ALBA LITERARIA
A HISTORY OF SCOTTISH LITERATURE

edited and introduced by
Marco Fazzini

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Table of Contents

xiii Alba Literaria and the New Canon: An Introduction
Marco Fazzini

xxiii Acknowledgments

Alba Literaria

3 Michael the Wandering Scot: 'Preziosissimo fra i miei Maestri'
Tom Hubbard

9 Barbour's Brus: Epic Poetry and the National Resistance of the Admirable Warrior King
Derrick McClure

19 The Wallace
R.D.S. Jack

33 Robert Henryson
R.D.S. Jack

45 Dunbar's The Godlyn Targe and The Question of the 'Auctoritates'
Stefania D'Agata D'Ottavi

65 The Poetry of Gavin Douglas: Memory, Past Tradition and Its Renewal
Anna Torti
The Poetry of Sir David Lyndsay: Reforming the Nation
KEVIN McGINLEY

A New Critical Cartography: pre and post-Union Scottish Renaissance
SARAH M. DUNNIGAN

Alexander MacDonald, William Ross and Duncan Macintyre: Gaelic Poetry in the Eighteenth Century
DERICK THOMSON

Allan Ramsay
FRANCO BUFFONI

Robert Fergusson
FRANCO BUFFONI

Traditional Gaelic Women's Songs
WILLIAM GILLIES

James Boswell
DAVID W. PURDIE

Ossian and James Macpherson
VALENTINA BOLD

Robert Burns: Poet of the People
G. ROSS ROY

James Hogg
VALENTINA BOLD

The Scottish-North-American Diaspora: Nineteenth-Century Poets Across the Atlantic
G. ROSS ROY
263  
*Thomas Pringle*
TONY VOSS

287  
*Lady Anne Barnard's Autobiographical Texts: An Author Effaced*
MARGARET LENTA

303  
*Women Writers in Early Nineteenth-Century Edinburgh*
PAM PERKINS

313  
*George Gordon Byron, Scotland and Europe: An Antithetical Mind*
TOM HUBBARD

325  
*Thomas Carlyle's Myth of Order in 'An Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question': Re-clothing 'The Guardian's Life and Duties'*
CRISTINA OSSATO

343  
*Walter Scott the Novelist: History in the Bones*
VALENTINA POGGI

355  
*The Quaint Old World of John Galt*
VALENTINA POGGI

367  
*R.L. Stevenson as Theorist and Popular Author: The Art of Writing and the Pleasure of Reading*
RICHARD AMBROSINI

387  
*John Davidson: 'The Great Poet is Always a Man Apart'*
GIOIA ANGELETTI

403  
*James Thomson ('B.V.'): The Predicament of a Scot in London*
GIOIA ANGELETTI
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>421</td>
<td><em>Scots as a Literary Medium 1870-2000:</em> 'I saw a rose come loupin oot'</td>
<td>Colin Milton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>473</td>
<td><em>The Scottish Renaissance</em></td>
<td>Alan Riach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>487</td>
<td><em>Seeking for Continuities in MacDiarmid's Poetry: Overcoming Fragmentation</em></td>
<td>Christopher Whyte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>505</td>
<td><em>The Place of Edwin Muir</em></td>
<td>Seamus Heaney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>519</td>
<td><em>James Leslie Mitchell/Lewis Grassic Gibbon: The Challenge of a Kaleidoscopic Identity</em></td>
<td>Carla Sassi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>533</td>
<td><em>The Poetry of Robert Garioch: More Ambition than Reduction</em></td>
<td>Christopher Whyte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>553</td>
<td><em>Norman MacCaig: The Poetry of Experience</em></td>
<td>Alan Riach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>565</td>
<td><em>The Gaelic Poetry of George Campbell Hay: Defence from Recent Strictures</em></td>
<td>Christopher Whyte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>577</td>
<td><em>Dialects, Orality and the Poetry of Tom Leonard: In the Beginning Was the Sound</em></td>
<td>Colin Milton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>611</td>
<td><em>Edwin Morgan's Sonnets From Scotland: Towards a Republican Poetics</em></td>
<td>Colin Nicholson</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
625  Sorley MacLean's Gaelic Oeuvre: Writing in a Dying Tongue
    William Gillies

