A CRITICAL GUIDE
TO THREE MOVEMENTS IN
CONTEMPORARY SCOTTISH POETRY

by

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ABSTRACT

The first Part of the dissertation examines in some detail the poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid. A chronological approach is used, but what is most stressed is the thematic unity of all MacDiarmid's work, from such early poems as *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (of which a detailed exegesis is presented) through the poems of the '30s to the long "world-view" poems such as *In Memoriam James Joyce*. This unity is to be found principally in MacDiarmid's attitude towards Evolution, and his view of the evolutionary development of the human mind. Within this context, the apparent paradoxes and confusions of MacDiarmid's political, social, and aesthetic views may be reconciled. Although mainly concerned with the ideas contained in MacDiarmid's poetry, the dissertation also attempts to describe and to defend the changing stylistic means by which these ideas are presented, especially with regard to the very "prosaic" nature of the later poems.

Part Two examines the work of four leading poets of the Scottish Renaissance. Sydney Goodsir Smith's poetry is discussed in terms of its main themes of love and politics, and their partial reconciliation in poems dealing with the figure of the outsider. Particularly close attention is given to the poem-sequence *Under the Eildon Tree*. The discussion of Robert Garioch relates his work as a translator of poetry to his work as an original poet, dealing especially with his poems about Edinburgh, and with the relation of his humorous to his more serious work. The section on Norman MacCaig analyses his attitudes towards nature, and the means of perceiving external nature, especially the poetic perception through metaphor. The results of MacCaig's
recent shift to free verse are also treated. Iain Crichton Smith's poetry is viewed as a system of dualities, perhaps best summed up in the title of one of his books, *The Law and the Grace*; the discussion closes with a detailed analysis of the one poem, *Deer on the High Hills*, in which these dualities are (tentatively) reconciled.

The final Part of the dissertation opens with an account of the history and theoretical basis of the experimental Concrete Poetry movement, and then examines the contributions to this movement of two Scots poets, Edwin Morgan and Ian Hamilton Finlay. Finlay's work is examined in detail, not only for its extraordinary inventiveness of technique, but also for the very positive values of its attitudes, themes, and imagery. Particular attention is given to the theme of fishing-boats and the sea in Finlay's work. This section is not merely a defence of Finlay's technical procedures, but an assertion of his greatness as a poet.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION . . . . . . 1

PART ONE . . . . . . 6
Hugh MacDiarmid . . . . . . 7

PART TWO . . . . . . 127
Introduction . . . . . . 128
Sydney Goodsir Smith . . . . . . 130
Robert Garioch . . . . . . 179
Norman MacCaig . . . . . . 203
Iain Crichton Smith . . . . . . 250

PART THREE . . . . . . 284
Introduction . . . . . . 285
Concrete Poetry . . . . . . 289
Edwin Morgan . . . . . . 305
Ian Hamilton Finlay . . . . . . 315

APPENDIX (Interviews) . . . . . . 358
Hugh MacDiarmid . . . . . . 359
Robert Garioch . . . . . . 377
Norman MacCaig . . . . . . 392
Iain Crichton Smith . . . . . . 412
Edwin Morgan . . . . . . 429
Stewart Conn . . . . . . 445

FOOTNOTES . . . . . . 452

BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . . . 466
INTRODUCTION

The title of this dissertation is "A Critical Guide to Three Movements in Contemporary Scottish Poetry." This introduction is mainly concerned with giving a brief outline of what I mean by these terms.

I have attempted to use the term "contemporary Scottish poetry" in as factual a manner as possible; none of the three words is intended to be in any way evaluative. I do not, for instance, regard "contemporary" as a term of approbation: it means, simply, the period of time from roughly 1920, the first publications of Hugh MacDiarmid, until the present day. By "Scottish" poetry I have understood poetry written in Scotland by writers of Scottish birth and/or nationality. The term is used purely in this pragmatic sense: it contains no implications whatever about the quality of "Scottishness" in either the style or the content of the poetry. It includes verse written in both Scots and English; I have, however, excluded all Gaelic poets, because, not having the Gaelic myself, I am unable to make any judgements about them.

Neither of these definitions would, I expect, be regarded as controversial, but my use of the word "poetry" might be. I have been prepared to extend the application of this word to its outermost limits, and include under it such disparate works as In Memoriam James Joyce and other later poems of Hugh MacDiarmid at one extreme, and the "concrete poetry" of Ian Hamilton Finlay at the other. It will certainly be disputed whether or not these works can be called "poetry", but I personally have no doubt that they are, and to demonstrate this belief is at least one purpose of the apposite sections of the dissertation.
From the phrase "three movements in", as important a word as any is "in". I do not for one moment pretend that this is a complete or comprehensive account of contemporary Scottish poetry. I have had to exclude several noteworthy poets, such as William Soutar, A.D. Mackie, Tom Scott, and George Bruce. My greatest regrets are for the exclusion of the two poets from Orkney: Edwin Muir (whose work, however, has gained probably more recognition than that of the other poets of the period except MacDiarmid's); and George Mackay Brown, whose poems, especially the magnificent "Five Voyages of Arnor", have given me great pleasure.

However, some measure of selectivity was obviously necessary, and I have picked out what seemed to me to be the three most important movements in the period; and, within these movements, I have picked out the poets who seem to me to have done the most important and rewarding work. The ultimate ground of the selection is still my personal taste and judgement; but the choice was made only after reading as much of the total poetry of the period as I could find access to.

The first of these three "movements" is in fact constituted by one man: Hugh MacDiarmid. MacDiarmid's contribution to contemporary Scottish poetry is of course immense, and is acknowledged even by those who dislike his work; but to a very great extent, he stands alone. Although his influence has been immense, his genius is so utterly individual that its influence is necessarily indirect. His style is impossible to imitate, difficult even to parody. His ideas also are individual, and, though some of the more obvious ones, such as his blend of Scottish Nationalism and Communism, have been picked up by other Scottish poets, the basic ones, such as his whole theory of evolution and
language, have not been received or developed at all. MacDiarmid is a movement in himself; he has no associates.

The second movement is that which could very loosely be called the "Scottish Renaissance". These are poets who started writing in the 40s and 50s and are all still writing today. They are not a "school of MacDiarmid", for there can be no such thing; but they all, in varying measures, owe some debt to him. There are some similarities - for instance, Sydney Goodsir Smith shares MacDiarmid's political position, Iain Crichton Smith shares his obsession with dualism - but these similarities are not often of primary importance. I have tried to approach each one as an individual, stressing what is most characteristically his own about his work, rather than stressing the sometimes tenuous similarities between them.

As representatives of this group, I have chosen two writers in Scots - Sydney Goodsir Smith and Robert Garioch - and two writers in English - Norman MacCaig and Iain Crichton Smith. Basically, all these writers are "conservative" in nature, insofar as they write in accepted poetic forms, and are not greatly concerned with experimentation in the structures of poetry itself. (In this they differ from MacDiarmid himself, whose long later poems constitute one of the most adventurous experiments of the century in poetic form.) Also, the influences they acknowledge are similarly "conservative": the poets of the Scots tradition, or such established American poets as Wallace Stevens (for MacCaig) and Robert Lowell (for Crichton Smith).

In contrast is the "third movement", which consists mainly of younger poets who have begun writing only in the 60s, and who are
characterised by a great willingness to experiment with the forms of
goethe, and by an open-ness to influences from the international avant-
garde. To them, William Burroughs and Robert Creeley are of more
importance than Hugh MacDiarmid is. A recent number of Lines Review
(number 26) included two very interesting pieces by D.M. Black and Robert
Tait, both of which operate in an unclassifiable area somewhere between
poetry and prose.

Out of this area of experimentation, I have concentrated on one
movement which has already attained a considerable maturity, cohesion,
and level of achievement, namely, concrete poetry, as exemplified in the
work of Edwin Morgan and Ian Hamilton Finlay.

This brings us, in various odd ways, full circle. Concrete poetry
is as far away from MacDiarmid's work as you can reasonably imagine: but
the extremes show signs of meeting. MacDiarmid and Finlay hold dismissive
attitudes towards each other; but in between is Edwin Morgan, himself
a fine concrete poet, and also the most understanding and intelligent
critic in Scotland of MacDiarmid's later works. My own position is very
close to Edwin Morgan's, in that I see much to admire in both extremes
(though my personal, emotional preferences are wholly with Finlay), but
I do not think that the two are completely irreconcilable. Indeed,
both seem to spring from very similar preconceptions about the nature,
value, and functions of language (though they then proceed in widely
differing directions.)

These, then, are the three movements: MacDiarmid himself; the
formally conservative poets of the "Renaissance"; and the younger, more
experimental writers, especially the concrete poets. Inherent in this
structure is also an examination of the fortunes of the Scots language: how it was used by MacDiarmid, and how his hopes for its continued use by younger poets have or have not been fulfilled.

Finally, I should like to explain what I mean by a "critical guide". I take the idea of "guide" fairly literally: the poetry of this period is a largely unmapped area, and the reader plunging unprepared into the middle of it tends to get lost. I wish to provide readers with a context, a framework of ideas, into which they can fit any particular poems they have read by, say, MacDiarmid. I have had to assume that my readers will be largely unfamiliar with the poetry, and this accounts for the somewhat large proportion of direct quotation from the originals.

There have been two books published which do something similar: Duncan Glen's *Hugh MacDiarmid and the Scottish Renaissance* and Kenneth Buthlay's study *Hugh MacDiarmid* in the "Writers and Critics" series. Mr. Glen's book, however, is primarily historical and bibliographical in method, and is not intended to be a critical study. Mr. Buthlay includes MacDiarmid's prose within his scope, and I believe that my own work, by concentrating on the poetry, is able to give a more detailed account. As far as the other poets are concerned, there have been a number of critical articles on particular aspects of their work, but this dissertation is, to the best of my knowledge, the first attempt to present a critical perspective and estimate of the whole body of their work.

This lack of previous critical work is all the more surprising because this is, I believe, a very rich and rewarding body of poetry, which has for too long remained unappreciated outside - and even inside - the borders of Scotland. It is my hope that my dissertation will do something to remedy this situation.
PART ONE

HUGH MACDIARMID

The Evolutionary Vision
I'll ha'e nae hauf-way hoose, but aye be whaur
Extremes meet.

All his life, Hugh MacDiarmid has held extreme, and often contradictory views. The man is himself a contradiction, a meeting of extremes: on the one hand, Hugh MacDiarmid, propagandist, fierce and unrelenting fighter for extreme causes, intellectually arrogant and contemptuous (though often with reason), sparing neither names nor feelings, master of invective; on the other, Christopher Murray Grieve, gentle, courteous, hospitable, generous, helpful, yet sharing with his alter ego tenacity, courage, and strength of purpose such as helped him through the years on Whalsay.

Any study of MacDiarmid must realise that one basic pattern of his thought is duality, combined with a disinclination, amounting almost to an inability, for compromise. He will combine the most diverse attitudes into a whole, but never by diluting them, never by seeking a middle way. The value of such opposing attitudes lies in their opposition. MacDiarmid compares the duality of much of his thought to the Chinese Tin-Tang dichotomy,

the peculiar beauty of which is that both parts are regarded as equally necessary, valid and to be accepted - there is no question of triumphing over the dark element and altogether wiping it out as though it were an arbitrary evil ... It is not an easy relationship. It entails unceasing conflict, a conflict not of extermination, but rather akin to that state of biology known as hostile symbiosis. (LP 371-2.)

This pattern MacDiarmid sees as akin to one which is particularly expressive of the Scottish mind and character: that which Gregory Smith
calls the "Caledonian Antisyzygy", or the ability to combine within one structure (say, a poem) the most diverse and opposing ideas or moods, such as the blend of the comic and macabre in some of Dunbar's poetry. In a sense, MacDiarmid's entire work is an exposition of this concept.

Yet one can apply this concept even to itself. I have said that the Caledonian Antisyzygy, or the co-holding of opposite extremes, is one basic pattern of MacDiarmid's mind. This is essentially a static pattern; although it contains a great deal of movement within itself, it is non-linear. But there is also another fundamental pattern in MacDiarmid's thought which is linear, progressive, evolutionary. This pattern is that of the development of mankind, and as MacDiarmid's work proceeds it comes to dominate. The evolutionary vision provides a context in which the reconciliation of opposites is possible. The only place where extremes meet, is infinity.

When I was talking to MacDiarmid, he was unhappy about the term "mystic" (which Professor David Daiches had applied to him), but he accepted the term "visionary", and said:

Edwin Muir said that I was much more interested in the potential than the actual. ... I couldn't be animated in the way that I am, either in poetry or in politics, unless I was concerned with the potentialities of mankind.

A main theme of his poetry is the variety of ways (political, cultural, social, intellectual, linguistic, mental) in which man can develop his potentialities and evolve towards a state of society which will differ as much from the present as the present does from prehistoric
times. One way forward is certainly to develop an awareness of the Caledonian Antisyzygy.

Thus a non-linear pattern of thought is combined with a linear one which in turn includes the non-linear. This kind of paradoxical combination is everywhere in MacDiarmid: it is the theory of the combination of opposites employed with the theory itself as one of the opposites. Of this continual movement of paradox, twisting ever back on itself, MacDiarmid has said:

There is a place at Langholm called the Curly Snake where a winding path coils up through a copse till it reaches the level whence, after passing through a field or two, it runs on into the splendid woods of the Langfall. It has always haunted my imagination and has probably constituted itself the ground-plan and pattern of my mind.

(FFS 41-2.)

In a poem actually called "The Caledonian Antisyzygy" (477), MacDiarmid defends this position, and also indicates some of the particular issues in which the general theory is exemplified:

I write now in English and now in Scots To the despair of friends who plead For consistency; sometimes achieve the true lyric cry, Next but chopped-up prose; and write whiles In traditional forms, next in a mixture of styles.

MacDiarmid's choice of language, his choice of form, and especially the change in both, have been discussed at great length; but these discussions remain peripheral to the centrally important issues of his
work, which they have sometimes tended to obscure.

MacDiarmid's earliest work (as C.M. Grieve) is in English, as was inevitable at the time. Before 1920, the verse being written in Scots was mainly in the "Kailyard" tradition, which had come to mean feeble imitations of Burns, expressing trite sentiments in a language desiccated by cliche. The young Grieve turned naturally to English.

His revulsion from the Kailyard tradition still determines, to a great extent, Scottish critical reaction to it: only recently has anyone been able to afford to look at it more objectively, and see its merits. Such as they are, these are the merits of (attendant on the faults of) Victorian verse in England as well. Ian Hamilton Finlay is one of the few people in Scotland who have looked on this period with any favour.

It should also be noticed that much of this verse dealt with subjects and themes which have never appealed to MacDiarmid: warm, simple expressions of human friendship and love. MacDiarmid has always had a kind of contempt for this:

Almost all modern Scottish poetry gives off a great sense of warmth and offering, like a dog when it loves you. It is soggily and indiscriminately affectionate.

(KPW 7.)

