tends, as MacNeice notes, to neuter as well as free poetry. It is a common impulse, though, for poets themselves to fear their work being misapprehended or taken over by outside (non-poetic) forces or agencies; the fear for poets in these conditions is that their work will not actually be read as poetry, or linguistic creation, first and foremost, but as a social or political tool.

As a result, war 'poetry' – as opposed to propaganda – tends to exist under the negative sign, to perform acts of negation and of denial. Any assertion of the poetic meets, almost inevitably, denial. This is what gives energy to Dylan Thomas's 'Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London'. The penultimate stanza states:

> I shall not murder
> The mankind of her going with a grave truth
> Nor blaspheme down the stations of the breath
> With any further
> Elegy of innocence and youth.[5]

But this is the penultimate stanza: despite the denials, the elegy and the mourning continue. Such assertion/denial is also what Tim Kendall notes in First World War Poetry, in the *Oxford Handbook of British and Irish War Poetry*: 'During the First World War, Owen, Gurney, and Sassoon wrote poems explicitly stating the need to forget events on which the poems themselves dwell: "I try not to remember these things now," Owen states in "The Sentry", having just lingered lovingly over them.'[6]

There was a particular problem, however, for Second World War poets, in that they were aware of the image of the war poet that had endured from the First World War, and were also aware that they did not fit that image. Keith Douglas wrote in 'Poets in This War' that 'hell cannot be let loose twice: it was let loose in the Great War and it is the same old hell now ... Almost all that a modern poet on active service is inspired to write, would be tautologies'.[7] Stevie Smith thought that poets *ought to* remain silent about the war.[8] Robert Graves – a First World War poet himself – claimed that 'war poet' and 'war poetry' were 'terms first used in World War I and perhaps peculiar to it' and that they could only with difficulty be applied to the Second World War.[9]

In asking 'Where are the War Poets?', meanwhile, C. Day Lewis suggests that the status and role of "war poetry" are problematic: his dilemma is what role, if any, poets and poetry should play in the war; his own answer is that poetry should have no role in a war so ideologically dubious, that defending 'the bad against the worse' was 'No subject for immortal verse'.[10] 'Poetry', that is, is disallowed or has no place in the Second World War in particular.

The dilemma over the relationship between poetry and the war comes into sharp focus when distinctions within national contexts – Irish neutrality, the absence of conscription in Northern Ireland, Scottish Nationalist conscientious objection – are taken into account; when, instead of defending 'the bad against the worse', there was the possibility of letting the bad and worse decide their fates among themselves. Although the war on many levels solidified notions of nationality, the mass movements of people during the war problematised international boundaries; as such the war created new patterns of intellectual and cultural commerce between nations and cultures (just as it was disallowing and troubling others). Maggie Ferguson's biography of George Mackay Brown recounts the disorientating social and cultural effects of the mass movement of troops into Scapa Flow on Orkney during the war (as well as the effect of German raids on Orkney). These inform the apocalyptic rewriting of this military 'occupation' in Mackay Brown's 1970 novel *Greenvoe*; similarly, Seamus Heaney's 'Anahorish 1944' describes the presence of large numbers of American troops in Northern Ireland during the war.[11] There are also, alongside these allied troop movements into and around the United Kingdom (and a smaller-scale cultural migration to Dublin), the encounters between different languages and nationalities (and the subsequent dissolution of national stereotypes) of troops abroad, as figured many times in Scottish Second World War soldier poetry.