641  The Poetry of Derick Thomson
    Ian Macdonald

661  Truth and Fiction in the English Poetry of Iain Crichton Smith: Unfinished Tapestry
    Carol Gow

675  The Poetry and the Fiction of George Mackay Brown: An Orkney Tapestry
    Massimiliano Morini - Valentina Poggi

687  Liz Lochhead's Poetry and Drama: In Her Own Voice?
    Massimiliano Morini

701  Kenneth White: A Transcendental Scot
    Tony Mcmanus

717  Douglas Dunn's Poetry: A Barbarian In-between Cultures
    Marco Fazzini

731  The Novels of Alasdair Gray: Subversions of Narrative Authority
    J.C. Bittenbender

749  New Scottish Poetry: John Burnside, Robert Crawford, C.A. Duffy, W.N. Herbert, Kathleen Jamie, Jackie Kay and Don Paterson
    Lilias Fraser

763  New Scottish Drama: The Repertoire of the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh
    Adrienne Scullion
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>783</td>
<td><em>New Scottish Prose: Speaking, Breathing, Bullfighting in the Novels of Janice Galloway and A.L. Kennedy</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Paola Splendore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>795</td>
<td>Contributors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>805</td>
<td>Index</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If the Scottish nation has widely been associated with its football or rugby representatives playing abroad, with tartanry or with that Edinburgh folk military show known as the Tattoo, it has been questionable until some years ago how a nation without a Parliament can be a credible nation, and how Scottish literature can get rid of the 'British', or better still, 'English' labels attached to it by the United Kingdom literary politics. For centuries, at least since 1707 when the Scottish Parliament was absorbed into the London institutions, the ambiguities generated by such terms as 'English' or 'British' have obfuscated the particularity of more than one marginalized culture. Scottish literature, like Welsh, Irish, and any other non-canonical literary productions outside England, has been neglected because of its supposed provincial or barbarous condition.¹ This is the reason why all the attempts to define the situation of 'minor' cultures, or the oppositional acts made against the Canon supported by the Centre, have tended towards the destruction of a 'major' literature, and a 'major' language from within.²

According to Robert Crawford, Scottish literature 'offers the longest continuing example of a substantial body of literature produced by a culture pressurized by the threat of English cultural domination'.³ The critic also points out that Scottish universities, as mainstream channels of higher education, helped to promote English studies, attempting 'suppression of native tradition in a process of cultural conversion that was thought of as a move from the barbarous Scottish to the polite British'.⁴ So, while on the one hand the internal colony of Scotland has helped to provide the basis of English studies around the world, on the other it has constructed a new strategy of opposition involving not only Welsh and Irish but
also Caribbean, Canadian, African, American and Australian literatures. Noting that the discussion of Scottish nationality and culture is not included in one of the most popular books about post-colonial theory, Colin Nicholson underlines how this fact should not prevent us from either acknowledging the historical truism of English domination upon Scottish languages, or ignoring the possible links existing among the literary productions of Scotland, Ireland, Wales, South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Australia and the Caribbean islands.

*Alba Literaria* is the first history of Scottish literature planned and produced outside Scotland. It is made up of 48 essays written on single authors or single aspects of the Scottish literary production, dating from medieval times to some of the latest writers working nowadays in the country (or, partly, outside it); yet, the volume and its chapters do not want to be exhaustive in any way. Each contribution to the volume insists on some of the key works or key authors of Scottish literary history, and it focuses on particular aspects of those works or writers, so as to analyse the fracture zones where the Canon and its linearity is questioned or subverted. This means that the reader will not be able to read the usual presentation of biographical details, succession of works and their contextualization. Only a partial view of that writer, or of his or her production, or of the period or problem under focus is offered here; at the same time, each chapter wants to be representative of some of the core problems attached to a 'minor' and 'colonised country such as Scotland: the loss of national identity, the schizophrenic contradictions linked to its multi-linguistic reality, the psychic and cultural anxiety determined by its 'marginalization', the tragedies of the Scottish Clearances and Diaspora, the contaminations and the divergences between the English and the Scottish canons, the role played, through various centuries, by translation. No general bibliography is offered in the volume; yet each essay lists a partial bibliographical note (made of primary and secondary sources on the topic or period) meant to be the starting point for further researches and readings. This kind of decentered discussion of the Scottish canon welcomes, at times, a counter-discursive or post-colonial approach, and it seems to be particularly useful to read and study writers such as Douglas Dunn, Edwin Morgan, Hugh MacDiarmid, Thomas Pringle, and even some of the tradi-
national authors of the recent and distant past, such as Michael Scot, Robert Henryson, Blind Harry, or Gavin Douglas.