Edwin Morgan has pointed this out as a "gap" in the range of MacDiarmid's subject-matter. 4

And so the first phase of Grieve's creativity fell naturally into English, producing the early poems and Annals of the Five Senses.
Of these early poems, the best is "Cattle Show" (238), later reprinted in *Stony Limits*. It is a concise lyric, wasting no words, which sets up a simple contrast and makes a simple satirical point. It is an unambitious poem, but is distinguished by the strength of its feeling for natural objects, for things. The animals are far more vivid to the reader than the "painted ladies" are, as will often be the case in MacDiarmid. This feel for natural objects is a continuing strength in his work; the comparative weakness in presenting individual human characters may also be a strength, if, as here, the scheme of the poem demands it.

Edwin Morgan has stressed the importance of *Annals* in any overall view of MacDiarmid's work:

> It's worth remembering that his first book is not Sangschaw but *Annals of the Five Senses*, which came out in 1923. This strange collection of prose and verse is both hard to read and hard to describe, but what one can say about it is that a good deal of the later MacDiarmid is already there in essence: so much so, in fact, that one might think it was Sangschaw which provided the interruption, rather than the later work which drove him off the rails.

*Annals* is a strange muddle of a book, full of unexpected rewards, gems hidden away in the depths of a loose and labyrinthine prose style. The long, often ungrammatical sentences (digressing into endless parentheses, much longer than this one, so that, when one eventually reaches the end, it is necessary to turn back a few pages to pick up the grammatical thread from before the beginning of the parenthesis) are a familiar and recurrent aspect of MacDiarmid's prose and of his later poetry.
The most interesting (though not necessarily the most successful) parts of *Annals* are those in which Grieve seems to be presenting a kind of idealised self-portrait, for instance the much-quoted passage -

So his tendency was always to the whole, to the totality, to the general balance of things. Indeed it was his chiefest difficulty ... to exclude, to condemn, to say No. Here, probably, was the secret of the way in which he used to plunge into the full current of the most inconsistent movements, seeking - always in vain, until he was utterly exhausted, not having failed, however, to enrich every one of them - to find ground upon which he might stand foursquare.

(A 194)

- or the opening section, "Cerebral", which portrays an almost super-human intensity of intellectual activity. The inability to carry this over into human relationships is presented with amusing self-awareness in "Cafe Scene"; whereas "The Never-Yet Explored" shows an acute awareness of and some insight into a particular character, even if it is mainly concerned with that character's ideas. Of "Sartoria", Kenneth Buthlay has said:

(It) is a sort of mosaic built up from items about dress, especially female dress, which suggests that fashion magazines must have been included in the author's voracious reading. It also reveals the passion for specialised terms and esoteric vocabularies that has characterised so much of his later work.

(B 17.)

*Annals* was first published in 1923; but by that time C.M. Grieve had discovered Scots, and become Hugh MacDiarmid. He had moved from a
position opposed to any revival of Scots to a position of immense personal enthusiasm for it, qualified only by his distrust of the uses to which it had been put by the Kailyard authors. The climax of this movement was the publication, in October 1922, in the third number of the Scottish Chapbook, of "The Watergaw".

Many questions have been raised about Scots. It has been debated, endlessly, whether Scots is a "language" or a "dialect". This debate has been concerned less with the denotative meanings of these terms (which would be hard, if not impossible, to fix precisely) than with their connotations. Scots as a "language" reflects the pride of an independent country; it is an aspect of Scottish Nationalism. Scots as a "dialect" of English is derogatory; it is an aspect of English Imperialism. One of the best short accounts of the history of Scots in relation to MacDiarmid's use of it is that given by Albert Mackie in the Festschrift, pages 165-185.

But theoretical arguments about the history of Scots seem to me to be of less significance than purely pragmatic considerations. MacDiarmid certainly found, in the articles he wrote during his shift of attitude, many valid and interesting ideas to justify what he was doing - but what he was doing came first. He turned to Scots because it worked; "The Watergaw" says more than all the articles put together.

This argument can also be applied to those of MacDiarmid's followers who have attempted to write in Scots, down to the present day. It is not a matter of theories, not a matter of intellectual knowledge of the language - as is proved by the spectacularly disastrous case of Maurice Lindsay, of whom Norman MacCaig once remarked that he "took to Scots like
a duck to glue."

In a letter to William Soutar, in 1932, MacDiarmid admitted:

I have been in regard to Scots a thoroughly bad influence on you and others and my own practice in regard to the synthetic business is so purely individual and inimitable that it justifies in my case alone - so far - what in other cases simply clutters up the verse with unvivified and useless words. 7

For Soutar himself, Scots worked intermittently (though it can be noted that his best poem, "Song" 6, depends on juxtaposition of Scots and English: see the last two lines.) It has worked for some (notably Sydney Goodsir Smith and Robert Garioch) and not for others. There is no logic in it.

As to the future of Scots, one can agree equally with Maurice Lindsay -

I cannot see how, under the influence first of the film and then of radio and now of television, the Scots tongue can do anything other than gradually dwine away.

- or with Robert Garioch -

(Scots) would be so useful that people would use it just because there was nothing else so convenient or useful for them to have, and out of its sheer usefulness they'll preserve it. I doubt even if it will fail as a spoken language. 9

It is no more probable or improbable now that a great Scots poet should arise than it was in 1922.
Having stressed the pragmatic basis of MacDiarmid's adoption of Scots, we can now turn to the theoretical reasons advanced, which are no less valid for being secondary. These centre on two things - MacDiarmid's conception of language itself, and his conception of Scotland.

It is in his attitude to language, more than in anything else, that MacDiarmid's true claim to "modernity" lies. A concern with the revivifying of language is central to all forms of modern poetic thought, especially some of the more recent developments, such as Concrete Poetry, of which MacDiarmid, with typical inconsistency, strongly disapproves. The concretists would certainly agree wholeheartedly with MacDiarmid's statement:

> the act of poetry (is) the reverse of what it is usually thought to be; not an idea gradually shaping itself in words, but deriving entirely from words.

(LP xiii.)

MacDiarmid's recourse to Scots is analogous to Pound's recourse to Provencal or Anglo-Saxon models; and his view of the Scots tradition is shared by T.S. Eliot. The importance of cross-fertilization of different languages through poetic translation lies at the centre of MacDiarmid's aesthetic as well as of Pound's.

MacDiarmid's use of Scots was described by John Buchan, in the Preface to Sangschaw, as

"at once reactionary and revolutionary. .... It is a proof that a new spirit is to-day abroad in the North, which, as I have said, is both conservative and radical - a determination to keep Scotland in the main march of the
world's interests, and at the same time to forgo no part of her ancient heritage." (§ x.)

For MacDiarmid, the way forward is the way backward, and vice versa. In his later work, we shall see him going even further forward, into visionary futures of unforeseeable developments in human evolution, and further backward, into Gaelic rather than Scots, and his ideas of Gaelic pre-history and the origins of civilization. He insists upon "civilization's urgent need today to refresh and replenish itself at its original sources." (IS ix)

Thus the return to the past (the "reactionary") is never for its own sake alone; the swing to the other extreme (the "revolutionary") is swift and necessary.

The passion for language as such is to find full expression some years later, with In Memoriam James Joyce; at this stage, it is centred on one particular language: Scots. The passion, and its relevance, may be illustrated by two quotations:

We have been enormously struck by the resemblance - the moral resemblance - between Jamieson's Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language and James Joyce's Ulysses. A vis comica that has not yet been liberated lies bound by desuetude and misappreciation in the recesses of the Doric: and its potential uprising would be no less prodigious uncontrorollable, and utterly at variance with conventional morality than was Joyce's tremendous outpouring.

(SC Feb. 1922, 183.)

The value of the Doric lies in the extent to which it contains lapsed or unrealised qualities which correspond to 'unconscious' elements of distinctively Scottish psychology.

(SC Oct. 1922, 63.)
This latter idea is one that MacDiarmid has often since repeated. When talking with him, I asked

Q. Do you have in mind here something like the Jungian idea of a collective unconscious?
A. Something similar; I think it reaches down to deeper and more important layers of the psyche.

And in "Gairmscoile" (56), he wrote

... And there's forgotten shibboleths o' the Scots
Ha'e keys to senses lockit to us yet
- Coorse words that shamble thro' oor minds like stots,
Syne turn on's muckle een wi' doonsin' emerauds lit.

This belief in a collective unconscious of the Scottish psyche ties in with the idea of returning to the "original sources" of our civilization. It leads later in MacDiarmid to a greater emphasis on Gaelic. It also exhibits characteristics of other leading MacDiarmid ideas: a broad generality, which sounds impressive, but which cannot be very precisely tied down, and which is not susceptible to "proof".

The ideas which MacDiarmid puts forward are often questionable: not many authorities, for instance, would place the trust he does in Waddell's *British Edda*. But whereas errors of fact can be noted and corrected by the critic, opinions can only be disagreed with. The reader will, eventually, have to make up his own mind about the validity of MacDiarmid's psychological, historical, linguistic, and political views. All that the critic can do is to interpret these views as he thinks MacDiarmid sees them, and demonstrate how they operate in his poetry.
Clearly, one of the "'unconscious' elements of distinctively Scottish psychology" is the Caledonian Antisyzygy; and sure enough, this is to be found in the language as well:

One of the most distinctive characteristics of the Vernacular, part of its very essence, is its insistent recognition of the body, the senses. ... This explains the unique blend of the lyrical and the ludicrous in primitive Scots sentiment. ... The essence of the genius of our race is, in our opinion, the reconciliation it effects between the base and the beautiful, recognising that they are complementary and indispensable to each other.

(SC, Feb. 1922, 104.)

This quality of "earthiness" was described by Edwin Muir, referring to "Country Life" (20), as

the product of a realistic, or more exactly a materialistic, imagination, which seizing upon everyday reality shows not the strange beauty which that sometimes takes on, but rather the beauty which it possesses normally and in use.

At the other end of the spectrum, MacDiarmid is also insisting upon the ability of Scots to carry more intellectual and abstract ideas.

The new Scottish literary movement, begun in the early 'twenties, was launched under the slogan "Not Burns - Dunbar", because it aimed not only at re-establishing for the whole range of modern literary purpose a fuller canon of Scots than Burns employed, but because it sought to intellectualize Scots poetry and reacquire a far greater range of technical resources than Burns commanded. This was necessary because in the post-Burns period Scots poetry had been bogged in mindless doggerel, facetiae, and hopeless sentimentality.
These, then, are the elements out of which the lyrics of Sangschaw and Penny Wheep were built, elements of the language itself: its richness and originality of fresh image, unspoilt by the excesses of post-Burnsian "doggerel", the "vis comica" comparable to Ulysses; its ability to appeal to deeper and more fundamental layers of the Scottish subconscious; its antisyzygistical properties, combining down-to-earth materialism with high flights of intellectual and metaphysical speculation, often describing one in terms of the other; and finally, a force and economy of expression which the language and the simple ballad-type forms seemed to release in MacDiarmid. Already some of his earlier English poems had shown a tendency to sprawl; but in these lyrics he achieved a concentration of expression almost unique in his work.

The best of these lyrics are now so well-known that they are part of a heritage; and much has been written about them. A fine and concise summing-up of their qualities is the following, by Robert Tait:

They have three main characteristics. First, they establish dramatic dialogue between an individual and the rest of the world. The world is always Other: it is not crudely anthropomorphised. Ease of familiarity with it is countered by mystery and metamorphosis over which the individual has no control, as when a catch of fish turn into women ("The Three Fishes"), blue eggs are seen as eyes ("Trompe L'Œil"), or a cloud-burst and soaring moon are part-identified with a lover. Along with this goes the second characteristic: cosmological events are conceived in terms of the matter-of-fact kind of action, human and non-human, such as is familiar in a rural community. This quality is the result of the scots vocabulary and, equally the scots rhythm and tone of voice. Thirdly, there is MacDiarmid's special talent for clear articulation of an image and timing of effects. At their best these poems are free of the muddle that results from being unable to resist another enticing image.
This relating of the individual, local, and particular to the general and universal, is the most characteristic of MacDiarmid's manoeuvres. It works in two ways: either it diminishes the universal, by seeing it in terms of the local (as in "The Bonnie Broukit Bairn" (7)), or else it diminishes the local, by setting it in a universal context. Observe "Empty Vessel" (50), which is certainly one of the most beautiful of all MacDiarmid's poems. Of it, George Bruce has written:

The cosmic image "Wunds wi warlds to swing" places the individual in a new situation truly comprehensible only to a man who is aware of the vast interstellar spaces discovered in our century. Without forcing our attention we are made aware of a background of scientific knowledge. "The licht that bends owre a' thing" images in cosmic terms the concept of the love of the mother bent over her child, but it also refers indirectly to the doctrines of relativity. The effect of this imagery is to diminish the size of the individual to vanishing point in a vast indifferent universe and so intensify the emotion of pity.

What I want to emphasize is that the intensity of pity is achieved only by placing it in a cosmic setting, with the result that the pity itself becomes a general emotion. In adapting his source, MacDiarmid has undoubtedly created a superior poem; but he has lost the individuality of "Jenny Nettles".

This tendency is not compensated for in the other approach: the planets may be seen as children or gossiping women, but never as a child or a woman. "The Watergaw" deliberately preserves an air of mystery, refusing to give the individual interpretation of "what your look meant
then". and thus keeps the emotions of awe and dread on a general level. The only person approaching a fully realised individual in these two books is Cophetua (19): certainly, hers is the only human name to appear in Sangschaw.

This is not intended as a criticism, but only as a clarification of what MacDiarmid can and cannot do, of what he intends or does not intend. His poetry is always a general one, even when it appears most intensely concerned with individual details (as in much of the later "poetry of fact"). The Caledonian Antisyzygy is always pulling him away from the particular to the universal: we never get the one untouched by the other. The greatest poetry can present the individual in such a way that the universal is implicit, without destroying the integrity of the individual: but this is an effect which MacDiarmid seldom achieves. Perhaps his own personality is too strongly individual to allow any other one to appear in his writings. His great gift is the presentation of the local and the universal as parts of one system, as interdependent, necessary to each other: but this interdependence is so conceived that the integrity of the individual, being less important than its relationship, is broken. It cannot stand alone. Whereas Swift could get along with John, Peter and Thomas but not all mankind, MacDiarmid seems perfectly happy with all mankind, but ill at ease with individuals. (Note, as a further example, how "Ode to All Rebels" (SLSU 91) slides from a striking dramatic portrait of an individual character into a loosely organized series of statements of general ideas.)

Tait is right in pointing out the excellent economy of means in these lyrics. This point can be borne out by detailed analysis of
individual poems, such as the analysis of "Ex Vermibus" (13) by David Daiches (F 23-4), or of "The Watergaw" by Iain Crichton Smith.12

These critics show how, in the best poems of Sangschaw and Penny Wheep, each word has its precise and measured contribution to make. But Crichton Smith is right in drawing some distinctions, and his use of the Coleridgian categories of Fancy and Imagination is useful. In some poems, such as "Blind Man's Luck" (31), it is clear that MacDiarmid has just found a word that he likes in Jamieson's, and so writes a poem round it. (See B 37.)