These population movements and cultural disruptions raise questions about defining or characterising poetry in national terms. Ruth Tomalin, one of the most accomplished of the female poetic war voices uncovered in recent anthologies, worked as a staff reporter in London during the Blitz. Her poems generally figure the war's disruption of the English landscape, as in 'Embroidery, 1940':

> All Sussex flows with silver blood
> from wounded white anemones,
> while flowers in dark remembered mud
> lie drowned among the waiting trees.[12]

or they figure the disruption of traditions rooted in the landscape, as in the 1943 poem 'Hunting Song':

> We from whom otters swam wild-eyed,
> who drove the backward-gliding hare,
> who dug the spent fox from his lair
> and watched, complacent, as he died –
> now it's our turn to crouch and hide.[13]

Tomalin was born in Kilkenny and educated in England before serving in the Woman's Land Army and as a reporter; her Irish origins have, however, little relevance to the Blitz poetry she was writing, even if they may have been important for her experience of the war. Are these Irish, English or British poems? Does it make sense to ask? Does the national context have any role whatsoever? Wilma Cawdor and Stephanie Batstone were born in England, but wrote in Scotland as a result of marriage and military posting: should their work be considered 'Scottish' war poetry or – at least – as a necessary context to Scottish war poetry? Similarly, what status have anonymous songs such as 'Oh! Fucking Halkirk' or 'The Twats in the Ops Room'[14] (which raucously dismiss Scotland as a military base) as 'Scottish' war songs?

Does the adjective 'Scottish' – or Irish, English, Welsh or British – cease to have any relevance whatsoever in the face of large scale displacement of peoples and the resultant meeting of different nationalities? Or is it of particular importance given the context of war between nations?

In the case of Tomalin's poetry, it is perhaps possible to read a mapping of Irish – rather than English – imagery onto the war. In 'Ladybird, Ladybird', the context of which is 'unusual swarms of ladybirds in Sussex and heavy air raids over London' in May 1941, the second stanza reads:

> Outside, a tired woman
> lingered to say,
> 'You wouldn't know of
> a place I could stay...?'
> weary, with bundles –
> life had gone West.
> 'Bombed out last night, dear.
> I – just need a rest ...' [15]

The 'West' is capitalised (the last refuge of 'life'), and it is possible to glimpse Ireland (in particular the West of Ireland), which was depicted – in one thread of 'neutrality' propaganda – as the last haven of humane sympathy.

Clair Wills suggests that there were diametrically opposed narratives of the Republic's neutral stance, drawn along national lines, both understanding the stance in terms of 'a battle of darkness against light':

> In Britain the Irish were portrayed as dwelling in a cave, lost in the dark, fumbling around in a state of ignorance induced by the harshness of the censorship, but also by their own lack of interest in a world from which they had deliberately withdrawn. In

> Ireland the right to an independent foreign policy, and to protect the Irish state, was also argued in moral terms. Political and religious imperatives seemed to overlap as neutrality was associated with pacifism, and with an ability to feel compassion for all suffering, regardless of which side the victims were on. According to this account, neutrality was a source of enlightenment.[16]

Máirtin Ó Direáin rather bluntly makes this case in 'Cuireadh do Mhuire' ['Invitation to the Virgin']. Writing of Inishmore, the poet invites the reader 'Go hoileán mara / San Iarthar cianda: / Beidh coinnle geala / I ngach fuinneog lasta' [To a sea-bound island / In the remote West: / Shining candles will be / Lit in each window].[17] This repeats Ó Direáin's strangely Romantic/Revivalist view of the purity of the Aran Islands (the man from Aran having watched *The Man of Aran*), but it also extends that view to Ireland as a whole – the 'hoileán mara / San Iarthar cianda' can just as easily be read as Ireland. The specific dating of the poem to Christmas 1942 emphasises its political point and import: Aran/Ireland is set outside the history of continental Europe, offering a moral haven to the rest of Europe.

As is evident from Gerald Dawe's *Earth Voices Whispering: An Anthology of Irish-War Poetry 1914-45*, there is a lack of Irish soldier-poetry of World War Two, because of the neutrality of the Republic and the lack of conscription in Northern Ireland. Instead of experiential poetry, Irish Second World war poetry tends to discuss, celebrate or trouble over its distance from the war, and particularly the distance caused by the (however porous) green curtain of neutrality.