All the collaborators are, obviously, experts on their topics, and their inclusion in *Alba Literaria* is an acknowledgement of both their dedication to their fields of research and of the innovative contribution of several of their ideas about the non-English, and non-British peculiarities of the Scottish canon. It is still a controversial matter if writers such as Thomas Pringle, or George Gordon Byron or Thomas Carlyle have any right to appear under such a literary and national label; or if Lady Anne Barnard's notebooks, or the women's Gaelic songs can face the high results of Walter Scott's prose books, or of Burns' compositions written with musical and poetic aims. Yet, this perfectly suits the literary agenda pursued by intellectuals, writers and academics working during the last 50 years in the various Scottish fields: literature, folk tradition, politics and music. And it is no surprise, for example, that any reader of folk traditions or any fan of Scottish music has now access to a huge collection of folk material at the University of Edinburgh, where Hamish Henderson, and others after him have worked since the end of the last war, leaving poetical and musical documents which are still to be investigated in their larger meanings. From a strictly literary point of view, The National Library of Scotland represents a brilliant mine where one can delve for years, studying and researching not only on the mapping (both cartographic and literary) of that national heritage through the centuries, but also and mostly on an alternative canon which is partly contained in letters, manuscripts, rare editions of art-books.

This is the reason why the re-definition of the Scottish canon which *Alba Literaria* proposes in each of its contributions can re-locate and subvert the old centre, so that the energy of the new literatures written in English can make 'new centres out of old peripheries'. After the experience, under MacDiarmid's guidance, of that phase that is generally defined as the Scottish Renaissance, or denial of the privilege of 'English', with the consequent re-introduction of the use of the Scots language, English has been later appropriated and renovated from within through a slow process of contamination operated by the writers belonging to the First and Second Wave of the Scottish Renaissance. MacDiarmid himself, in
the late 1920s and early 1930s, after his theorization for the renovated role of the Scots language, proposed some general directions for the manipulation of the colonizer's language and the emergence of a new phase in which the local, barbarian and peripheral Scottish accent and language could build a bridge towards the other post-colonial literatures in English.

Concentrating on a literary production which covers nearly seven centuries, and discussing, in various ways and through diverse approaches, the different strategies through which a sense of cultural identity is created by counter-exercising power and self-constitution, *Alba Literaria* is not only concerned with the many 'englishes' born after the collapse of the British Empire but with the more general collision of the many facets of Otherness those languages have brought into play in a near and distant past. When linguistic dislocation and literary hybridity are involved, the counter-discourse of the marginalized Other proposes the rejection of the organic wholeness of the imperial discourse for the re-constitution of a national identity. To look at Scotland in terms of a counter-discursive theory means not only to place the country within the general discussion about the marginalization of the peripheral literatures written in the English language, but to observe how the Empire has been condemned to collapse because of the introduction of a large number of new and subversive voices inside its system. The literatures in English that Riach speaks about, and which have been introduced, not without a certain ideological debate in some universities, have imposed new aesthetic values and a new literary project for a future of oppositional criticism, in order to learn not just the overt thematic declarations of anti-colonial resistance in 'ex-centric' post-colonial writing, but also the counter-discursive investments of post-colonial figuration on the level of genre and mode.

It seems undeniable that in contemporary Scotland we face an era in which we must pay attention to the question of multiculturalism because Scottish literature(s) contains one of the most heterogeneous productions coming out of the ex-Empire, and one which can properly be defined as multilingual and syncretic, being written in Scots, Gaelic, and English respectively. Looking for a model for Scotland, Angus Calder observes that since Scottish culture is remarkably diverse within a relatively small area, 'any suggestion
that it has ever been or should be ‘racially’ homogeneous can only be dismissed with contempt. Like Russian culture, it is marked by a fierce sense of difference, but this is not difference from sharply distinct Tartars and Catholics but more elusive divergence from English people close in many ways, delimited by a border which has always been more like a revolving door than a portcullis.10