MacDiarmid's method has always been to take any idea or mode of expression and push it to its limit, and then (being in agreement with Blake) beyond. It is clear that the short lyric was soon exhausted for him, and that any further efforts would be mere repetition (although whenever he does return to the form, it is with distinction.) The really great lyrics are, necessarily, few. The general run of poems in Penny Wheep shows a facility which MacDiarmid was bound to realise as dangerous, holding as he does that the good is the worst enemy of the best.

Despite his assertion that

Wee bit sangs are a' I need (41)

Sangschaw and Penny Wheep both contain longer poems which try to get beyond the limited formal range of the lyric. These poems - "I Heard Christ Sing" (8); "Ballad of the Five Senses" (25); "Sea-Serpent" (33); "Bombinations of a Chimaera" (45); "Gairmscoile" (56) - all have points
of interest, and display the current of his thought, but none is entirely successful. The formal elements are uneasy, especially of those in ballad-metre, where the conciseness of the poems around them is noticeably lacking.

In a sense, MacDiarmid's continuing problem has been to find a form capable of expressing the ever-expanding content of the long poems he wishes to write. Architectonic power, in the classical sense, has never been one of MacDiarmid's strong points: his longer poems seek a different kind of unity, that of the continuum. One section flows into the next, so that the links, or contrasts, are plain to see; but the structure of the whole remains irregular.

Such is the structure of his first, and perhaps most successful, long poem, *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1925). This volume is, in one sense, a poem-sequence, not dissimilar to the form employed by Pound in his *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* sequence, or by Yeats in *The Tower*; and certain sections of it can be detached to stand on their own as separate lyrics. (Most notably, "Wha's the Bride?" has been anthologised and published separately.) But MacDiarmid was surely right to emphasize the poem's unity by publishing it with no more indication than a few dots (...) of where the different sections might end. The division into titled lyrics of the *Collected Poems* was, as John C. Weston admits (xix), a regrettable mistake. The titles add nothing to the poem, and detract from its sequential nature. However, for the critic, they do provide convenient references, and it is only as such that I will use them here.

The connections between these sections are thematic, using both similarity and contrast of theme. The drunken-ness of the protagonist
serves as a unifying device, and absolves the poet from any rigorously logical scheme. Daiches comments:

The moments of semi-drunken confusion in the poem serve as effective transitions; when the image on the screen comes back into focus, as it were, we are somewhere else - but where we are is always related to the main theme and purpose of the work as a whole.

(F 38).

The poem as a whole presents an extended deliberation on many of MacDiarmid's main themes; its greatest success lies in finding for its ideas images which are striking, adequate, and appropriate.

The form of the poem is a series of concentric circles. At the centre is a drunk man on an actual hillside observing an actual thistle; from here it extends to the situation of a Scottish poet examining the state of his nation, as seen in its emblem, the Thistle; at the furthest extent, the Poet (not necessarily of any race, he might as well be Dostoevsky or Christ) surveys the condition of man's mortality in relation to the universe, as imaged by the thistle in the moonlight.

This exhibits the familiar juxtaposition of the individual and the universal, with again the twist that MacDiarmid's "individual" is somehow generalised. Although it would be a mistake to identify MacDiarmid with his persona, the persona does not seem to have any very obvious personality traits or ideas apart from MacDiarmid's; and Jean, although continually used to return the poem to the individual, practical, down-to-earth level, is herself a generalised ideal of a loving wife. (Only briefly, at the very end of the poem, do we ever hear her speaking.)
The opening section has been fully analysed by David Daiches in the *Festschrift*, and I do not intend to duplicate his comments. It is a brilliant piece of satire in its own right, but it is more brilliant as an introduction to the themes of the poem. It establishes the locality, moving from the pub to the hillside; and it establishes the voice of the protagonist, the drunk man, Jean's husband, getting "fair waun'ert" (56), who is also the poet, conscious of setting out on a major poem (the allusion to Dante, which Daiches mentions) and conscious also of the procedure he intends to take:

To prove my saul is Scots I maun begin  
Wi' what's still deemed Scots and the folk expect,  
And spire up syne by visible degrees  
To heichts whereo' the fules ha'e never recked.  

(63)

The examples taken - Scotch whisky and "Bobbie Burns" (as the Americans would say) - tie in also with the theme of the poet, and his function in society, which is central to all MacDiarmid's work. The whisky provides the atmosphere, spirit, or medium in which the whole poem exists; and the pun "fu' moon" (66) links it with the major symbol of moonlight which, in one of its aspects, is to stand for poetic inspiration. Burns poses in acute form the problem of a poet's relationship to society; the bizarre phenomenon of Burns Clubs is a dreadful warning of the way society can pervert the poet's role, can render him harmless by accepting him. The process is akin to that by which the good is the worst enemy of the best. The direct comparison
As Kirks wi' Christianity ha'e dune,
Burns' Clubs wi' Burns (66)

immediately jumps the poem from the local to the universal. Burns serves also as a focus for the national issue, as Scotland's "national bard", and, through his world-wide reputation, for MacDiarmid's internationalism.

The position of the satirist is always one of intellectual superiority, and MacDiarmid has never been inclined to modesty about this. Already we have his favourite phrase "maist folk" (66), and the contempt for Thought that is (continuing the alcoholic metaphor) "under proof". This leads to an assertion of the rarity, and therefore the supreme value, of "a thocht worth ha'en'". This experience is "no' for ilka man": the implication is of course that the poet is not merely "ilka man", not one of the "maist folk". Such thoughts provide one constant (at an opposite extreme from Jean) in the flux of time, space, and whisky. Nevertheless, the superiority is partly the Socratic one of realising

I dinna haud the warld's end in my heid
As maist folk think they dae. (67)

Here follows the statement, already quoted, about being where "extremes meet"; this is seen as a distinctively Scottish characteristic - "Auld Scottish instincts" (68) - and is the poem's first statement of the Caledonian Antisyzygy.

With the quick expansion of the Christ reference - "What tho'ts
Montrose or Nazareth?" - the poem is ready for its next widening of view, via the translation of Blok. The very introduction of a Russian writer into a Scots poem was remarkable enough; it jolts the reader into an expanded awareness. "Poet's Pub" picks up the symbol of moonlight/drunkenness, and sets it apart from the world:

And in the lift, heich, hauf-averted,
The mune looks owre the yirdly roon'.

(69)

The vision of the moon is linked with the idea of poetic inspiration; it becomes in the poem an element of mystery. As inspiration, it is a continually ambivalent quality. Although

"In vino veritas" cry rough
And reid-zen'd fules that in it droon

(69)

it is also true that

You're richt, auld drunk impenitent,
I ken it tae - the truth's in wine!

(70)

This ambivalence is stressed by the next Blok lyric, "The Unknown Goddess" (71), in which the Muse is strange and threatening, yet still "'f'rae my hert's-hert torn!'" This continues the idea that the beautiful "silken leddy" seen in the glass may also be "a vision o' mysel'." The opposing forces are crystallised in the opposition of moonlight and thistle:
The thistle "gurly" like the unknown Goddess, but also linked to the poet himself, and thus to the "silken leddy" aspect of the Muse. The relationship is stated thus:

The munelicht's like a lookin'-glass,  
The thistle's like mysel'

(70)

The two aspects are at opposite extremes, yet meeting. They are interdependent. The thistle can only see itself if the mirror is there; the mirror can only function if the thistle is in front of it.

The ambivalence is continued in the vision of life which the Muse gives him - "this cursed Conscience thou hast set in me" (71). On the one side is the moonlight, which represents absolute freedom, freedom from mortality, the ability to do everything (but which is also, as freedom from "Conscience", mere anarchy). On the other is the thistle, "Mortality itsel'":

For ilka thing a man can be or think or dae  
Aye leaves a million mair unbeen, unthocht, undune, 
Till his puir warped performance is,  
To a' that micht ha' been, a thistle to the mune.

(72)

But just as the moonlight was ambivalent (tending towards anarchy), so is the thistle (tending towards glory). This leaves

Man torn in twa  
And glorious in the lift and grisly on the sod!'  

(72)
The two aspects of Eternity and Mortality are brought back to earth by the poet's wondering in which sphere he really is, whether he's a "thingum" preserved in spirit (alcohol, moon, Eternity), or whether he is a man on a hillside in 1925 A.D. It is impossible to tell; all of life may be a dream; but

We maun juist tak' things as we find them.

(73)

Thus MacDiarmid airily dismisses the whole question of reality and appearance, and agrees to operate on the common assumption of reality. In that case, though, the most pressing problem is to understand the true nature of the mortality imaged in the thistle, and it is to this that he turns in the following sections.

Various attitudes to the thistle are presented, some through translations. Ramaeckers' imposing view of the Gothic Thistle is counterpointed by Hippius' vision of the thistle as octopus, with again the identification of the thistle and the poet's own soul. The thistle is also Scotland's soul, but the country lies "clapt and shrunken", a model that would have improved Eliot's "Waste Land" (74). (The idea of Scotland as waste land runs through the whole poem, mainly in terms of satire on cultural sterility.) The Octopus vision is continued in the "Ebb and Flow" section, which contrasts the chaotic uncertainties of the poet's own thought and being with the "certain certainties" of "Members o' / St. Andrew's Societies" (76). These worthies are "sober", and do not wander over "wine-dark" oceans; that is, they have never visited
the Poet's Pub, never been caught by the moonlight.

Another (somewhat loose) translation, this time from Else Lasker-Schüler, presents the thistle in relation to the moon again, as

its counter-pair
t - The opposite 'thoot which it couldn' be

This is perhaps the strongest statement in the poem of the interdependence of the two.

The search for the thistle continues in a series of energetic comic pictures, culminating in

Grinnin' gargoyle by a saint,
Mephistopheles in Heaven,
Skeleton at a tea-meetin'

Here the thistle is being expanded, almost to include the moonlight as well, as it becomes the symbol of the Caledonian Antisyzygy, a combination of opposites. The idea is in comic form here, but is shortly to be picked up more seriously.

Meanwhile we get a short interlude on the merits of Scottish education (which contains the unspoken irony that Cruivie and Gilsanquhar were educated in the same school system as the poet), and the beautiful lyric "The Crying of the Fair" (78). This lyric illustrates in brief the poem's movement from the local (Langholm) to the universal ("the stars o'Heaven") and back again (Jean). The thistle is in attendance, ambivalent as ever, grand and magnificent, yet "ill to bear".
The section "Man and the Infinite" (79) picks up again the idea of the thistle uniting man and the infinite. Its roots are "in the howes o' man's hert", where also the Strange Goddess came from. Thus man is also capable of making this unity: remember the thistle as self. The vision is glorious, as the thistle sweeps upward to "set roses alight Inowre Eternity's yett." But of course the ambivalence persists; the unity is fleeting, and leaves Man's heart bare, containing "nocht but naethingness". The thistle is left "rootless and radiant", but still, as a Phoenix, capable of resurrection.

This complex vision culminates the first examination of the properties of the thistle. Although it preserves in its ambivalence the possibility of certainty and fulfillment, it does end on a pessimistic note, which is reflected in the short, sour lyrics which round off the sequence. Man, tormented as a "thistleless fule" (81), plays little rhyme-games with Masoch and Sade; and

We wha are poets and artists
Move frae inklin' to inklin'
And live for oor antrin lichtnin's
In the haingles atweenwhiles. (81)

"Haingles" could be translated as "ennui"; and echoes of Baudelaire (especially "The Voyage") are to be found in the wild brief outcry "Outward Bound" (82), which seeks an escape from boredom. The defence of this attitude in "The Ineducable" brings the poet back to self-awareness, and the poem enters a new phase.

The poem now turns to a brief examination of "The Psycho-Somatic Quandary", as one aspect of mortality, of the thistle. The relationship
is again one of interdependence:

Man's spreit is wi' his ingangs twined
In ways that he can ne'er unwind.

(83)

But women, who start from a more physical, down-to-earth point of view, often have a clearer vision and see that man's mind is "juist a geg."
The poet is confident that Jean could explain the thistle. (Could she also explain the moonlight?)

The sexual theme continues through the next few lyrics. Again, a translation (from Edmond Roche, reprinted from Penny Wheep) is introduced to give a new perspective on the theme. This poem, and "In the Last Analysis", are both about the clearer vision of women, which reduces man to a "truth abject" about his own physical basis. Conversely, this awareness serves only to increase man's desire.

The sequence rises to its memorable climax in the famous lyric/ballad "O Wha's the Bride?" (84). This poem is, deservedly, the most famous of MacDiarmid's individual works; high tribute has been paid to it by Yeats and many others. What I want to note here, is that, however magnificent it may be in itself, it also fits exactly into its position in the sequence of A Drunk Man; the poems before lead up to it, those after lead away. The woman is still seen as the dominant partner, and the relationship is still very firmly based on the physical, but it reaches powerfully towards an almost mystical view.

Of this poem, M.L. Rosenthal has written:
MacDiarmid in this poem does a quietly extraordinary thing. He has written a modern poem which repossesses not only the diction and rhythm of the medieval folk-ballad, but also its implicit mentality - in this instance, its thrilled awe and terror of the supernatural. .... An instantaneous linking of past and present, one mercifully free of ratiocinative expansiveness or of proliferating juxtapositions. It is not a mere exercise but a rediscovery; and a rediscovery, not of a superstitious dread of the unknown but of the terrible mystery to which such dread makes abject obeisance.

In the next two sections, the idea of Christ continues the mystical theme, but the conversational tone (the "verse shrug" of which Daiches speaks) returns the poem to the physical basis, and thus to the general condition of the "fioky bairn", Man.

Thus the whole sequence on sex presents a continuous alternation of views, from the physical to the mystical (thistle to moonlight), the climax of which is their unification in "Wha's the Bride?" But, since MacDiarmid can never leave anything as a syzygy, he again leads quickly out of this unity.

The next phase of the poem (from here until "The Form and Purpose of the Thistle" - 101) is more loosely organized; but the idea of death (the natural antisyzygistical reaction to sex) runs through it all; either as mortality, the death of man, or as the death of a culture - there are strong satiric passages on the barrenness of contemporary Scotland.

The references to childbirth are taken up in "The Skeleton at the Feast" (86), in which the earth is seen as the moon's bastard, its "puir get". The poet is again identified with the thistle:

My self-tormented spirit took
The shape repeated in the thistle (87)
which is "pairt soul, pairt skeleton." The thistle is also, at this point, identified with Death (mortality, as before, cf page 72): and MacDiarmid rises from his meditation on Death with the strong assertion:

Shudderin' thistle, gi'e owre, gi'e owre! ... 
Your sallow leafs can never throw, 
Wi' a' their oorie shakin', 
Ae doot into the hert o' life 
That it may be mistak'n. 

(87-88).

This links up with the theme of Scotland's cultural death, and the possibilities of re-birth, in the lively lyric "The Barren Fig" (88). The next section makes it clear, through its picture of Scotland's treatment of Burns and Dunbar, that a miracle is indeed necessary. The barrenness of the fig is blamed upon "this preposterous Presbyterian breed." The satire is here reinforced with positive thinking, offering as cultural alternatives such names as Dostoevski and Nietzsche, whose lesson - "To be yersel's - and to mak' that worth bein'" - is the equivalent of the "thocht worth ha'en" of page 66.

