



BOOK REVIEW

A Kist o Skinklan Things: An anthology of Scots poetry from the first and second waves of the Scottish Renaissance

Compiled and annotated by J Derrick McClure

Glasgow: The Association for Literary Studies (2017) 256pp., hardback £14.95

ISBN: 978-1-906-841294

Sandra Nicol, sandra.nicol@abdn.ac.uk

University of Aberdeen, Scotland

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This book is published by, The Association for Literary Studies, which 'aims to promote the study, teaching and writing of Scottish literature'.

An anthology of any body of work involves a complex consideration of selection, author preference and the interests of the audience to whom it is aimed. Mr McClure has chosen a variety of work across a particular historical period. The book takes the reader chronologically through the works of a range of Scots authors beginning with the earliest born poet through to those still with us at the time of print.

The introduction is key to what follows and sets the points of reference – the Scottish Renaissance of the early 20th Century and epitomises the 'radically new literary status (of) the Scots language'. Here, McClure refers to a range of literature that had impact, 're-establishing Scots as the language of a poetic tradition' despite the emergence of English as the dominant form of communication. The demise of Scots was to be mourned notwithstanding the success of Burns in the previous century and McClure argues that such dominance led to others seeing themselves as less worthy and, therefore, less inclined to see their work as being of value. McClure explores the rise of Scots as a poetic language both in in dialect and pans-Scots (using vocabulary from any and every region). He promotes the work of Hugh MacDiarmid as being the catalyst for the resurgence in the field of Scots poetry, identifying two waves; the second being that produced by MacDiarmid and first being the output of his predecessors.

These key points are the foundations for the selection of poems that follow which he argues exemplifies the social and political thinking of the time. McClure has clearly set out his terms of reference for the inclusion of the material chosen with the intention of re-establishing Scots' poetry from this period, giving its 'due place' in Scottish literary history.

The selected pieces cover a variety of topics and are fine examples of the richness of the Scots language. Following the poems, he includes information regarding the biography of each author and a suggested critique of the stance adopted by the poet and in the poetry. These can be referred to as is

the wont of the reader, either before or after, or as an overall reference. Its later placement may suggest that McClure is encouraging the reader to accept the poem as it reads for them and then seeing the notes as an added consideration as well as encouraging a rereading of the work in order to seek deeper understanding.

Much as it is tempting to discuss some of the poems, that would be a distraction based on personal preference rather than acknowledging the varying tastes of any audience.

Finally, a glossary is included to aid with spelling as well as the meaning of some of the more obscure or outdated words but should not detract from the overall essence of the poetry and the richness of the repertoire.

Acknowledgements

Mr J. Derrick McClure, MBE, Honorary Senior Lecturer, M.A. (Glasgow), M.Litt. (Edinburgh), retired in 2009 after over forty years in the Department of English, University of Aberdeen and has several publications focusing on Scots and Doric. Very recently, he has been awarded the 'The Janet Paisley Lifetime Achievement Award' sponsored by Creative Scotland, in the Scottish Language Awards 2021.