The flexibility of the border has been both a weakness and a strength for Scotland. The transformation and the adaptation of Scottish literature to its multi-linguistic realities have contributed to the shaping of an ambiguous character which Hugh MacDiarmid defined by using G. Gregory Smith's phrase 'Caledonian Antisyzygy'. Noting that in his or her literature the Scot presents a contradictory character which reflects the 'stress of foreign influence and native division, almost a zigzag of contradictions', Smith admits that two sides of the matter must be considered when studying the oxymoronic restlessness of the local culture.11 Both seem to refer to the idea of a Scottish mixture of contraries, a diversity-in-unity which opens itself to the multifarious influences deriving from a variety of heritages. However, beyond every kind of polarization of opposites, it seems that MacDiarmid's model for twentieth century Scottish culture more clearly responds to the post-colonial idea of a hybridized dynamic creativity. From this point of view, MacDiarmid's words go beyond a mere reconciliation or clash of contraries when he underlines that 'the abiding myth of our people' is represented by the synthesis of East and West, multi-linguistic interests, internationalism, world-consciousness.12 What MacDiarmid longs for is the recuperation not only of Scots culture but of the hidden Celtic heritage of the Highlands in order to underline the hybrid character of his national identity and confront it with other international realities. Bhabha's proposal of the existence of a 'third space', an interstice opening up new possibilities for literary and sociological aims, seems to have most to offer to those interested not just in the Caledonian Antisyzygy combination of opposites but in MacDiarmid's programme of a polyphonic comprehensiveness which could include Scots, Gaelic, English, Russian, Italian, and other influences.

The foundation of any individual identity for many of the writers examined in this volume rests less on a closure than on an openness to the contradictory textures of the world and of language in
particular, leaving both writers and readers in a world where paradox might be a relevant basis of one's being. Here the ambiguities of the World become the ambiguities of the Word so that this half-way position within language and identity subverts not only any authoritarian and institutionalised discourse but also the hegemony of the Subject. Crossing the borders of a national and cultural exclusivity, as we can clearly see in Lenta's essay on Lady Anne Barnard, in Tony Voss's contribution on Thomas Pringle or in all the diaspora poets discussed by G. Ross Roy or, again, in the internationality of the medieval poet Michael Scot or in an innovator such as MacDiarmid, means to do without any kind of linguistic and perceptive appropriation of reality, so that translation can become an all-important tool of literary and intellectual struggle. Supported by both MacDiarmid and Muir in the twentieth century, translation has represented an essential part of the contemporary Scottish writer's work, especially in the last 50 years. For Bhabha, the notion of hybridity comes out of the genealogy of difference and the idea of translation. Both help the attainment of the awareness of multiculturalism as a denial of essentialism and originary/original culture. The hybrid for Bhabha also avoids the simplistic dichotomies ruler/ruled, coloniser/colonised so that from two original moments a third entity emerges. This 'third space' helps to displace 'the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom'.

Bhabha's 'third space' is reflected in McCarey's description of the 'third tiger', that half-way condition reserved for both poetry and translation when writing has much to do with the trans-national and supra-national character of the writer's median state. It is this balanced position which can subvert the two original moments from which, as Bhabha says, the third emerges. Translation is one of the possible means to approach the Other, responding to the call of a kind of elective affinity and refusing the authority of the standardised language and the canonized prescriptions imposed by the Centre. In Scotland, a similar process of abrogation has given way to the First Wave of the Scottish Renaissance, and the appropriation of the coloniser's language and culture has given impulse to the so-called Second Wave, performing that disruptive role which has
achieved the imposition of an ex-centric vision of contemporary literature. As a direct consequence of the process of abrogation that MacDiarmid inaugurated in the 1920s with his 'Synthetic Scots', Bhabha's 'third space' emerges from the interstice created by the friction of two contrasting cultures. As the authors of *The Empire Writes Back* point out, there is no hope 'that cultural practices can return to some 'pure' and unsullied cultural condition, and that such practices themselves, such as the use of vernacular terms or grammatical forms in English literature, can embody such an authenticity'.

Where, as Wilson Harris – a writer of Scottish origins – notes in the last page of his novel *The Palace of the Peacock*, an alchemic mixture of opposites engenders a 'starned peacock who was instantly transported to know and to hug to himself his true invisible otherness and opposition, his true alien spiritual love without cruelty and confusion in the blindness and frustration of desire', there is still the possibility of enjoying the enriching reality of syncretic discourses: here the subject can confront its alterity and speak a language which re-establishes not only a national identity but a sense of completeness in local languages, history and place.

**Selected Bibliography: 2000-2005**


NOTES

4 Robert Crawford, op. cit., p. 22.


Above all I should like to thank all the collaborators for having provided the kind of competence and support that is not easily found.