(Cf the quotation from Norman Douglas with which MacDiarmid closes his second volume of autobiography, *The Company I've Kept*: "He (the wise man) endeavours to find himself at no matter what cost, and to be true to that self when found, a worthy occupation for a lifetime." CK 277.)

One cause of this barrenness is grovelling respect for England, whereas MacDiarmid now stresses the distinctively Scottish characteristics and achievements which England is incapable of. But any concern with
such aspects of Scottish culture as the "bonny idiosyncratic place-names" (90) will be met with complete apathy and complacency by individuals (Cruivie and Gilsanquhar) and whole cities (Edinburgh and Glasgow).

In bitter self-awareness, the poet realises the rightness of their position -

Guid sakes, ye dinna need to pass
Ony exam. to dee

- and almost envies the oblivion of fools. But it will make no difference either way - "Le'e go as you maun in the end" - and if there is no reason for thinking, that is no reason for not thinking. Instead, even if thought is a "gnawin' canker", it has the glamour attached to the relentless pursuit of an impossible ideal, it has the epic dimensions of Ahab's pursuit of Moby Dick:

- The mune's the muckle white whale
  I seek in vain to kaa!

  The Earth's my mastless samyn,
  The thistle my ruined sail.

After renewing his drink, the poet returns to the same theme on a more mundane level with his address to Cutty Sark (Burns again), imploring her to take off all that she has to take off -

For less than a' there is to see
'il never be owre muckle for me. (92)
Here, in comic mode, we see one of MacDiarmid's most central themes: the continuing search for the infinite, the delight that all is not yet known. (Cf later, page 144.) This experience is to be desired whatever the cost: he wishes for a life as brief but glorious as that of a beer-barrel.

This is the attractive side of mortality: life as a dashing and gloriously futile gesture in the face of death. But in the next few pages, the poet turns to its darker side, in a series of gloomy images in which the thistle again figures as an emblem of Death. The ideal is still there, uncatchable, ever-returning only to mock. This climaxes with the eerie lyric "The Tragic Tryst" (95), in which the poet makes love to a woman, only to discover, in the light of her ghost (the Moon?) that he possesses only her skeleton. The poem reaches a low ebb of despondency with

And Earth sall be like a toom skull syne.
- Whaur'll its thocht's be then?

(95)

At this low ebb, the poet's thoughts turn again to one constant factor: Jean (who tends to re-appear in the poem at the moments when she is most needed.) She is seen as being beyond the moon/thistle dichotomy, here concisely expressed as

The munelicht is my knowledge o' mysel',
Mysel' the thistle in the munelicht seen.

(96)

Through her influence, the thistle aspects of him will be transformed,
and he will be enabled to "brak' in roses owre a hedge o' grief."
This move gives him breathing-space again, and he is even able to consider more objectively exactly what it is that Jean can do for him that no other woman could. (This is limited due to the lack of true individuality which the poem's Jean possesses.) We get instead a familiar extension from the local to the universal, as love enables us to

Create oorsels, syne bairns, syne race

(97)

until finally man must take "a' the warld" as his bride. The light which Jean gives him is valuable whatever it reveals:

- Gin it shows either o's in hideous plight,
  What gain to turn't to nicht?

(98)

The last section of this phase of the poem is "Yank Oot Your Orra Boughs" (99), and it sums up what has gone before. It starts with the poverty of the Scots language and the expressions so far attempted in it, the past tradition which can imperil future achievement. But there is, perhaps, no betterment or progress possible: achievements come as unexpectedly and deviously as roses above the "jungly waste o' effort" of the thistle. This leads to an extended image of life as a thistle -

A mongrel growth, jumble o' disproportions,
Whirlin' in its incredible contortions

(100)
- with the roses breaking above them. These roses, the achievements of life, are not possible without the thistle, yet they must cultivate a certain arrogance or aloofness to

the thorter-ills o' leaf and prick
In which they ken the feck maun stick.  

(100)

This theme of contempt being necessary is to be repeated later in the poem. Therefore, "Yank oot your orra boughs, my hert!" The poet must avoid compromise, avoid playing it safe, avoid that good which is the worst enemy of the best.

This thistle image of mortality sums up the preceding sections, and also leads into the central phase of the poem, which consists of a series of extended speculations on various meanings or implications of the thistle, interspersed with short lyric comments. The verse form, which has retained a measure of stanzaic regularity, now tends towards the looser and more discursive.

It opens (101) with a statement of the organic nature of life, and of man's incomplete understanding, and therefore humility, in the face of it. The particular instance is again the thistle. Although the poet has "watched it long and hard", observing the eccentricities of its form, still

I can form nae notion o' the spirit
That gars it tak' the difficult shape it does.  

(102)
This ignorance must lead to a yet closer examination, attempting to

learn what's gar't its present shape arise,
And what the limits are that ha'e been put
To change in thistles, and why - and what a change 'ud boot.

(102)

This is what this central phase of the poem attempts to do.

First is considered one attempt at change, in the "Ballad of the Crucified Rose" (103), an allegorical account in ballad form of the General Strike of May 1926. This is the only instance in the poem of a particular political issue: generally, MacDiarmid's politics do not occupy a central position in his poetry at this stage. His sympathies are clearly shown by his figuring the Strike as a rose, breaking out of "the thistle's ugsome guise"; but he is objective enough to realise that the movement is defeating itself, crucifying itself, while all the Devils (the bosses) have to do is to stand around and admire the Crucifixion like "connoisseurs" (105).

In the following sections, the various aspects of the thistle, and the various images for each aspect, are interwoven and repeated with the asymmetrical complexity and brilliance of Celtic decorations - lines twining back and in and out of each other. It is a method of formal construction which is to be of increasing importance in MacDiarmid's work.

The limiting factors of the thistle are stressed: the "dour provincial thocht" (106), reflected in the language and the obvious concern with Christianity. This limitation denies even the hope of evolution:
Or let a generation pass
That ane nae better may succeed

The thistle is itself like a corpse, which the soul released by death
"Scunners to think it tenanted" (107), yet which is also necessary for
the soul's existence: this union, or cohabitation, of body and spirit,
is the basic antisyzygy of human life. The thistle is

The grey that haunts the vievest green;
The wrang side o' the noblest scene

But the thistle can never extinguish the hope of overcoming these
limitations - a thought which finds fine expression on pages 108-9.
The moon reappears, as an "unsplinterable wa'" which separates chaos
from Eden (108). Again we have the double set of contradictions: that
between the moon and the thistle, and that within the thistle itself.
In man, it is the "dog-hank o' the flesh and soul" (110), the ultimate
"irony" of being human in eternity, "a grocer 'neth the sun" (111).
What escapes are possible from the irony of this dichotomy? Well, you
could always be Christ, whose "writhen form" was the product of a strange
union:

A drucken hizzie gane to bed
Wi' three-in-ane and ane-in-three.

Or you can escape towards moonlight by being drunk (on drink, ambition,
or love - cf Baudelaire), or by being inspired (as earlier, "Poet's Pub" etc.)

Some escape certainly seems necessary -

For wha o's ha'e the thistle's poo' er
To see we're worthless and believe't?

(111)

The power to believe it is frightening; it produces such a vision as is found in "The Grave of all Mankind" (112), first of the short lyric interludes in the long monologue. This stark vision of the great emptiness underlying life is elaborated in "A Stick-Nest in Ygdrasil."

The thistle image has expanded into Ygdrasil, and covers the whole Universe. The "michty trunk o' Space" is "but a giant thistle ... that spreids eternal mischief," (113-4) In this infinity, what is the size of Man? Of all the countless twigs of Ygdrasil, man is, not even a single twig, but one of the countless atoms of which it is composed. Even the ultimate purpose (and hence the worth) of man is uncertain: "A means to ends he'll never ken." (113) This leads to another statement of MacDiarmid's central doctrine of evolution:

Juist as man's skeleton has left
Its ancient ape-like shape ahint,
Sae states o' mind in turn gi'e way
To different states, and quickly seem
Impossible to later men.

(115)

This is, for MacDiarmid, a statement of faith and hope for "Man's mind in
its final shape"; but it in no way diminishes the tragic awareness of mortality in the individual. Still he is confronted by eternity in the eyes of his friends (with the typical leap from the local to the universal); even Jean brings this realization:

\begin{quote}
And whiles I canna look at Jean
For fear I'd see the sunlight turn
Worm-like into the glaur again!
\end{quote}

There is, ultimately, no escape - except by ignorance or foolish dreams. The poet himself prefers, although "It may be nocht but cussedness" (117), a kind of Socratic awareness of his own position, not knowing any answers, but at least admitting that there is a question. The true Calvary (returning again to the Christian symbolism) is not only to be tormented by your own awareness but to see other men

\begin{quote}
In similar case but sufferin' less
Thro' bein' mair wudden frae the stert!
\end{quote}

The lyric interlude, "The Fork in the Wall" (117), presents the now-familiar conflict between the universal (in this case the poet's inspiration?) and the mortal conditions in which it must be realised. The physical birth of Christ (cf pages 85-6) again serves as the image. The poem now makes its first direct reference (apart from the Blok translations) to Russia, preparing for the central address to Dostoevski. Scotland, although in a sorry state at present, may yet
find oot its destiny,
And yield the vse-chelovek.

MacDiarmid translates this word as "The All-Man or Pan-Human"; it represents, clearly, his own ideal, which is not a transcendent one, depending on the infusion into man of something outside himself, but rather involves the full development of all his diverse capabilities, the realization of all his potentialities, some of which we are not even aware of, yet. It is another glimpse of his visionary, evolutionary, but basically humanistic ideal.

The allusions to Melville and Hawthorne reflect MacDiarmid's knowledge of American literature, one of the many areas of his knowledge derived from the famous library in Langholm. (See LP 12-13).

Scotland is seen in the thistle-grip of the Kirk; then, with the quick movement out to the universal which so characterises the poem, three stanzas present the thistle as mortality at every known level of man:

form
Or in the human frame that hauds
Us in its ignominious thrall,
While on brute needs oor souls attend
Until disease and daith end all,

Or in the grey deluded brain,
Reflectin' in anither field
The torments o' its parent flesh
In thocht-preventin' thocht concealed,

Or still in curst impossible mould,
Last thistle-shape men think to tak',
The soul, frae flesh and thocht set free,
On Heaven's strait if unseen rack.

(119)
Even beyond that there may be "heicher forms", unearthly but still paradoxical thistles which "free but to transfixed." (120).

Faced with the prospect of mortality, the poet's soul must develop a thistle-like contempt of everything except the single goal, "To be yoursel', whatever that may be" (120). This need to be contemptuous, previously referred to on page 100, is to be forcefully restated shortly. (128).

The "Letter to Dostoevski" (121) is the high point, structurally, of the whole poem. MacDiarmid's attitude towards Dostoevski ("As bairn at giant at thee I peer" pg 129) is one of unusual humility, yet also egotism. There are few people whom MacDiarmid recognises as his superiors; but, having, partly by this very rarity of praise, established Dostoevski's stature, it then becomes a typically self-assured (to use the kindest word) pose for MacDiarmid even to begin comparing himself with the Russian.

MacDiarmid's Communist leanings are adumbrated in his reference to Russia's "struggle in giant form", but as always, he is a very eclectic Communist, anticipating by some decades the Party's acceptance of Dostoevski as anything other than a decadent bourgeois novelist.

One thing they share is their perception

O' man's facility
For constant self-deception
(122)

and of the
flagsome deeps
Whaur the soul o' Scotland (or Russia) sleeps.

(122)

The artist's place must then be, not with genteel society or with those who believe in common-sense, but among the lowest, the "senseless strife; In which alane is life":

Sae I in turn maun gie
My soul to misery,
Daidle disease
Upon my knees,
And welcome madness
Wi' exceedin' gladness
- Aye, open wide my hert
To a' the thistle's smert.

(123)

Cf the lines from "A Glass of Pyre Water":

every true poet's place
Is to reject all else and be with the lowest,
The poorest - in the bottom of that deepest of wells
In which alone is truth.

(471)

Paradoxically, by thus suffering the full "smert" of the thistle, the poet is able to transcend it; by ignoring the "hopes o' men" and "popular opinion", the poet is able to rise above the thistle like a moon.

(124) The thistle is a process, in which the "feck o' men" (familiar phrase) are trapped, but the poet's spirit has "gane richt through."
To him it is only a memory.

This is the poet's destiny: and yet MacDiarmid has misgivings.
The destiny is not perfect, for it has taken him "past / Humanity" (125); yet it is as near perfection as any man - even Dostoevski himself - is able to achieve, given the conditions of mortality.

This is a vision of a possible future state: in the present, the moonlight "owre clear defines" the thistle and its restrictions. But even here, caught in mortality, before the spirit has "gane richt through" the thistle process, the moonlight is occasionally able to transform the thistle:

The munelicht that owre clear defines
The thistle's shrill cantankerous lines
E'en noo whiles insubstantialises
Its grisly form and 'stead devises
A maze o' licht, a siller-frame,
As 'twere God's dream frae which it came,
Ne'er into bein' coorsened yet,
The essence lowin' pure in it.

(125-6)

These are the moments of greatest inspiration, when "Magic emerges frae the dense / Body o' bein'" (126), and the poet's song moves as free as a soul from its body - premonitions of the fulfillment of the poet's destiny.

But again doubts return:

Sic sang to men is little worth.
It has nae message for the earth.

(126)

This is because:
Men canna look on nakit licht.  

This doubt (which could also, ambivalently, be taken simply as an expression of artistic contempt) is supported by the vision itself, because the essence which has escaped the clay does so "In dooble form": there is darkness in every light.

The thistle canna vanish quite. Inside a' licht its shape maun glint, A spirit wi' a skeleton in't.  

This insight of the poet - ambivalent, fleeting, but glorious - is intimately connected with the poet's country. For MacDiarmid

And as at sicna times am I, I wad ha'e Scotland to my eye Until I saw a timeless flame Tak' Auchtermuchty for a name, And kent that Ecclefechan stood As pairt o' an eternal mood.  

For Dostoevski, "Wha had (his) ain land in (his) bluid" (123), it was Russia. The vision is not entirely "given" - it is also worked for, and it requires from the poet intense concentration of effort, dedication, and thus contempt (as before) of all lesser satisfactions. The passages on this need for contempt (120, 128) thus link realization of self with realization of country. Both are, in the final analysis, symbols of something greater, the condition of the vse-chelovek, which may even be
able to resolve ("in a concrete abstraction") the antiszyzygistical qualities inherent in both. It is this hope which is expressed in the last paragraph of the "Letter":

Is Scotland big enough to be
A symbol o' that force in me,
In wha's divine inebriety
A sicht abune contempt I'll see?
For a' that's Scottish is in me,
As a' things Russian were in thee
And I in turn 'ud be an action
To pit in a concrete abstraction
My country's contrair qualities,
And mak' a unity o' these
Till my love owre its history dwells,
As owretone to a peal o' bells.
And in this heicher stratosphere
As bairn at giant at thee I peer.

