

(Thomas) Douglas Macpharlain Gifford MA, PhD
14 July 1940-28 June 2020

Douglas Gifford grew up in Glasgow, attending Hillhead High School, and spent some of his boyhood also in Orkney and elsewhere in Scotland due to his father being a locum doctor. His mother was a teacher of children with special educational needs, and he contemplated a career in school-teaching himself with a brief period as an uncertificated teacher in the highlands before becoming an academic. A first-class honours MA in English Language and Literature from the University of Glasgow led to a Balliol scholarship at the University of Oxford where Douglas was not entirely happy, largely due to his view that his supervisor and other English faculty members cared nothing and knew even less about nineteenth-century Scottish fiction to which he was increasingly drawn as an under-researched area of scholarship. Many of his happiest times in Oxford were spent running, a talent which he pursued for well over fifty years and only gave up when diagnosed a few years ago with a heart arrhythmia, a common occurrence in long-term runners. Douglas's early talent on the field (especially in cross-country events) in the lean post-war years during the early fifties was rewarded when the young athlete won a race and with it the prize of a turkey ('nearly as big as me,' he later remembered). This brought particular cheer to the Gifford family that Christmas, where as ever he enjoyed the close company of his younger brother Hugo. Hugo Gifford would go on to found the Strathclyde Theatre Group at the University of Strathclyde, where he was also that institution's first Director of Drama. Hugo's death tragically early from natural causes in 1981 was obviously a sore blow to Douglas. Like Hugo, Douglas had distinct performative talent and with his fine voice the elder sibling seriously considered a career as a singer in his youth. Through the seventies and eighties especially, Douglas's mellifluous voice could frequently be heard on radio and television discussing Scottish Literature, reviewing new books and events at the Edinburgh Festival.

Douglas taught at the University of Strathclyde from 1967, while continuing work on a PhD thesis on James Hogg at the University of Glasgow in which he opened up new directions in the exploration of Hogg and the contemporary periodical press and within both the contexts of literary and traditional culture. He had joined a nascent English Studies department under the headship of I F Clarke who encouraged his staff to be generalists in their teaching as student-demand soared in that post-Robbins time with the ensuing expansion of the UK university sector. This suited the capaciously-minded Douglas who could be found through the years teaching Shakespeare, Thackeray, Ibsen, Joyce and much else. Unsurprisingly Douglas especially developed courses in Scottish Literature that took advantage of new directions in scholarship – his own and that of others who were appearing in that same powerful generation: the pioneers of the Scottish Literature scholarly-area in the sixties and seventies. At Strathclyde, Douglas was at the centre of an impressive academic group with interests in Scottish Literature, which included colleagues, Mike Bath, Andrew Noble, Ken Simpson and Joyce Wilson. In that period, it was Douglas, to a large extent, who built up much of the extensive Scottish Literature resource at the Andersonian (Strathclyde) library. He also pioneered the study of the Glasgow novel during his Strathclyde years, exemplified by an excellent essay *Dear Green Place: The Novel in the West of Scotland* published by the Third Eye Centre in 1985.

During his time at Strathclyde down to 1987, and thereafter at the University of Glasgow where he joined as Senior Lecturer, was made Reader and then Professor, Douglas enthralled (no exaggeration) many generations of students with his habitual tour de force eloquence and - most especially in his scholarly specialism - an encyclopaedic turn of mind. In 1987 Douglas was enticed to the University of Glasgow by Rod Lyall, becoming a third member of staff in the Department of Scottish Literature, whose first head had been Douglas's PhD supervisor, the poet Alexander Scott after it became a distinct unit in 1971. Thanks to Gifford and Lyall, the department expanded rapidly from the late eighties, and it is due to their ambitious endeavours that Scottish Literature at Glasgow today has eight permanent members of academic staff. The pair also oversaw the development of a distance-taught MPhil covering five centuries of Scottish Literature, which in the rather more richly resourced CPD times of the 1980s was taken by many school-teachers across a three-year, part-time course. Here as Douglas had always made happen - in school-visits, conferences and in work for the Scottish Qualifications Authority - his engaging lecturing style (many balls in the air, most of which he would have caught by the end!) meant that numerous

teachers had their appreciation and knowledge of Scottish Literature much enhanced. And this dividend was passed on to their pupils and often also at second-hand to their teaching colleagues.