My greatest debt is to some of my friends, such as Valerie Gillies, Christopher Whyte, Ronnie Jack, Edwin Morgan, Douglas Dunn and G. Ross Roy, because their response to my idea of dealing with Scottish works and writers and analysing the fracture zones where the Canon and its linearity is questioned or subverted was particularly encouraging.

For help of various kinds I am also grateful to William Gillies, Roberta Cimarosti, Michele Toniolo, Anna Lukianowicz, Armando Pajalich, and to the following institutions: The Edinburgh Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, The School of English at the University of Edinburgh, The National Library of Scotland, The Edinburgh University Library, The Royal Society of Edinburgh, the Studies in Scottish Literature journal, The University of Columbia (South Carolina) and the Rare Book Collection of the Thomas Cooper Library, the Department of Modern Languages at the University of Macerata, and the Department of European and Post-colonial Studies at the University of Ca' Foscari (Venice).
ALBA LITERARIA
Tom Hubbard

Michael the Wandering Scot:
'Preziosissimo fra i miei Maestri'

Although the theory of the soul is difficult and dangerous
for every researcher, nevertheless we shall say something here about the soul,
as about something familiar to us and to everyone else, as far as God,
the creator of every single thing, will grant us his grace, not to our own praise,
but to the honour of God and for the use of modern scholars in this art of astrology.¹

In this volume the reader will encounter many examples of Scottish writers who lived and worked overseas, enriching and enriched by the cultures in which they found themselves. Mediterranean and central Europe; north America; the South Pacific islands; these are among the most prominent destinations of the Scottish literary 'diaspora', to cite the term favoured by G.Ross Roy in the following pages. Alternatively, there is the phrase 'wandering Scot', which has established itself as something of a popular idiom: conveniently, the earliest celebrated literary example bears his nationality in his surname.

GIOIA ANGELETTI gained her PhD in Scottish Literature at the University of Glasgow and is presently a Research Fellow at the University of Bologna, where she has taught courses on Romantic and Victorian British Poetry and on English Language. Her research interests have recently turned to Romantic British theatre and drama (in particular by women) and to translation studies. She has published articles, reviews and translations in various books, periodicals and anthologies. Her most recent publication is *Eccentric Scotland: Three Victorian Poets. James Thomson ('B.V.'), John Davidson and James Young Geddes* (2004).

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**Franco Buffoni** lives in Rome. He is Professor of Literary Criticism and Comparative Literature at the University of Cassino. Some of his poetry books are: *Suora Carmeliteana e altri racconti in versi* (1997); *Songs of Spring* (1999); *Il Profilo del Rosa* (2000); *The Shadow of Mount Rosa* (2002). As a translator he edited *I Poeti Romanticì Inglesi* (2005), *La trilogia delle Ballate dell'Ottocento inglese* (2005). As a journalist he collaborates with several newspapers and radio programmes and he is the editor of the journal *Testo a fronte*, dedicated to the theory and the practise of literary translation.

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**Sarah M. Dunnigan** graduated from the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh and she is Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Edinburgh. She is the author of *Eros and Poetry at the Courts of Mary Queen of Scots and James VI* (2002), and of articles on Medieval and Renaissance Scottish literature, Renaissance women's writing, and twentieth-century Scottish women's writing. She is also co-editor of *Scottish Literature* (2002), and of *A Flame in the Mearns. Lewis Grassic Gibbon: A Centenary Celebration* (2003).
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Lillas Fraser took a PhD at the University of St Andrews in 2003, writing a work on contemporary Scottish poetry. Now she works at the Scottish Poetry Library in Edinburgh.

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Seamus Heaney was born in County Derry in Northern Ireland. Death of a Naturalist, his first book, appeared in 1966, and since then he has published poetry, criticism and translations which have established him as one of the leading poets of his generation. In
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**Tom Hubbard** is an Honorary Research Fellow in the Department of Scottish Literature, University of Glasgow (2004-2007). From 2004 to 2005 he initiated compilation of the new Bibliography of the Scottish Book Trade (BSBT). From 2000 to 2004 he was editor of BOSLIT (Bibliography of Scottish Literature in Translation). A widely published and translated poet and literary scholar, he is the author or editor of several books including *Seeking Mr Hyde* (1995), and *The Integrative Vision: Poetry and the Visual Arts in Baudelaire, Rilke, and MacDiarmid* (1997). He is editor of *The New Makars* (1991), *Poetry from Switzerland* (2002), and co-editor, with Duncan Glen, of *Stevenson’s Scotland* (2003). His most recent poetry collections are two pamphlets, *Scottish Faust* (2004) and *From Soda Fountain to Moonshine Mountain* (2004). He is currently completing working on the Scottish poet T. S. Law (1916-1997), on the medieval polymath (and legendary ‘wizard’) Michael Scot, and on the reception of Walter Scott’s poetry in Europe.