(128-9)

A brief lyric interlude refers back to page 98; the light referred to there is now appealed to again. The poet has reached another crisis, and again Jean is brought in as a steadying influence; the poet sees himself "in thistle-shape", but in Jean's light that shape can be accepted as "planned." (129) The light of love clarifies his situation and gives him strength for it, as well as the hope of some eventual release.

The next long section, "Metaphysical Pictures of the Thistle" (130) opens with one of the most striking of the images juxtaposing the local and the universal:

And heard God passin' wi' a bobby's feet
Ootby in the lang coffin o' the street

(130)
The torture of the thistle is presented, in this section, more in metaphysical terms; it becomes a "symbol o' the puzzle o' man's soul", yet still able to "thraw roses up / - And up!" (131)

This section presents a world view in which God is a limited factor, and in which darkness is more fundamental than light.

"Let there be licht," said God, and there was A little:

...  
- Darkness comes closer to us than the licht,  
And is our natural element.

(131)

At the metaphysical level, the light is but a "queer extension o' the dark" (132); all opposites seem resolved:

O little Life  
In which Daith guises and deceives itself,  
Joy that mak's Grief a Janus,  
Hope that is Despair's false-face,  
And Guid and Ill that are the same,  
Save as the chance licht fa's!

(132)

(This is not a static or established synthesis: it is still a process, a continuing interplay of opposing forces.)

Again, MacDiarmid, having reached a high point in the argument, works himself down again, through the figure of the thistle, to wish for some escape from its endless predicaments, even though to "withdraw my endless spikes" would mean that he also has to "let my roses drap". (133)
You can't have it both ways.

The poem now begins the transition into its final phase. The next lyric interlude (134) is a passage of sophisticated irony on literary themes, beginning a final series of sections on the barrenness of Scottish culture, which leads up to the climactic vision of the Great Wheel.

But first (overlapping as it were) there is the final lyric of the central phase, the "Farewell to Dostoevski" (135), which Daiches calls (F 44) "the true emotional centre" of the poem.

It presents a picture of the wasteland in terms of snow and wind; MacDiarmid's imagery is at its strongest when presenting desolation. Yet the snow and wind which constitute the wasteland (which is capable of separating "even" the poet and Dostoevski) also constitute the thistle:

And still - its leaves like snow, its growth like wind -
The thistle rises and forever will!

The note of the verse here is unmistakably triumphant; it implies the thistle's roses. But immediately, once such a positive statement has been made, the opposite must be introduced, not to negate it, but to complement it, to fill out the Antisyzygy.

The thistle rises and forever will,
Getherin' the generations under't.
This is the monument o' a' they were,
And a' they hoped and wondered.

The verse forms of the poem have now returned to regular stanzas,
after the extended and exploratory central phase; the poet runs over some of his familiar themes, providing a breathing space before "The Great Wheel."

"The Barren Tree" (135) is another assault on the sterility of human culture, especially in Scotland, where the "Presbyterian thistle" crucifies its own roses. There is a bitter attack on Scottish life and "correct" society. Of the short lyric on page 138, Daiches writes:

The Scots are as good as anybody else at laying flattering unctions to their souls. "Fier comme un Ecossais" is a description they like to cherish. MacDiarmid exposes it by repeating it three times in the midst of a short ironic lyric which reveals the hollow centre of the modern Scot - and of much more than the Scot - as Eliot does in "The Hollow Men" but more succinctly.

(F 44-5).

This hollow centre is viewed in an increasingly menacing light in "The Emptiness at the End" (138), which presents a brilliantly twisted metaphysical nursery rhyme about the skeleton in Mother Hubbard's cupboard. The darkness, hollowness, and hopelessness of life find final concise imagistic expression in "In the Keel of Heaven" (139).

Before the final vision, the poet takes a final look at the two plants, the Scottish Thistle and the English Rose. The description of the thistle's

Sibness to snakes wha's coils
Rin counter airts at yince

(139)
looks forward to the "Curly Snake" of his next major poem, as well as being a concise image of the Caledonian Antisyzygy. The thistle still yokes earth and heaven (cf page 79), and provides

Roses to lure the lift  
And roots to wile the clay.  

(140)

The final dismissal of the English Rose sees it as something which has certain admirable qualities, but yet "Ootside me lies"; and which has become an obstacle to the poet's natural growth. Its values are absolutely contrary to his.

The climactic section opens with speculations on the origins of thought, and refers back to the early theme of mortality:

I ken hoo lourd the body lies  
Upon the spirit when it flies  
And fain abune its stars 'ud rise.  

(142)

The poet then introduces the vision of the great wheel.

It might be argued that it is a weakness of the poem to introduce this new image for its final statement, dropping the images of thistle and moonlight which have constituted the bulk of the poem. On the other hand, we have seen that thistle and moonlight have already been permutated through a vast range of ideas and references, so that it would be difficult to imagine a new frame of reference for them which would act as a summation of all that they had previously stood for. The
new image has more force by virtue of its being new; and it is justified, on purely pragmatic grounds, by the fact that it works. This final section does contain almost all of what MacDiarmid has said in this and other poems. (It was thus a very perceptive choice with which to represent him in the Oxford Book of Scottish Verse.)

The great wheel, moving in eternity, contains everything - God, Devil, and Scotland. It is a vision of a type the poet has often reached for before; in three lines which describe perfectly the achievement of his best lyrics, he says

I've often thrawn the world frae me,
Into the Pool o' Space, to see
The Circles o' Infinity.

(143)

In the immensity of the wheel, all events, wars, oppositions, are so close as to be indistinguishable; it is a view of all human experience (of which both God and Devil are but aspects) seen sub specie aeternitatis.

Poetry confined within the Wheel is useless, its vision is far too limited, for it still sees the apparent oppositions which are resolved in the infinite view. The product of such a view would be the song which "to Men is little worth" (126), the ultimate vision towards which the poet strives, which will be able to perceive "the Will / That raised the Wheel". It has not yet been achieved, but this is a cause rather for rejoicing than despondency.
Yet I exult oor sang has yet
To grow wings that'll cairry it
Ayont its native speck o' grit.

And I exult to find in me
The thocht that this can ever be,
A hope still for humanity.

These lines contain the central spirit of MacDiarmid's belief in the evolutionary future of the human mind, the development of which is the central task of mankind, and one which the poet alone can undertake.

The time will come when the eternal wheel will "birl .. inside oor heids", and we shall find whatever Will there is behind it:

And if we still can find nae trace
Ahint the Wheel o' ony Face,
There'll be a glory in the place.

The hope of this is the only thing which can mitigate the horror of the Socratic self-awareness of mortality within eternity.

To attain this vision, all things must be seen from outside the wheel; thus the famous lines:

He canna Scotland see wha yet
Canna see the Infinite,
And Scotland in true scale to it.

None of MacDiarmid's passionate Scottish Nationalism makes any sense unless seen in the context of these three lines.
The vision may be obtained by "impersonality", which shall "scour me o' my sense o' awe" (146) -

Until disinterested we,
O' a' oor auld delusions free,
Lowe in the wheel's serenity.

(Cf., of course, the "Second Hymn to Lenin":

Disinterestedness,
Oor profoundest word yet

The vision will be, first, of one's self ("to be yourself" etc.):

Oor universe is like an e'e
Turned in, man's benmaist hert to see,
And swamped in subjectivity.

This, however, is only a necessary preliminary:

But when that inturned look has brocht
To licht what still in vain it's socht
Ootward maun be the bent o' thocht.

And organs may develop syne
Responsive to the need divine
O' single-minded humankin'.

This idea is expanded to its fullest and most brilliant expression in
In Memoriam James Joyce, pages 142-3, where Joyce's work vastly outrunning present needs
With its immense complication, its erudition

is compared to nerves which

before they ever function
Grow where they will be wanted.

Here too, MacDiarmid sees the work of "providing for developments to come" as being that of the Poet:

The function, as it seems to me,
O' Poetry is to bring to be
At lang, lang last that unity.

(147)

This "unity" (cf page 122) is the final goal of all the poet's work, of all mankind's evolution. It is only in these farthest reaches of his thought that MacDiarmid can conceive of any kind of unity, beyond all the "contrair qualities" of the Caledonian Antisyzygy.

But now, as usual, MacDiarmid lets himself and his poem down from the exalted sphere they have reached. We have a satirical vision of "The lesser wheel within the big", which is "Puirt Auld Scotland":

And Rabbie Burns and Weelum Wallace,
And Carlyle lookin' unco gallus,
And Harry Lauder (to enthrall us).

(146)
(The pun on that last word has bite: MacDiarmid would regard the music-hall conception of the Scot as a vital factor in the "enthralling" power of the English ascendancy.) There follows a serio-comic conversation with his Muse: serious insofar as MacDiarmid does, to a great extent, believe what the Muse tells him. The lines

A Scottish poet maun assume
The burden o' his people's doom,
And dee to brak' their livin' tomb

(149)

can be compared with those on pages 123 and 471, already referred to. But the tone is, to put it mildly, "portentous" (Daiches); and the poet's non-committal decision to "tak' it to avizandum" should surely prevent us from taking his dilemma too seriously.

The two lyrics which round off the poem correspond, roughly, to the thistle and the moonlight. The thistle still extends from himself, "the sustenance o' its root" (150) to the heavens. It has emptied him, left a hole in his life never to be filled; yet for all that

The stars like thistle's roses floo'er
The sterile growth o' Space ootour.

(150)

The moonlight is silence; the poem closes on a note of awe and mystery, until the very last line returns it firmly to the domestic context with which it began. The vision has taken him "past humanity" again; by human standards he has "seen owre much". For the while, he is
silent.

Daiches does not exaggerate when he says that *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* is not only MacDiarmid's finest sustained performance but also the greatest long poem (or poem-sequence) in Scottish literature and one of the greatest in any literature. (p. 46)

It is certainly MacDiarmid's finest single work, and possesses a unity of theme and expression which he was never quite to recapture. But we must beware of using it as a stick with which to beat MacDiarmid on the head for the lesser quality of his later works; certainly we must not use its supremity as an excuse for not reading the rest of MacDiarmid. Purely as a poet, MacDiarmid was never to reach such perfection again; but in my account of the poem I have tried to stress the ideas inherent in it; and as a man of ideas, MacDiarmid has never ceased to be of compelling interest. Too much discussion of MacDiarmid has centred on the (comparative) trivialities of his form, language and verse-structure, to the exclusion of his ideas. And although a great part of MacDiarmid's thought is present in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, much of it is only fully developed in the later work.

The *Drunk Man* itself is essentially unrepeatable. MacDiarmid himself must have known or half-known this, but at any rate its immediate successor, *To Circumjack Cencrastus* (1930), is a half-hearted attempt at best to repeat the earlier success. The poem lacks both the controlling situation (man on hill) and the unifying images (thistle and moon); thus,
we get a much more loosely connected series of poems, of greatly varying quality. The selection from *To Circumjack Cencrastus* in the *Collected Poems* is fair to the point of generosity.

I do not therefore propose to examine *To Circumjack Cencrastus* as a whole, but rather to indicate certain of its characteristics which are of importance for the kind of work MacDiarmid was to do over the next decade.

First, however, I would like to take a brief look at one of the finest individual passages in the poem (or indeed in MacDiarmid's whole work), the translation of Rainer Maria Rilke's "Requiem für eine Freundin". (158) The passage is not out of place in *To Circumjack Cencrastus*: it follows on from the brilliant "Scots Anthology" (156: pages 25 and 31 respectively, in the original edition), occurring as the climax of a phase of the poem in which death is the central theme.

It is important for two reasons, apart from its great intrinsic merit. Firstly, as the finest example of MacDiarmid's abilities as a creative translator of poetry; and secondly, as the first example in MacDiarmid's work of truly great poetry written in English. Indeed, at one stride the Scots invader has captured the very citadel of English poetry: blank verse. No blank verse written in English this century possesses a finer movement, a more dignified tone.

Critics who claim that MacDiarmid's finest poetry is in Scots should look again at the magnificent opening paragraph, with its tone of measured gravity, which is yet capable of assimilating such almost conversational effects as
You only, you come back

or the perfect reversal of stress and strong line opening, directly reflecting the sense, in

To come in touch with something that will ring
Out suddenly, and show that you are here.

This masterly control of rhythm also goes to show that MacDiarmid's (comparative) abandonment of it in the later poems was not due to any inability. It was, rather, a conscious aesthetic choice:

Poetry is not rhythm, it is "making words do things". Rhythm is one of the resources, a chief resource, a necessary resource, of poetry, but it is not the basis of it.

(LP 340.)

MacDiarmid's translation can be read and appreciated as a poem in its own right, which is of course the highest praise for any poetic translation. This emphasis on translation is, as I have said, central not only to MacDiarmid's work but also to the 20th century tradition stemming from Pound. For MacDiarmid, translation is one aspect of his internationalism, and it is also one aspect of his multilingual interests. It is a constant factor in his work: from the early Scots translations from Blok through the impressive version of Harry Martinson's Aniara right up to his most recent, and as yet unpublished, translation of Brecht's Threepenny Opera. In common with Pound, he is apt to take
liberties with the works he is translating, so that the resulting version is more literate than literal.

(This can be obviously seen in comparing MacDiarmid's Rilke with the literal verse translation of J.B. Leishman.\textsuperscript{15})

MacDiarmid's alterations to the original are mostly by way of compression, concentrating the images and the line of thought into a much smaller space, without losing either their force or their cogency. For example, the remarkable paragraph on page 161 (from "Can you still weep?" down to "You were free") compresses 41\% lines of the original German into 24; and immediately after that, MacDiarmid's

\begin{quote}
How short your life was, put against the hours 
You sat surrendering all you might have been 
To that blind germ of destiny again 
\end{quote}

corresponds to Leishman's literal

\begin{quote}
How very short your life, when you compare it with hours you used to sit in silence, bending the boundless forces of your boundless future out of their course to the new germination, that became fate once more. 
\end{quote}

The most striking change, of course, is the transposing of the lines which form MacDiarmid's conclusion from an earlier and less prominent position in the original. Rilke ends on a quieter, more resigned note:
For somewhere there's an old hostility
between our human life and greatest work.
May I see into it and it say: help me!
Do not return. If you can bear it, stay
dead with the dead. The dead are occupied.
But help me, as you may without distraction,
as the most distant sometimes helps: in me.

(Leishman)

MacDiarmid's ending is obviously stronger, more suited to his own combative spirit. It shows to what extent he was able to make the original poem his own, to make it an intensely living part of his own experience. Only on the basis of such an appropriation can a translation become, more than a crib, a poem.

It is in *To Circumjack Cencrastus* that certain characteristics of MacDiarmid's later work make their first decisive appearance. Firstly, politics enters into the poem much more directly than in *A Drunk Man*, where the "Ballad of the Crucified Rose" is the only outstanding example. The sections on MacDiarmid's boss towards the end of *To Circumjack Cencrastus* have a bitterness, partly personal but partly social, which is unrelieved by the attempts at humour. Secondly, the Celtic ideal, with its emphasis on Gaelic literature, is strongly in evidence, although MacDiarmid's knowledge of that literature is still second-hand, fragmentary, and sometimes erroneous. (See F 121.) Thirdly, the tone and style of the poet's utterance are shifting towards the attitude of direct statement (of fact and/or opinion) which is to characterise most of MacDiarmid's poetry from now on, and which can be so disconcerting to readers brought up in an Imagist tradition.