In MacNeice's 'Neutrality', for example, Ireland is criticised for being a 'neutral island in the heart of man'[18]; its closeness (rather than sea-bound isolation), and consequent inculpation are highlighted:

> But then look eastward from your heart, there bulks

A continent, close, dark, as archetypal sin,
While to the west off your own shores the mackerel
Are fat – on the flesh of your kin.[19]

Patrick Kavanagh, meanwhile, connects – in Clair Will's terms – neutrality to 'neuterality' (Maguire's emasculation and entrapment in *The Great Hunger*) to condemn the Republic as a state 'peopled by the old and poor, a country with no future'.[20] This is not just the Republic, for Kavanagh: in 'Lough Derg', he describes 'All Ireland that froze for want of Europe'[21], in line with the version of 'Ireland's wartime story' that Wills associates with 'absence – the absence of conflict, of supplies, of social dynamism, of contact with "the outside world"', with the understanding that participation in the war would have led to the 'presence' of each of these things (as well as centrality instead of isolation, artistic wealth instead of cultural impoverishment).[22]

However, for both MacNeice and Kavanagh the difficulty is that Ireland is simultaneously outside and inside the war. In his 1939 'Coming of the War' MacNeice considers Ireland as both nightmare and dream, 'the crossbones of Galway ... the rubbish and sewage' and a weir on the Corrib with 'a hundred swans / Dreaming on the harbour'. Despite the attempt to set Ireland apart, it is not exempt from the pressures of the war: the poem's refrain states that 'The war came down on us there'.[23]

Similarly, in Kavanagh's 'Epic', the war is figured in miniature in an Irish land dispute: a 'local row' about land between the Duffys and old McCabe is set alongside and given precedence over the 'Munich bother'.[24] In 'Lough Derg' the brutality of the war and the plight of the individual soul coexist uneasily:

Then there was the war, the slang, the contemporary touch,
The ideologies of the daily papers.

> They must seem realer, Churchill, Stalin, Hitler,
> Than ideas in the contemplative cloister.
> The battles where ten thousand men die
> Are more significant than a peasant's emotional problem.
> But wars will be merely dry bones in histories [a possible re-versioning of MacNeice's 'crossbones of Galway, here?]
> And these common people real living creatures in it
> On the unwritten spaces between the lines.[25]

The relationship between the individual and history – and the role of the poet in this relationship – is the crux. This is poetry as a witnessing of the lives 'on the unwritten spaces between the lines', rather than grand, overarching, historical events. It is the 'moment's mention' of MacNeice's 'Three Poems Apart', a space in which things may be asked for (forgiveness, in the case of 'Lough Derg'), and received.

In Scotland, poetry was also written by non-combatants (including the most famous Scottish poet, Hugh MacDiarmid, who worked in a munitions factory during the war), and by poets who worried over the rights or wrongs of participation in the war. Douglas Young, who oversaw the preparation of Sorley MacLean's *Dàin do Eimhir* [*Poems for Eimhir*] while MacLean served and was almost killed in North Africa, opposed the war effort in a (failed) legal action based on his own interpretation of the 1707 Treaty of Union:[26] his subsequent imprisonment meant that his experience of the war had more in common with that of the Irish nationalists interned in the Curragh for the duration of the conflict – including Máirtín Ó Cadhain and the young Brendan Behan[27] – than with that of his friends MacLean and Robert Garioch (though Garioch did spend a long period in a German prisoner-of-war camp). George Bruce and Norman MacCaig were accepted as conscientious objectors; 'Edwin Morgan had felt the same, before accepting service in the Royal Army Medical Corps.'[28] George Campbell Hay spent some months in the hills of Argyll on the run from the military police, as a failed conscientious objector, before finally accepting a posting which saw him serve in North Africa, Italy and thereafter Greece.