After Rod Lyall's departure, Douglas was head of department for a decade and in 1995 promoted from Reader to occupy the first established Chair of Scottish Literature, as distinct from the Chair of Scottish History and Literature, which had been founded at Glasgow in 1913. Douglas had been a stalwart of the Association for Scottish Literary Studies since its foundation in 1970 and was a main mover behind the first Scottish Universities Committee for the Teaching of Scottish Literature. For the ASLS he produced that organisation's inaugural - now long-running - annual scholarly volume when he edited, Hogg's *The Three Perils of Man: War, Women and Witchcraft* (1972). Earlier his collection *Scottish Short Stories 1800-1900* (1971) demonstrated a deftness of introduction and a discriminating selection that few others could have produced at that time.

Douglas's thesis on James Hogg became the basis of a monograph in 1976, and this pioneering new attention to a neglected nineteenth-century Scottish author was joined by another canon-defining publication on two twentieth-century writers in *Neil Gunn and Lewis Grassie Gibbon* (1983). His sweepingly panoramic narrative here derived some energy from an earlier collection of path-breaking critical essays which he had edited with Alex Scott, *Neil M. Gunn: The Man and the Writer* (1973). When Douglas's Aberdeen University Press volume 3 - *History of Scottish Literature: Nineteenth Century* (1988) was reviewed that doyen of Scottish criticism, David Daiches opined that it was a generally excellent volume but so good and knowledgeable was its editor's own chapter, 'Myth, Parody and Dissociation: Scottish Fiction, 1814-1914' that he could have wished that Douglas had written the entire volume. Nonetheless, this was a typical Gifford production in its editor's commissioning of chapters that dealt with an impressively wide swathe of literary, cultural and intellectual history. It shone much new light on a field with many neglected aspects. The same was true of the critical collection he co-edited with Dorothy Macmillan, *A History of Scottish Women's Writing* (1997) and the large survey-volume he co-edited with Sarah Dunnigan and Alan MacGillivray, *Scottish Literature in English and Scots* (2002), Douglas personally writing over one third of the material in the latter book. He was the author too of many individual essays on Walter Scott, Robert Louis Stevenson, Iain Crichton Smith, Robin Jenkins and others. For many consecutive years he produced a survey of the most recent Scottish fiction for the North American journal, *Studies in Scottish Literature* and his unrivalled reading here was also put to use by the Saltire Society on whose book awards panel he served from 1982-2011. Appointed Honorary Librarian at Abbotsford (Walter Scott's historic home near Melrose), Douglas initiated a strong research agenda there on many aspects of the writer's collection, most especially Scott's unpublished manuscripts as well as his chapbooks and other 'popular culture' items. Douglas was a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh being elected to that honour in 1996, one marker of a richly dynamic career where he made a huge difference in academia and Scottish literary scholarship, and did so much in the way of knowledge exchange and outreach to the public before these ideas had the status they now enjoy.

Many adventures of a man who loved his work, his family and friends and who also had a great sense of fun might be recounted. My own favourite is his trip to a European university where like everyone else assembled he was appalled by an increasingly bad smell in the conference lecture-hall during three days of a very hot summer. Eventually the source was discovered to be the gift of a haggis Douglas had brought for his hosts, allowed to roll away down a hole in front of the lectern and had then promptly forgotten about. Douglas is survived by his daughters to whom he was a doting father, Alison (from his first marriage to Gina), Joanna and Rosslyn, by his grandchildren, by his wife, Anne, and his sister Elizabeth.

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