

# The New Criterion

## Notebook

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### George Mackay Brown, 1921-1996

by [Robert Richman](#)

On the life & work of the Scottish poet

George Mackay Brown's death this year, at the age of seventy-four, is a terrible blow: he was Scotland's finest poet, and one of the finest in all Britain. In a *New York Times* obituary, the Irish poet Seamus Heaney said that he had never seen Brown's poetry sufficiently praised. I would concur, and add that Brown's work had never been sufficiently published, either, at least not in the United States, where only some of Brown's fiction and children's books have appeared. When I think of the lack of regard accorded Brown's poetry on this side of the Atlantic, it is hard not to think of his predecessor and mentor Edwin Muir, another Scotsman whose work is unknown to many American readers.

Brown, like Muir, was from Orkney, the remote group of islands north of the Highland region; the two met while the younger poet was a student at Newbattle Abbey, the college where Muir was ward ...

Robert Richman

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