More prominent than Scottish ‘wartime’ poetry, however, is the poetry of the soldier-poets, and most notably that of the poets who served in the North African desert. Indeed, Cairo is the default location of much Scottish Second World War Poetry. As Roderick Watson notes:

> The remarkable literary contribution of the desert war in particular (one has only to think of Keith Douglas, Vernon Scannell, Sidney Keyes) is all the more striking for the fact that so many of the leading Scottish poets of that generation found themselves in the same theatre of action. [G.S.] Fraser was posted to North Africa in 1941. In the same year, Hamish Henderson arrived with the 51st Highland Division as an intelligence officer; Robert Garioch and Sorley MacLean were posted to Egypt with the Royal Signal Corps; while 21-year-old Edwin Morgan was on his way in a troopship, trained as a stretcher-bearer for the RAMC. In June 1942 Garioch was captured outside Tobruk; MacLean was wounded that November at the Second Battle of El Alamein; and George Campbell Hay arrived to serve with the RAOC in Algiers and Tunisia.

> Henderson survived the desert to take part in the invasion of Sicily and to follow the War the length of Italy. Hay also saw service in Italy and then Greece before being invalided home from Macedonia in 1944 [sic, 1946]. (It never happened, but it is not too difficult to imagine a moment when all six of them might somehow have met on leave – perhaps in some Cairo café with Fraser presiding. Certainly they all knew each other, or knew of each other by mutual friends or correspondence.)[29]

For Scottish participant poets, there was indeed the 'presence' of other cultural contexts than the national. Even a fervent Nationalist like Hamish Henderson could consider (after being educated in England and then serving in the Army) that 'his long exile has seriously disqualified [him] as a Scottish poet; though [he] may be better as a European poet'.[30] It would certainly be misleading to define a narrowly Scottish context for Henderson's wartime songs and his *Elegies for the Dead in Cyrenaica.* Henderson himself emphasised that the Eighth Army with which he served in Africa and Italy was 'a literate army, its soldiers the beneficiaries of the 1918 Education Act'[31]; it was also a heterogeneous army, made up of different nationalities, languages and classes. The importance of encounters with English soldiers as comrades cannot be underestimated. One of the most unusual moments in Sorley MacLean's war poetry, for example, is the surprised realisation that an English 'Fear beag truagh le gruaidhean pluiceach' ('poor little chap with chubby cheeks') could act as bravely as the heroic subjects of traditional Gaelic clan-and-chief panegyrics.[32] The meeting with the 'enemy' (and the affirmation of cultural similarity as well as difference is also important). In Robert Garioch's 'Kriegy Ballad', for example, (with 'Kriegy' being the German slang for a prisoner of war), Garioch makes good use of British Army demotic (as Henderson often did also), to laud his German captors (and implicitly criticize the Italians):

> There was plenty of water in Derna,
> But the camp was not very well kept,
> For either you slept in the piss-hole,

> Or pissed in the place where you slept. /
> And when we went on to Benghazi,
> We had plenty of room, what a treat!
> But I wish that the guard was a Nazi,
> He might find us something to eat.[33]

The work of the polyglots Henderson and Hay offers the fullest exploration of other nationalities and cultures. Henderson's multilingualism and position as an interrogator put him in constant touch with both locals and captured enemies; his *Elegies for the Dead in Cyrenaica* recreate on a textual level repeated encounters between Scottish and other cultures. These encounters, and the polyglossia of the texts, are to some extent the point of the poems. Cavafy's descriptions of Alexandria[34] are incorporated into the text along with references to ancient Egyptian religion (38-9), and fragments of untranslated Italian and German appear alongside Scots and English. The dedications and epigraphs make this encounter somewhat programmatic: there are dedications to Luigi Castigliano, Gregorio Prieto and John Lorne Campbell[35]; the epigraphs are untranslated passages from Goethe (15) and Holderlin (25) balanced by the Gaelic of Sorley MacLean (31). The presence of German texts here is of course crucial: in Henderson's work Germans are not figured propagandistically or negatively, but are instead treated with sympathy and humanism. In his 1948 Foreword Henderson writes:

> It was the remark of a captured German officer which first suggested to me the theme of these poems. He had said: 'Africa changes everything. In reality we are allies, and the desert is our common enemy.'[36]

This fellow feeling across the front line is nuanced by a 'curious "doppelgaenger" [*sic*] effect' caused by the fact that the British and German armies lived off supplies and machinery salvaged from each other, and so were to some extent dependent on each other; to this extent for Henderson the conflict is not between the two armies but between '"the dead, the innocent" – that eternally wronged proletariat of levelling death in which all the fallen are comrades – and ourselves, the living'.[37]

Henderson focuses on the desert as an enemy: it is 'brutish', heretic and a place of 'moron monotony'; it is 'the malevolent bomb-thumped desert / impartial / hostile to both'.[38] For Sorley MacLean, however, the desert is more important as an alien and alienating space. Writing in his introduction to Henderson's elegies, MacLean suggests that the desert is a no-place, with 'little of human achievement' to mark it out or give it meaning, and that the soldiers fighting in the North African desert during the Second World War were 'as if abstracted from a real world to fight on a remote moon-like terrain'.[39] For MacLean, the desert is an environment which alternates between being benign, hostile and impartial, seemingly at random. Before going to Africa, MacLean had, in 'An Cogadh Ceart' [The Proper War], described 'an Fhàsaich thìorail ghréine' [the comfortable sunny Desert].[40] By contrast, 'Dol an Iar' [Going Westwards] speaks of 'gainmheach choigreach anns an Eachdraidh / a' milleadh innealan na h-eanchainn' [a foreign sand in History / spoiling the machines of the mind].[41]

The deceptiveness of the desert is central to 'Latha Foghair' ['Autumn Day'], where the sand is described as 'cho tìorail / socair bàidheil' [so comfortable, / easy and kindly] yet the sun is 'cho coma, / cho geal cràiteach' [so indifferent, / so white and painful].[42] In 'Latha Foghair' the precise rhythms of life and death in the conflict are viewed *sub specie aeternitatis*; the line separating life and death – the fate or 'Taghadh' ['Election', with Presbyterian overtones] that chose the poet's comrades but not him – is discovered to be 'cho diabhlaidh coma' ['as devilishly indifferent'] as the shells.

The notion of the Republic of Ireland as an 'absence' sits uncomfortably alongside the Scottish soldier poets' experience of the desert as an absence. They are both 'dislocated' spaces at once within and outwith the war; however only one is an impartial no-place in which there are no traces of life and civilisation. When Adorno stated that ‘To write poetry after *Auschwitz* is barbaric’, he was not denying the possibility of writing poetry after Auschwitz (the ‘No poetry after Auschwitz’ of the mistaken slogan) he was attacking Enlightenment notions of progress and civilisation, while praising the barbarians at the gate of the polis, and the opportunity to question and challenge the hierarchies of ethics, taste. Abstracted desert warfare is one of the apotheoses of the Enlightenment / scientific mechanization of life and death; it is also based on a creation of the desert as an absence, as devoid of civilisation or human life – which was not and is not the case (as the ongoing deaths from the landmines of the war – 1 fatality and 4 serious injuries this year – show[43]). The writing of poetry is ‘barbaric’ inasmuch as it returns to humanist connections instead of theoretical and institutional constructions of progress; (the ‘absence’ of the Republic from the war as imagined by Ó Direáin could be viewed in this light, as a denial of international engagement for a spiritual [and to some extent anti-Enlightenment] attitude to international affairs).