These tendencies in *To Circumjack Cencrastus* point the way towards
the themes and styles of the later poetry, all of which proceeds from a very definite world-view, which was forming in MacDiarmid's mind around this time. This world-view encompasses historical, social, political, literary, linguistic, musical, and philosophical perspectives. Before going on to examine some selected poems of the '30s, it would perhaps be as well to attempt some brief outline of this world-view.

It begins with the assertion, as a historical fact, of the Gaelic origin of all civilization. This is based upon two books: L.A. Waddell's *British Edda*, and L. Albert's *Six Thousand Years of Gaelic Grandeur Unearthed*, which includes the various *Chronicles* preserved by Cier Rige (Roger O'Connor). These chronicles describe the "continuous and consecutive history of the Gaelic branch of the Sumero-Caucasian (wrongly called Indo-European) race, covering the space of time from 5357 B.C. down to 7 B.C." (Albert, as quoted in *LP* 293.)

Waddell's book reconstructs the poem generally known as the Icelandic Edda, and generally thought to be a discontinuous collection of myths, and presents it, instead, as "The great epic poem of the ancient Britons on the exploits of King Thor, Arthur or Adam and his knights in establishing civilization, reforming Eden, & capturing the Holy Grail about 3380 - 3350 B.C. Reconstructed for the first time from the Medieval MSS. by Babylonian, Hittite, Egyptian, Trojan & Gothic keys." (Title page.)

Waddell's argument is an elaborate exercise in comparative mythology, seeking to provide a historical basis for just about every single major myth of Western civilization, and a good few of the Eastern into the bargain. The fact that this book has been met with universal disbelief
(from those who have bothered to read it) does not in the slightest detract from MacDiarmid's faith in it. Rather the opposite:

Dr. Waddell's book was of course virtually stillborn; English historians and litterateurs are not open to fundamental revaluations or any displacement of the upstart English tradition in favour of the far more important elements that tradition has so far wholly occluded and is all intent to keep in occlusion. (LP 292.)

A similar process applies to Albert's book, which supplies MacDiarmid with some good stories of how, in the 19th century, the English authorities suppressed publication of Cier Rige's Chronicles.

These issues are outwith my competence to judge - (though I would expect that, in the nature of the case, no definite statements could be made either way, only degrees of probability) - but they also seem outwith relevance. Whether or not these exotic theories are literally true does not have any direct bearing on MacDiarmid's work; the only thing that does is the fact that he passionately believed them to be true. They provide a foundation, false or otherwise, for his insistence on the importance of elements of the Gaelic tradition which have been ignored by the central European, Classical, and English traditions.

(The only direct eruption of Waddell into the poetry is in the poem "The Pot Hat" (222) which is based on Waddell, pages 169-171. The impressive last line - "As a holy trophy enringing his skull" - is in fact taken word for word from Waddell's text.)

These elements could be classified as either cultural/artistic or social/political; but the two interact and intermingle so continuously
that such separate classifications could not be maintained for long, it is better to discuss them together. It is in fact one of the great strengths of MacDiarmid's "system" that it is so cohesive, synthetic rather than analytical, even if it does produce a degree of confusion in his prose writings. There are, for instance, no separate sections on politics, art, etc. in *Lucky Poet*; the themes continually run throughout the book, intertwining, as I said (above, pg. 39) of the symbols in *A Drunk Man*, like the intricate and asymmetrical patterns of Celtic art.

The very assertion of these elements is itself a political act, one of Scottish Nationalism, striking against the dominance of English culture. English Imperialism proceeds on both cultural and political levels; and whereas political ties can be broken in a comparatively short time, cultural influences are much more deep-seated. MacDiarmid's hope, as expressed in *Lucky Poet*, was, by detaching Scotland from the Empire, to strike at the heart of English Imperialism, to deliver "a mortal blow to the greatest Empire in the world at the very centre of its power." (LP 98.) The ironies of history have certainly turned against MacDiarmid; it could scarcely have been foreseen that the twenty years following the war would witness the complete abolition of the Empire, but leave Scotland still subject. The battle continues. (The most striking and effective image MacDiarmid has found for it occurs in the "Cornish Heroic Song for Valda Trevlyn", in which (379) the Celtic genius and the English ascendancy are compared to the white and killer whales.)

One of Waddell's central points was the identity between the Eddic, Gaelic traditions and Sumerian and other Eastern traditions. MacDiarmid
insists on this connection: it is, politically and culturally, an assertion of Gaeldom's independence from the English tradition. Celtic art especially is closer to Eastern art than to Western art. The instance in which MacDiarmid crystallises this point, and which becomes a central image for him, is musical: the similarity between the classical bagpipe music (the Ceol Bior) and Eastern music. Structurally, the great pibrochs and the Indian ragas stand together, completely independent of the principles of Western symphonic music. This is the subject of one of MacDiarmid's finest long poems, the "Lament for the Great Music", in Stony Limits, which we shall later examine more closely. One feature of this art is that it is "barbarian", in the sense defined in one of MacDiarmid's favorite quotations:

The arts of the Celtic lands and of Scandinavia .. were .. both of them barbarian, although this may well sound a rather irreverent description of the lovely works produced by early monastic Ireland; but the meaning is clear - they were both on the edge of the world wherein classical art progressed through Carolingian, Ottonian, Italian and Byzantine phases, and neither of them was strong enough to stand aside from this main stream of European art. They aped it, and whenever they did, they fell from grace, as is the way with barbarian art.

(T.D. Kendrick, as quoted in LP 368.)

In this sense, MacDiarmid is pleased to note, both Lenin and Stalin were "barbarians". (LP 375.) Stalin, in fact, by a coincidence which MacDiarmid would regard as anything but coincidental, came originally, like the Gaels, from Georgia. (See "Direadh III", 351; also LP 321.) This ties in with one of the (for MacDiarmid) key aspects of Gaeldom, that it was "moving towards - and but for the English would have realized -
a real People's State." (Rudolf Bringmann, as quoted in LP 27.)

The "Gaelic Idea" is thus the basis for the possibility of an "East-West Synthesis", both in cultural and political terms. Politically, the anti-Imperialist bias of Gaeldom provides the necessary affinities with Russia, so that the two things - Gaeldom and Communism - may provide the new balance of world society, overthrowing the corrupt and inferior English tradition.

If we turn to Europe and see
Hoo the emergence o' the Russian Idea's
Broken the balance o' North and Sooth
And needs a coounter that can only be
The Gaelic Idea
To mak' a parallelogram o' forces,
Complete the Defence o' the West,
And end the English betrayal o' Europe. (CC 77.)

The East-West Synthesis also proceeds on a cultural level: MacDiarmid refers to the Irish writers' interest in Eastern literature, and to his hero, Charles Doughty's absorption in Arabia. (See LP 14-15.)

The nature of Celtic art also appealed strongly to MacDiarmid. In LP (353) he quotes Henri Hubert:

Celtic literature was essentially a poetic literature...
We must not think of Celtic poetry as lyrical outpourings,
but as elaborately ingenious exercises on the part of
rather pedantic literary men. Yet Celtic literature
was popular as no other was.

At other places in Lucky Poet (353 again, 335) he quotes accounts of the common people's intense interest in, and knowledge of, the minutiae of
formal problems in poetry. This true popular art combines, for MacDiarmid, his "highbrow" uncompromising intellectualism and his socialism. The position of the poet in Gaelic society, as he envisaged it - his worth recognised, held in popular esteem by a whole people qualified to judge him - is precisely that towards which MacDiarmid himself is aiming. It is lost in modern society, and thus we have his many bitter attacks on all the betrayers of this ideal: the public who will accept trash, and the writers who will peddle it to them.

Celtic art - "asymmetrical, intricate, organic" (Tonge, as quoted in LP 376) - thus becomes an ideal, both cultural and political, which has to be recovered, in both culture and politics. Time and again, MacDiarmid stresses Lenin's grasp of the organic nature of society. His own poetry aims at achieving a new kind of unity, while being at the same time asymmetrical, in the sense that there is no neat order or pattern, and intricate, in that all the thousands of diverse facts packed into it are conceived of as being meaningfully interrelated.

The ultimate goal towards which humanity is moving must certainly possess this quality of organic unity: but MacDiarmid is prepared for just about anything to happen along the way. Physical evolution is almost finished. In a great passage from the "Lament for the Great Music" he declares:

The struggle for material existence is over. It has been won. The need for repressions and disciplines has passed. The struggle for truth and that indescrivable necessity, Beauty, begins now, hampered by none of the lower needs.

(264)
What is left is the evolution of the human mind. As we have seen in parts of *A Drunk Man*, MacDiarmid accepts the unpredictability of this process, knowing that we are as little able as the apes were to conceive of the possibilities of what we might become. But he is unshakably optimistic about it: whatever develops will be for the better.

This long view accounts for MacDiarmid's scorn of philosophies which place their central values on the individual, or personal relationships. (See his dismissal of E.M. Forster, *LP* 78-79.) MacDiarmid's allegiance is not to an individual, but to a cause. It is certainly not to the masses, insofar as they are opposed to that cause.

I have no love for humanity - but only for the higher brain-centres, the human mind in which only a moiety of mankind has ever had, or has to-day, any part or parcel whatever. ... I am fully aware of the emptiness and insignificance of sentimental humanism.  

(*LP* 78)

And he quotes with approval Ford Madox Hueffer's calculation that "In each 100,000 souls, five are reasonably civilized." (*LP* 103.) Conversely, since his allegiance is to the cause, and to the belief that the hope for change does lie with the masses, his allegiance is strongly devoted to their reform.

"But why indulge in these endless newspaper controversies with nearly illiterate people?" I have frequently been asked. "You will never get anything into their heads. What does it matter if what they like is to any intelligent person sheer doggerel?" The answer, of course - the reason for my tireless indulgence in these humiliating and apparently useless controversies - is simply that the only thing I do care about is what the masses of the people
think and believe and like and dislike. I do not care a rap in comparison what the educated classes think, believe, like, &c. But if the great masses are bogged in ignorance and shocking bad tastes, that is precisely what I am vitally concerned about, and I cannot lie back, aloof among my intellectual peers, and in that way acquiesce in the degraded standards of the generality.

(LP 95-7.)

To see the consistency of attitude underlying these surface paradoxes is to begin to see something of MacDiarmid's essential method of thought.

This long-term vision provides the constant force behind MacDiarmid's poetry and life. But on the way, he is a ruthless pragmatist so far as means are concerned. He is willing to use anything and everything which will advance mankind even a little. This goes a long way towards explaining some of his political eccentricities. He is willing to use Social Credit economics as a means to the end of Communism only because he regards Communism itself as a means to the greater end. Incidental benefits of these theories, such as prosperity, are thus irrelevant: hence Eric Linklater's description of him, which MacDiarmid quotes with approval:

(He) hotly denied any concern with the increase of wealth that might be expected to accrue from his policy. "I have no interest whatsoever in prosperity," he declared, and left the uncommon impression that here was a man who advanced an economic theory for purely aesthetic reasons.

(as quoted in LP 35.)

In this kind of perspective, MacDiarmid's political views become almost logical. Everything he has campaigned for is a necessary step on the way to his ultimate goal. First comes the political independence of
Scotland from England - which should be worked for by the English Communist Party as well, for "no nation which enslaves another can itself be free." This will contribute to the break-up of the English Empire and its political and cultural dominance, thus opening the way for the resurgence of the Gaelic spirit, via the formation of a Scottish Workers' Republic on the lines laid down by John Maclean. Intermediate economic measures such as Social Creditism will give way to a fully Communist society ("Nae Marx-without-tears"), which in turn is desirable only insofar as it is, to MacDiarmid, the form of society most open to future, and unknown, developments.

This political progression is, further, a metaphor, as well as a prerequisite, for cultural evolution.

As a Socialist, of course, I am, it should be obvious, interested only in a very subordinate way in the politics of Socialism as a political theory; my real concern with Socialism is as an artist's organized approach to the interdependencies of life.

(LP 241n.)

Politics cannot be conceived of separately. Culture is both a part of politics, and something which transcends it. Thus Lenin, in another of MacDiarmid's favorite quotations:

It would be a very serious mistake to suppose that one can become a Communist without making one's own the treasures of human knowledge. It would be mistaken to imagine that it is enough to adopt the Communist formulas and conclusions of Communist science without mastering that sum-total of different branches of knowledge, the final outcome of which is Communism. ... Communism becomes an empty phrase, a mere façade,
and the Communist a mere bluffer, if he has not worked over in his consciousness the whole inheritance of human knowledge ... made his own, and worked over anew, all that was of value in the more than two thousand years of development of human thought.  

(As quoted in LP xxi.)

Lenin is a key figure for MacDiarmid in this whole world-view, as a historical figure who has actually achieved giant strides in the desired directions, and as an example of the kind of man necessary for future steps, the kind of man who will, it is to be hoped, become more common. Another such was Rilke - again the inseparableness of art and politics - as expounded in "The Seamless Garment" (290). Nearer home, there was John Maclean, who with James Maxton and Willie Gallacher led the Scottish workers' movement in the early 1920's. Maclean is the originator of the idea of the independent Scottish Workers' Republic, an idea enthusiastically endorsed by MacDiarmid, and later by Goodsir Smith, both of whom wrote poems about him. Maclean died in prison, and was thus elevated to the status of martyr.

Maurice Lindsay, who could never be accused of Communist leanings himself, has dismissed MacDiarmid's Lenin as a "Gothicized Christ-substitute" 17, but this view is never really justified by the poetry itself, except perhaps in some of the incantatory sections towards the end of the "Third Hymn to Lenin." ("Ah, Lenin, / Life and that more abundantly, thou Fire of Freedom .... Spirit of Lenin, light on this city now!" 3HL 30-31.)

Quite to the contrary, there is a balanced and carefully defined view of politics and poetry in the "Second Hymn to Lenin" (298), which is,
in every way, the most interesting and most successful of MacDiarmid's political poems.

(Of course, MacDiarmid also holds that "As a Communist, I regard poetry as simply one of the gifts, one of the talents that I've got to place at the disposal of the Party"18, and has churned out many pieces whose value as propaganda has far outweighed their value as poetry.)

The "Second Hymn to Lenin" is only in a very secondary way concerned with politics. Certainly there is no argument in it as to whether or not Communism is "correct": that is merely assumed. The major concern is stated in the early stanza:

Are my poems spoken in the factories and fields,
   In the streets o' the toon?
Gin they're no', then I'm failin' to dae
   What I ocht to ha' dune.

MacDiarmid is concerned with the practical effect of his poetry, what difference it is going to make, not just in general terms like the modification of the consciousness of the literati, but in terms of the everyday life of the workers "in the factories and fields". It is obvious that, as things stand at present, his poems are less vital to the workers than are the politics of Lenin. This puts him on the defensive, and establishes the mood of (friendly) argument, against Lenin as an ultimate priority.