**R.D.S. Jack** is Professor Emeritus at the University of Edinburgh. He held the chair of Scottish and Medieval Literature from 1987-2004. He has published widely on Scottish Literature in all periods with special emphasis on the Renaissance, the eighteenth century vernacular revival and Victorian drama. His interest in the links between Scottish and European Literature is mirrored in the two monographs *The Scottish Influence on Italian Literature* (1972) and *Scottish Literature’s Debt to Italy* (1986), as well as in his continued involvement with the online database The Bibliography of Scottish Literature in Translation. He is currently working on studies of Burns and Barrie as well as editing (with Tom Hubbard) a collection of essays entitled *Scotland in Europe*.

**Margaret Lenta** was born and grew up in the north of England. After leaving Britain, she taught in Nigeria and Kenya, and since 1973 has worked at the University of Natal (now the University of KwaZulu-Natal), Durban, where she is now an Honorary Research Associate and Professor Emeritus. Her research interests in the last few years have been in the autobiographical writings of Lady Anne...


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**Tony MacManus** was an inspirational teacher, writer and musician who studied the work of Kenneth White in French and English, and gave lectures and published many articles on that work and on other subjects. He was curator of the *White World* exhibition for the National Library of Scotland in 1996, which has since toured extensively in Scotland and France. He founded the Scottish Centre for Geopoetics in January 1995, becoming its first director and securing its future before his untimely death in 2002.
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Cristina Ossato obtained her PhD in English Studies at the University of Pisa in 1998. After publishing several essays on English Victorianism and American Transcendentalism in the nine-
Contributors

teenth century in various journals such as *Annali di Ca' Foscari, Rivista di Studi Vittoriani, Merope, Strumenti Critici* and *Rivista di Studi Americani*, she published the poems 'Truth', 'Life', 'Black/White', 'Warp and Woof' in *Revetta Atenea* of the University of Puerto Rico in 2000. Her first book of literary criticism, *Sartor Resartus, ovvero la creazione di un Nuovo Mito* came out in 2001. In 2004 she was awarded a literary prize for the poem 'Obbedienza' by the *Premio Letterario Nazionale S. Egidio*. Her first collection of poems, *Foglie d'argento*, has just been published.

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**Valentina Poggi**, born in Modena, graduated in 1960 at the University of Bologna and took an MA at Cornell University in 1962. Apart from a few years at Pescara, Ferrara and Padua, she has taught English Literature (and from 1991 through 1998 also Scottish Literature) at the University of Bologna since the early seventies. Her books and essays range from Shakespeare, Elizabethan drama and Metaphysical poetry to Richardson, Dickens, and other Victorians. She has dealt with most significant Twentieth-century Scottish novelists in *Voci da un paese lontano* (1992), as well as written essays on James Hogg, Margaret Oliphant, Elspeth Davie, and her favourite George Mackay Brown. She has also published her translation of stories by the two latter and by Gibbon, MacColla, Mitchson, Friel, Gray, Kessong and Owens, in the collection *Scozia controluce* (1995).

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**G. Ross Roy** started teaching at the University of South Carolina in 1966. He founded *Studies in Scottish Literature*, a scholarly journal, in July 1968. He was awarded an honorary degree from the University of Edinburgh in 2002 for his work regarding Robert Burns. He is also an honorary president of the Burns World Federation and is a member of the Atlanta Burns Club. The *G. Ross Roy Collection of Robert Burns, Burnsiana & Scottish Poetry*, which consists of approximately 15,000 volumes of which nearly 5,000 are on Burns, was acquired by the University of South Carolina in 1989.


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Contributors

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CHRISTOPHER WHYTE is a poet, novelist, critic and academic. He has degrees from Cambridge and Perugia, and a PhD from the University of Glasgow. He was Reader in Scottish Literature at the University of Glasgow. He has published widely in the field of Scottish poetry and fiction, with particular emphasis on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He has edited An Aghaidh na
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