It also, perhaps, provides a way of reading the poetry of George Campbell Hay, perhaps the most sympathetic of the Scottish Second World war poets. Hay’s poems from the war focus not so much on life in the Army, or his own experiences of conflict, as on the inhabitants of North Africa; he quickly learnt Arabic[44] and his friendships with locals influenced the poems ‘Mochtár is Dúghall’ [Mokhtâr and Dougall][45], ‘Atman’[46], ‘Bisearta’ [‘Bizerta’][47] and ‘Meftah Bâbkum es-Sabar’.[48] The impetus in each of these poems is to show the similarities and fraternity between the Arabs and the Gaels, and the adversity and suffering they share. In ‘Atman’ the affirmation of friendship - ‘’S b’e ’n toibheum, Atmain, àicheadh / Gur bràthair dhomh thu fhéin’ [‘And it would be blasphemy, Atman, to deny / That you are a brother of mine][49] – comes despite ‘Atman’s’ conviction as a thief; meanwhile, in ‘Mochtár is Dúghall’ the eponymous Scottish and Arab characters die together under mortar fire, their friendship and shared humanity annulled by the war.[50] In annulment, in absence, despite the pressures on the poet to speak and deny his fellow man, are found for Hay all that is left: humanist sympathy, the affirmation of friendship.

Notes

[1] Louis MacNeice, 'Three Poems Apart (for X)', III, in *Collected Poems* (London: Faber, 2007), 700.

[2] Fran Brearton, 'A War of Friendship: Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon' in Tim Kendall (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of British and Irish War Poetry* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 209.

[3] John Hackett, 'A Preliminary Note', in Victor Selwyn (ed.), *Poems of the Second World War: The Oasis Selection* (London and Melbourne: Dent, 1985), viii. Hackett was Australian, his father being a Wicklow-born barrister who had emigrated in 1875 and became a newspaper proprietor.

[4] Louis MacNeice, 'The Poet in England To-day: A Reassessment', in Alan Heuser (ed.) *Selected Literary Criticism* (Oxford University Press, 1987), 113.

[5] Dylan Thomas, 'A Refusal to Mourn the Death, by Fire, of a Child in London', in *Deaths and Entrances* (Worthing: Littlehampton Book Services, 1946).

[6] Tim Kendall, 'Introduction', *The Oxford Handbook of British and Irish War Poetry* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 2.

[7] Keith Douglas, 'Poets in This War' in *A Prose Miscellany* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1985) 119-20.

[8] C.f. Brian Gardiner (ed.) *The Terrible Rain: The War Poets 1939-1945* (London: Methuen 1983 [1966]), xviii.

[9] Robert Graves, 'The Poets of World War II' (1942), *The Common Asphodel: Collected Essays on Poetry* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1949), 307, quoted in Hugh Haughton (ed.) *Second World War Poems* (London: Faber, 2004), xviii.

[10] See Gerald Dawe (ed.) *Earth Voices Whispering: An Anthology of Irish-War Poetry 1914-45* (Belfast: Blackstaff, 2008), 135.

[11] Maggie Ferguson, *George Mackay Brown: The Life* (London: John Murray, 2007), 43-66 (page 45 gives two stanzas of the song 'Bloody Orkney', a variation on 'Oh! Fucking Halkirk'). See Seamus Heaney, *District and Circle* (London: Faber, 2006), 7.

[12] Anne Powell (ed.), *Shadows of War: British Women's Poetry of the Second World War* (Gloucestershire: Sutton), 68.

[13] Powell (ed.), *Shadows of War,* 231.

[14] Kenneth Baker (ed.), *The Faber Book of War Poetry* (London: Faber, 1996), 110-12. The chorus of 'The Twats in the Ops Room', which was written in what has been termed 'British Army demotic', ends 'Ain't the Air Force fucking awful? We made a fucking landfall in the Firth of Fucking Forth'.

[15] Powell (ed.), *Shadows of War,* 131.

[16] Wills, *That Neutral Island*, 423.

[17] Máirtín Ó Direáin, *Selected Poems: Tacar Dánta*, trans. Tomás Mac Síomóin and Douglas Sealy (Newbridge: Goldsmith, 1984), 8-9.

[18] MacNeice, *Collected Poems*, 224.

[19] MacNeice, *Collected Poems*, 224.

[20] Wills, *That Neutral Island*, 257.