MacDiarmid is concerned, increasingly, with writing poetry about poetry. The theme, which has been present since his earliest works (see "In Glasgow", S 53), emerges into the primary position in MacDiarmid's
poetry of the early 30's, where he is especially concerned with the sources of his poetry, its inspiration. (See, for example, "The Point of Honour", 205.) And of course such later poems as The Kind of Poetry I Want serve both as programmes for and exemplifications of his ideals. But none of this concern would be of anything other than hypothetical value, unless he had first dealt with this challenge which the "Second Hymn to Lenin" debates, unless the social as well as the aesthetic relevance of poetry had been established.

The priority of poetry over politics had already been asserted in the "Better a'e gowden lyric" section of To Circumjack Cencrastus (193). But that section is mere assertion; it lacks entirely the measured perspective of the "Hymn"; it does not really solve any problems. (Ironic, then, that Iain Crichton Smith should have used it for the title of his essay on MacDiarmid.)

MacDiarmid starts by freely admitting the irrelevance of much of what has been written, even by such people as Joyce, if it has not made this kind of impact, and by denying that there can be such a thing as "Great poets hardly anybody kens o'." (299).

This should not, I believe, be taken as implying that social relevance is an infallible criterion for judging great poetry. (Obviously, there can be poetry which is socially relevant but not great.) Rather, the great poet's ability to affect somewhat more than a fringe of mankind is a natural result, rather than a cause, of his greatness.

The ineffectualness of poetry is then compared to the sweeping impact of the "Barbarian saviour o' civilization". ("Barbarian" is being used in the sense noted above, page 65.) Poetry must be regarded
with ruthless practicality, in terms of means and ends. MacDiarmid's practicality can be, politically, very ruthless: see the almost inhuman political logic on the horrors of the Cheka in the "First Hymn to Lenin". (205).

The indictment of poetry culminates in a curt, incisive, idiomatic judgement:

Poetry like politics maun cut
The cackle and pursue real ends,
Unerringly as Lenin -

and here MacDiarmid switches over, the next phrase appearing to be part of the judgement and a reason for it, but being also the central affirmative statement of the poem

- and to that
Its nature better tends. (299)

The poem continues:

Wi' Lenin's vision equal poet's gift
And what unparalleled force was there! (300)

What is implicit in this wish for the union of two things is the fact that the two things are in fact distinct. Lenin was not a poet; poetry is distinct from politics. Therefore, although there may be useful analogies to be drawn between them, although poetry may be able to learn from politics, the distinction remains, and it is no use for a poet to try
and save his poetic soul by becoming a politician. He can only do that by becoming a better poet.

Poetry must be true to itself, that is, uncompromising, just as Lenin's politics were uncompromising, the "fu' course". The structure of the ideal poem, like the structure of the ideal political state, must be built by "Organic constructional work." Lenin's state is already built like that: poetry will be, in its turn. (300.)

That future tense, plus the words "in turn", provide the key to MacDiarmid's reconciliation between poetry and politics, a reconciliation which must be understood in an evolutionary, rather than a revolutionary, context. Lenin also saw poetry in that context, "faur off."

The progression of evolution may be inevitable, but it is also slow, and man's life is brief. The visionary will never see the practical results of his visions; only the irritating delays of the present. MacDiarmid's famous exclamation against this -

Oh, it's nonsense, nonsense, nonsense,
Nonsense at this time o' day
That breid-and-butter problems
S'ud be in ony man's way. (300)

-is a curious mixture of immature annoyance caused by an inability to accept the inevitable, and a deeply emotional recognition of the essential tragedy of humanity (the "Mortality" theme of A Drunk Man).

The following stanzas present a concise picture of MacDiarmid's evolutionary vision, in which humanity loses, like its simian tails, various hindrances on the road to perfection. Whereas most people would
be quite happy about leaving poverty behind, some other examples of what MacDiarmid regards as expendable might surprise them:

Sport, love, and parentage,
Trade, politics, and law.  (300)

The omission of parentage is, of course, standard practice in intellectual Utopia-building ever since Plato's *Republic*; and the omission of love also points towards the essentially non-humanist (in the present sense of the term) character of MacDiarmid's vision. As with other carefully constructed but joyless Utopias, we are reminded of Bob Dylan's line:

In all their promises of Paradise you will not hear a laugh. 19

As far as the poem is concerned, the key word on the list is "politics". All these things, politics included, are "in the meantime", provisional, relative. Lenin himself observed this principle within the political sphere, not regarding the Russian Revolution as absolute, ready to see the time when it would pass away.

Sae here, twixt poetry and politics,
There's nae doot in the en'.
Poetry includes that and s'ud be.
The greatest poo'er amang men.  (301)

Even this judgement is relative, and MacDiarmid, like Lenin, is prepared to see his own speciality superseded:
- It's the greatest, in posse at least,  
  That men ha' discovered yet  
  Tho' nae doot they're unconscious still  
  O' ither's four greater than it.  

The ultimate result of the evolutionary process is, by definition, unknown and unknowable.

The process is finally summed up in two concise and beautiful images:

But, as the loon is in the man,  
  That'll be ta'en up i' the rhyme,  
  Ta'en up like a pool in the sands  
  Aince the tide rows in

Poetry "includes" politics, but has to go far beyond it, has to take a still wider view. The effective politician has to define his ends and work ruthlessly towards them, excluding anything which does not contribute to the achievement of these ends. But poetry is unable to exclude anything, because its end is total comprehension. The poet "daurna turn awa' frae ocht" (302); he cannot afford the luxury of choosing what a "poetical" subject is. All subjects are poetical, and must be dealt with.

A poet has nae choice left  
Betwixt Beaverbrook, say, and God.

The function of the poet is total comprehension, achieved through
the "profoundest" virtue, disinterestedness, and resulting in a synthesising view of the world, which, like the drunk man's vision of the Great Wheel, obliterates such minor distinctions as Life and Death, past present or future. Such a comprehension is what MacDiarmid actually strives to accomplish in his later "world-view" poems. He takes as one of his mottoes (see LP 67) Rilke's statement "The poet must know everything", and interprets it quite literally. These climactic stanzas of the "Second Hymn to Lenin" act as a programme, a statement of intent, for all of MacDiarmid's subsequent poetry.

Having established this system of priorities, on a vast evolutionary scale, MacDiarmid returns at the end of his poem to his real starting point: the miner in the pit, the housewife at her wash-tub. What can all this mean to them? They are, of course, part of his poetry. Disinterestedness gives them equal validity with the furthest reach of metaphysical speculation. In fact, they are still at the centre of it, as MacDiarmid establishes with a dazzling piece of poetic trickery which, although it appears at first arbitrary, is an integral part of the argument:

The sailor gangs owre the curve o' the sea,
The hoosewife's thrang in the wash-tub,
And whatna rhyme can I find but hub,
And what else can poetry be?

(303)

As the core, poetry is part of all social change, as of all other types of activity; a role of such complexity that in comparison even Lenin's profound achievements become mere "bairns' play."
How far has MacDiarmid succeeded in answering his own doubts?

From one point of view, he has succeeded brilliantly. He has answered these doubts with a statement which is logically and intellectually satisfying (given the premises from which it operates.) What is more, this statement is itself a poem, thus proving by its own example the ability of poetry to come to grips with the most subtle of problems. As a poem, the "Second Hymn to Lenin" is a most impressive achievement, marred only by one hideous "I wis" (302). The tone of voice is exactly right, and moves easily through the stanza forms. The language is basically English with Scots inflections: but these inflections establish a tone of easy familiarity, almost homeliness, without relaxing the rigour of the argument, which would be much harder to achieve in English. The diction is simple and direct, and at at least one point ("Oh, it's nonsense etc.") the poem achieves that profundity which is only achieved by the most sublime simplicity. The poem also has a conciseness of expression, familiar from the best of the early lyrics, which MacDiarmid, whether by intention or incompetence, was to achieve less frequently when dealing with the concerns of his later poetry.

But from another point of view, namely, the poem's own, the failure remains. The "Second Hymn to Lenin" is not spoken in the factories and fields, any more than any of MacDiarmid's other poems. It does not yet possess even the dubious distinction of being read by coerced school-children. Does not MacDiarmid himself remain, what he said was impossible, a "great poet hardly anybody kens o'"? Those who do read and admire his work are faced with exactly the same problems as the poet himself. MacDiarmid's solutions may be valid, but they are not yet proved to be
valid by the only standards which he himself would accept.

I have mentioned that the language of the "Second Hymn to Lenin" is basically English. Throughout the 30's, MacDiarmid's interest in language itself is increasing, and his uses of it are polarizing. On the one hand, he is moving increasingly towards standard English, rather than Scots, as the only means to express all that he wants to say; on the other, the Scots poems that he does still write are in a much denser, more deliberately dictionary-dredging "Synthetic Scots". This latter trend results, at its best, in the magnificent spate of vocabulary in "Water Music" (270), which is MacDiarmid's finest achievement in the transformation of Jamieson's Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language into poetry. Other poems are better described by the sub-title to "Scots Unbound": "Divertissement Philologique". Some of his English poems of the period deserve this title also, as MacDiarmid stretched and strained the language to try to accommodate his thoughts.

MacDiarmid himself describes the process in his Note to the combined edition of Stony Limits and Scots Unbound (1956):

Both (Scots Unbound and Stony Limits) were largely experimental, the first in an extended use of synthetic Scots but also of modern scientific terminology, and the second in an endeavour to employ recondite elements of the English vocabulary. Each in its different but complementary way marked steps in the transition from my earlier volumes of lyrics towards my later long "world-view" poems.

(StLSU v).

Stony Limits is the central volume of the 30's, and indeed of the whole "middle" period of MacDiarmid. Although we must suppose that much
of the later poetry, such as *In Memoriam James Joyce*, was in fact written in the late 30's, none of it appears in final form until the 50's.

*Stony Limits* as a book is very varied and rewarding. It contains some superb short lyrics: the Shetland series, "The Skeleton of the Future", and above all "The Little White Rose". (If indeed that perfect gem is wholly MacDiarmid's, as has been questioned: see *The Scotsman*, August 23rd, 1967.) It also contains political doggerel, such as "Edinburgh Toun", and long rambling pieces such as "Etika Preobrazhennavo Erosa", none of which are wholly devoid of interest, though some come pretty close to it. But the volume is dominated by three long poems, the "Ode to All Rebels", "On a Raised Beach", and the "Lament for the Great Music" (*SLSU* 91, 42, 121), and I propose to limit my discussion of the book to these three.

They have had, incidentally, a mixed publication history. The "Lament" appears in full in the original *Stony Limits*, in the combined edition, and in the *Collected Poems*. "On a Raised Beach" appears in the *Collected Poems* only in a very brief extract, but has since been reprinted in *A Lap of Honour*, in Penguin's *Longer Contemporary Poems*, and in a special limited edition by the Harris Press, Preston. The "Ode" did not appear in full in the original *Stony Limits*, due to censorship problems. Bits of it turned up in other collections, but the full text, as originally conceived, has been printed only in *Stony Limits* and *Scots Unbound*. The *Collected Poems* prints only an extract, in English, not the original Scots. In the combined edition, the "Ode" is prefaced by two quotations, one from Petronius and one from Jeremiah; but the extract in the *Collected Poems* is prefaced by neither of these, but by a third quote, from the
Bhagavad Gita, which does not appear elsewhere. It is to my mind disgraceful that the *Collected Poems* should print in full all of the minor poems from *Stony Limits* and omit two of the most important poems MacDiarmid ever wrote.

Among the sayings which MacDiarmid has taken as his mottoes (see *LP 67*) is Thomas Hardy's declaration that "Literature is the written expression of revolt against accepted things." The most sustained exposition of this text in MacDiarmid's poetry is the "Ode to All Rebels."

The poem falls into two sections, though there is no very precise division. The first is centred on the monologue of a particular character, interspersed with short, objective poems on related themes; in the second section, this character drops out of sight as an individual distinct from MacDiarmid, and becomes more a generic type of "The Rebel", while the poem's discussion moves onto a more general plane.

This movement away from the individual is characteristic of MacDiarmid. As he says in another of the poems in *Stony Limits*:

> The War put an end to individuals  
> They are no longer of interest - even to themselves.  
> (211)

And the individual character of the "Ode" (significantly unnamed) is used mainly to negate individuality.

The character is in some ways an anticipation of Meursault, the hero of Camus' *L'Etranger* (1942), in that he is devoid of the emotions which are commonly considered as human. Meursault is condemned partly on the grounds that he could not weep at his mother's funeral, and that he
started a flirtation with a girl on the very next day. MacDiarmid's rebel is an even more extreme case: even as he is lowering into its grave the coffin of his first wife he is dispassionately considering the second. He comes to the conclusion:

\[
\text{mony a thoosand}
\text{Forbye the cratur I actually got}
\text{'Ud ha'e seemed as convincin' and fore-thought}
\text{And wi' a' their differences the life I'd ha'e led}
\text{Wi' ony ane o' them I micht ha'e wed}
\text{'Ud ha'e been fell near the same}
\text{As wi' yon particular dame.}
\]

(SLSU 94)

This early monologue is written in a fairly full canon of Scots, and has the ring of individuality about it as much, if not more so, as the speaking voice of the Drunk Man. The inset comments are in English, and range from the comic:

"The Colonel's too gallant, too romantic, too old,"
She sadly admitted, "it's true
To appreciate the Great Discovery of the Age
- That women like It too!"

(SLSU 95)

to flat, direct statement:

In male or female the normal operation
Does not interfere in any way at all
With any further function, interest, or occupation,
Spiritual, intellectual, emotional, or physical.

(SLSU 95)
This form - the monologue commented on by inset poems - seems to suit MacDiarmid, and it is a pity that this is the last example of it in his work.

Having disposed of love, he goes on to deal with parentage:

We need propinquity and habit then
Oor bairns to ken
And reason and feelin' are o' nae avail

At first, the character had felt some "self-scunner" at this characteristic of his, but, as the poem progresses, he comes to terms with himself, and generalises his own experience thus:

Aye mair and mair clearly I saw
Sexual relations arena personal at a'
But the least intimate things in the world

His attitude is given a comic but logical turn in the section beginning "Thank God for laundries." (SLSU 98). It is a paradox that the rebel, denying individuality, seeks for isolation.

From this point on, the protagonist increasingly tends to generalise his remarks, through such phrases as "we rebels", into a philosophy of rebellion.

He is aware of the outrageousness (by normal standards) of what he is saying, and states it as a principle that the rebel's task is to "think the unthinkable", whatever the reaction of the common herd may be. MacDiarmid is well aware of the application of this to his own position.
as a poet, and comments on it:

I used to write sic bonny sangs  
A'body wi' pleasure and profit could read,
Even yet a bit discipline's a' that I need  
To mak' myself' ane o' the greatest poets
Puir Scotland's ever managed to breed.
Why dae I turn my back on a' that  
And write this horrible rubbish instead?
' Sustain me, spirit o' God, that I pay  
These seductive voices nae heed!'  

(SLSU 99)

MacDiarmid must, poetically, think the unthinkable, and sing the unsingable.