[21] Patrick Kavanagh, *Selected Poems* (London: Penguin, 1996), 59.

[22] Wills, *That Neutral Island*, 10.

[23] MacNeice, *Collected Poems*, 684. Samuel Beckett's response was more vehement than MacNeice's, as seen by his – in Clair Wills' terms – 'absolute rejection of neutral Ireland for Paris and later Roussillon – his stated preference for France at war to Ireland at peace', Wills, *That Neutral Island*, 12.

[24] Kavanagh, *Selected Poems*, 101-2.

[25] Kavanagh, *Selected Poems*, 57.

[26] Other high profile Scottish poets not directly involved in the conflict include Norman MacCaig and George Bruce, who were accepted as conscientious objectors, and Hugh MacDiarmid was employed in a munitions factory during the war – see Watson, 'Death's Proletariat', 330.

[27] Wills, *That Neutral Island* (London: Faber, 2007), 13

[28] Roderick Watson, '"Death's Proletariat": Scottish Poets of the Second World War', in Kendall (ed.) *Oxford Handbook of British and Irish War Poetry*, 330.

[29] Watson, '"Death's Proletariat"', 318.

[30] Timothy Neat, *Hamish Henderson: A Biography* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2007), I: 163.

[31] Hamish Henderson, 'The Poetry of War in the Middle East, 1939-45', in Henderson, *Alias MacAlias*, 319. The extent of the army's literacy (and literariness) is evident from journals such as *Citadel*, *Personal Landscapes*, *Orientations* and *Oasis*. For the importance of Henderson's songs to the soldiers in the Army, especially the 51st Highland Division, see Neat, *Hamish Henderson*, 67-104.

[32] 'Curaidhean' ['Heroes'] in MacLean, *O Choille gu Bearradh*, 208-9.

[33] Selwyn (ed.) *Poems of the Second World War*, 193.

[34] Hamish Henderson, *Elegies for the Dead in Cyrenaica* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990), 22.

[35] Castigliano was a close associate of Henderson's during the war, having deserted from Mussolini's army – see Neat, *Hamish Henderson*, 124-5. John Lorne Campbell (1906-96) was a renowned Gaelic scholar and folk-collector.

[36] Henderson, *Elegies for the Dead*, 59.

[37] Henderson, *Elegies for the Dead*, 58-9.

[38] Henderson, *Elegies for the Dead*, 59, 27, 25, 20.

[39] Sorley MacLean, 'Introduction', in Henderson, *Elegies for the Dead*, 12.

[40] 'MacLean, *O Choille gu Bearradh*, 198-9.

[41] MacLean, *O Choille gu Bearradh*, 204-5.

[42] 'Latha Foghair' ['Autumn Day'], in MacLean, *O Choille gu Bearradh*, 214-15.

[43] Christian Fraser, 'Lethal landmine legacy from battle of El Alamein', (20 Mar 2010) in news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/8576292.stm.

[44] During his life Hay was also able to translate from Irish, Welsh, French, Spanish, Italian, Icelandic, Norwegian, Greek and Arabic. See Caoimhin Mac Giolla Leith, 'At one with Mokhtar', www.timesonline.co.uk, 10 Aug 2001.
[45] Hay, *Collected Poems*, II: 105-61.
[46] ibid., 162-4.
[47] ibid., 176-7.
[48] ibid., 193-6.
[49] Hay, *Collected Poems*, II: 164. The importance of 'blasphemy' as a marker of cultural difference (and soldierly identity) during the war can be picked up from a letter Hamish Henderson wrote from Italy in the winter of 1944: 'These hills are a great breeding ground of blasphemy. The partisans swear by Madonna the pig and Jesus the assassin, and in spite of Monty's old Orders of the Day his veterans in the Apennines are now much given to taking in vain the name of the God of battles' – Hamish Henderson, *The Armstrong Nose: Selected Letters of Hamish Henderson* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1996), 7.
[50] Hay, *Collected Poems*, II: 159-61.