The "personal" side of the poem ends with a bizarre and gruesome anecdote: a piece of extreme anti-romanticism. A general statement -

And as o' my weemun and oor bairns  
I feel aboot a'  
Accepted standards, the framework o' life,  
Ilka sae-ca'd law  
Man-made or "divine."  

(SLSU 100)

- opens the way for the rest of the poem, which expands upon this text, starting with a version of the third temptation of Christ, with Reason cast in the role of Satan.

The position which the rebel/MacDiarmid (with the dropping of the persona, it becomes almost impossible to tell them apart) takes up is one of anarchy:

the essence o' a' law  
Is that there is nae law ava'.  

(SLSU 105)
This leads to a contemptuous dismissal of the whole fabric of "civilization":

Keep ga'en to your wars, you fools, as o' yore;  
I'm the civilisation you're fechtin' for.  

(SLSU 107)

Yet despite MacDiarmid's embracement of Chaos and Anarchy, despite his avowal that his interests are "foreign to hope", there is hope in this poem, there is a future vision. (Perhaps readers could deal more easily with MacDiarmid, they could "place" him better, if he were merely a negative critic and satirist: it is the positive side of his ethos which gives so much difficulty, or perhaps embarrassment.)

The poem is studded with passages of fierce rhetoric which proclaim the anarchist's faith - and hope.

Responsibility's a fearsome load  
Nae man can bear,  
Rebels, try nae mair  
Be as irresponsible as God.

...  

The advice I gi'e you is simply this:  
Keep oot o' a' else except the abyss.  
Rive Joy oot o' Terror's clenched nieve  
Gie't a'e look, syne back again heave.  
You'll no' see it twice.  

(SLSU 107)

These two strands in the poem - the rebel's rejection of present society, and MacDiarmid's faith in a future vision - are now drawing together towards a climax. The rebel's attack culminates in the passage
"Think not that I forget a single pang", which was (partially) published in *The Second Hymn to Lenin & Other Poems* (312; SLSU 108). It asserts the identity of the rebel/poet with the victims of oppression and crime, as they occur, masked by respectability, in the most "civilized" of countries; it asserts also God's identity with them:

You may feel certain that God
Is on the side of the sane
And prefers your condition to syphilis.
I am not so sure.

(SLSU 109)

The two strands join as MacDiarmid tries to envisage what would in fact happen if his vision came to pass. The answer is obvious:

Blindin' licht is waur than the dark.

(SLSU 110)

(Cf. "Men canna look on nakit licht": from *A Drunk Man*, page 126.) Here is the relevance of the quotation which the *Collected Poems* uses to preface its extract:

"Deluded men despise me when I have taken human form."
- Bhagavad-Gita.

(243)

This is of course a central preoccupation of MacDiarmid: the opposition of the masses to what is best, their unwillingness to be changed, even for the better, which makes it inevitable that those who wish to do some
good in the world have to adopt the position of rebellion, rejection of orthodox society.

A' that's badly, malformed, obscene,
Mankind accepts and guards;
But when an angel kyths ...
... they howl wi' fear,
Or perjure their sicht, and gibe and jeer
And deny that the like can ever appear.

(SLSU 111)

The fierceness of this denunciation leads into a passage of delightfully playful irony (a mood which MacDiarmid frequently attempts, but less frequently achieves) in which the respectable citizens decide that God has acted in bad taste, and should have consulted the Kirk or the Medical Profession:

Wi' a' due respect we'11 no' follow his lead.
Mankind at least maun aye keep its heid.

(SLSU 112)

As it reaches its climax, the "Ode" achieves a fine concentration of rhetorical effectiveness. There follows a list of the rebel's enemies, a catalogue of the crimes of respectability, which shows MacDiarmid's considerable powers of invective at their best: controlled and precise. Incidentally, this denunciation carries more force in the original Scots than in the Collected Poems' Anglified version. Cf

A' that cry "Haud - that's ga'en owre faur.
We dinna ken where - if at a' - it'll stop."
All who cry: "Hold - that's going too far.  
We don't know where - if at all - it'll stop."

The difference is a subtle one of tone: but in this kind of writing, tone is all-important.

MacDiarmid is a great exponent of the catalogue, the list of names; here, the rhetorical effect is overwhelming. And after this spate of invective, the poem comes magnificently to rest on a small, quiet statement of sublime confidence:

Then quietly, quietly, quietly  
Wi' nae excitement or noise.  
It's rarely a rebel  
Raises his voice.  

There's nae necessity.  

(SLSU 114)

This seems to me the true ending of the poem. The rest may be regarded as a kind of coda, introduced by a rare and beautiful image:

We are like somebody wha hears  
A wonderfu' language and mak's up his mind  
To write poetry in it - but ah!  
It's impossible to learn it, we find,  
Tho' we'll never ha'e ony use again  
For ither languages o' ony kind.  

(SLSU 114-5)

The coda takes the form which so much of MacDiarmid's later poetry
is to take: it is an account of the kind of poetry he wants, which, in attempting to define it, is actually creating it. This is the poetry in the impossible language, which the rebel should sing: but it is also a discussion of that poetry, an attempt to describe what it ought to be. MacDiarmid's poems about poetry may seem self-centred, sterile, in-breeding; but they are not.

The poetry is one that "reason with good reason" must reject, that men will refuse to hear, or, hearing, refuse to recognise for what it is. But it is a song which will continue to rise, and spread. It stems from a refusal to accept limitation:

Let all men laugh as at a child
Crying broken-hearted for the moon
...
The child is right and must not be
Consoled until the world ends

(SLSU 117)

It is, ultimately, the song of God:

Your song, O God, that none dare hear
Save the insane and such as I
Apostates from humanity
Sings out in me with no more fear
Than one who thinks he has the world's ear
From his padded cell
- Insane enough, with you so near,
  To want, like you, the world as well!

(SLSU 118)

It is surely rather curious that a poem engaged in rejecting every vestige of common authority, reason, and certainly religion, should end on
such a religious note, even admitted that MacDiarmid's "God" bears little
relation to the Christian God, but is used more as a kind of loose
shorthand for MacDiarmid's visionary dimension.

Due to its limited availability, the "Ode to All Rebels" is
probably the least-known of MacDiarmid's great poems. This is unfortunate
because it is a great poem. There are weaknesses. The reader is
liable to become too interested in the individual personality of the
persona at the beginning of the poem, and thus the transition is made
more difficult. Furthermore, the transitional stages are in any case
the most diffuse and least satisfactory parts of the poem. As always,
MacDiarmid's structuring power is shaky. But towards the end, the poem
does develop a fine flow and drive which carries it through to a power­
ful conclusion. The Scots language is vigorously and appositely used,
and the loose, variable verse forms also contribute well to the poem's
movement. The poem does seem to me to have an emotional and intellectual
unity, and to be an important contribution to any overall understanding
of MacDiarmid's thought. It is to be hoped that some enterprising
publishers will again make it available in its entirety, and in its
original language.

At this period of his life, MacDiarmid was living on the island
of Whalsay, in the Shetland Islands, a landscape of bleak, bare rock.
Undoubtedly this is the immediate environment which produced the geo­
logical meditation of "On a Raised Beach" (SLSU 42). This poem is
unique in MacDiarmid's work. Although it does relate to his central
themes and concerns, it is perhaps his only major poem which can be
approached and understood without any prior knowledge of these themes
and concerns, or even of MacDiarmid himself. The casual reader may well skip the first paragraph, with its fusillade of erudite and esoteric vocabulary; but the bulk of the poem is written in clear, simple English, dignified in tone, and charged with concentrated power. The poem contains some of MacDiarmid's most remarkable achievements in the eloquence of simplicity.

The basic situation is analogous to that of *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*. The poet/protagonist (there is no attempt to create a persona here: the speaker is MacDiarmid) is lying on a raised beach of stones, and the poem consists of his meditation upon them. Various attitudes and ideas come up, are examined, recur. One thought passes into another, with more of a natural randomness than of logic. The poem is fairly loosely structured, but it is reasonably concise; there are fewer flat passages than in the "Ode". But the mood is contemplative and calm; there is emotion, but not excitement.

The poem begins with the utter strangeness of the stones, an overwhelming sense of otherness. This partly accounts for the use of all the unusual words in the first paragraph. All are used correctly and precisely - "fiducial", for instance, describes exactly the function of the stones in the poem, "that may be used as a standard of reference" - but to the average reader they will produce immediately a sense of strangeness. The idea that the stones are entirely separate is further enforced by the fact that neither these strange words, nor even the ancient and magical Norn words (*SLSU* 40), can bring men any closer to the stones.
Even those who juggle with lapidary's, mason's, geologist's words
And all their knowledge of stones in vain
(SLSU 53)

The stones are set apart by their age and by their absolute impassivity. They do not acknowledge

anything more recently born than themselves
And that is everything else on the Earth.
...
So these stones have dismissed
All but all of evolution, unmoved by it,
(Is there anything to come they will not likewise dismiss?)
(SLSU 44-5)

Above all, they are silent and unmoving, completely impervious to change.

The moon moves the waters backwards and forwards,
But the stones cannot be lured an inch further
Either on this side of eternity or the other.
...
Cold, undistracted, eternal and sublime.
They will stem all the torrents of vicissitude forever
With a more than Roman peace.
(SLSU 49)

For MacDiarmid, this absolute otherness of the stones is something awesome. (Unlike Sartre's Roquentin, in La Nausee, 1938, whose similar encounter with the absolute otherness of a stone fills him with disgust and horror.) The initial response has to be humility. We ephemeral humans cannot presume to impose on the stones our paltry ideas; they are contemptibly irrelevant.
We must be humble. We are so easily baffled by appearances And do not realise that these stones are one with the stars. It makes no difference to them whether they are high or low, Mountain peak or ocean floor, palace, or pigsty. There are plenty of ruined buildings in the world but no ruined stones. (SLSU 45)

That last line is, arguably, the finest that MacDiarmid ever wrote.

The stones make nonsense of all our ideas of time. They have witnessed, impartially, all of evolution. They have seen mankind develop from its earliest stages, and will also see all the further developments which MacDiarmid believes in. But for the stones

the essential life of mankind in the mass Is the same as their earliest ancestors yet. (SLSU 45)

They are the beginning and the ending of the world, "Earth's vast epanadiplosis", as the last line of the poem says. (This phrase is a striking metaphorical application of a rhetorical device - opening and closing a sentence with the same word - to geological history, spoiled only by the fact that it gives a totally superfluous and slightly ludicrous rhyme to "closes". In the same paragraph, another rhetorical term, diallage, a figure by which arguments are considered from various points of view, and then turned to one point, is also brilliantly applied to the stones. MacDiarmid's use of his strange terminology is always exact and often surprisingly subtle. Are we also meant to be aware that the word diallage, with a different pronunciation but the same spelling and Greek root, is a type of mineral?)
Given the proper humility in his approach, man has much to learn from the stones. They re-adjust his sense of values, they question his concept of reality, they set time in perspective.

Impatience is a poor qualification for immortality.

They dismiss all his superficial ideas and emotions.

There are no twirly bits in this ground bass.

To learn from the stones we must become more like them; we too must "dismiss all else" and become "enamoured of the desert", like MacDiarmid himself, or like his hero Charles Doughty (the elegy for whom, "Stony Limits", gives the volume its title.) This requires an immense exercise of will,
Inconceivable discipline, courage, and endurance,
Self-purification and anti-humanity

This concept of will is fundamental to MacDiarmid. In an interesting aside, he criticises the Romantics for setting up as their goal "Infinite longing rather than manly will" (SLSU 53). The will is directed against the weak manifestations of "humanity", such as emotion; but it is will, a force, that is the alternative, not reason, for reason is equally inadequate:
But an emotion chilled is an emotion controlled;  
This is the road leading to certainty,  
Reasoned planning for the time when reason can no longer avail.  

(SLSU 47)

"Anti-humanity" is an interesting word for MacDiarmid to use here.  
It expresses, more directly than usual, the tendency of his thought.  
MacDiarmid is in one sense a humanist, in that his fundamental belief is  
in mankind, and the possibilities of its evolution; but his concept of  
"humanity" is a rigorous and often "inhuman" one. It makes no allowance  
for weaknesses, and does not even admit the possibility of compromise.  
MacDiarmid is not troubled by any false humility when he says

Here where there is neither haze nor hesitation  
Something at least of the necessary power has entered into me.  

(SLSU 51-2).

(Before the stones, all men are equal, but some are more equal than  
others.) This tendency in him, his "disposition towards spiritual  
issues / Made inhumanly clear" (SLSU 53) is at once his strength and his  
weakness. It gives him the power to carry out his task, but it  
isolates him from the common man. This split is repeated in his  
attitude towards the common man, who is to be revered as the ultimate  
value because of his potentialities, and simultaneously to be despised  
for not being able yet to realise them.

This duality comes up in the poem itself. Given the strength,  
given the lessons learned from the stones, what do these enable us to do?  
What is our task, "our function (which) remains, / However isolated we
I/O seem, fundamental to life as theirs (the stones)" (SLSU 54)?

The stones give to MacDiarmid "a sense of perfect form":

These stones have the silence of supreme creative power,
The direct and undisturbed way of working
Which alone leads to greatness.

(SLSU 50-1)

(Cf "Silence supervening at poetry's height" (IMJJ 47).)

The isolation of the stones, their total self-sufficiency, is
directly analogous to the necessary isolation and self-sufficiency of
the artist:

It will be ever increasingly necessary to find
In the interests of all mankind
Men capable of rejecting all that all other men
Think, as a stone remains
Essential to the world, inseparable from it,
And rejects all other life yet.
Great work cannot be combined with surrender to the crowd.

(SLSU 51)

At the same time, MacDiarmid maintains, co-holding opposites; this crowd
to which we cannot surrender is our master, our task, our justification:

The empty hand of my brother man,
The humanity no culture has reached, the mob.
Intelligentsia, our impossible and imperative job!

(SLSU 55)

Only in the evolutionary context (over spaces of time as great as those
experienced by the stones) can these opposites be held together.
The stones have one final lesson to teach, which is proclaimed in the penultimate paragraph of the poem. It concerns death. Some of MacDiarmid's finest poetry is about death, notably "At My Father's Grave" (289), or the great closing lines of "The Wreck of the Swan" (399). The stones, which have challenged men's views of reality, and of time, must also talk of death. The stones on a grave are also immobile; there is no "Christophanic rock that moved." (SLSU 43).

I lift a stone; it is the meaning of life I clasp
Which is death, for that is the meaning of death
...
Each of these stones on this raised beach,
Every stone in the world,
Covers infinite death, beyond the reach
Of the dead it hides

(SLSU 55-6)

This kind of apprehension of death, and the acceptance of it ("Death is a physical horror to me no more" - SLSU 49) is part of MacDiarmid's ethos; it has a Stoic nobility. What is remarkable about this poem, what is unique in MacDiarmid's work, is the closing assertion:

But let us not be afraid to die.
No heavier and colder and quieter then,
No more motionless, do stones lie
In death than in life to all men.
It is no more difficult in death than here
- Though slow as the stones the powers develop
To rise from the grave - to get a life worth having;
And in death - unlike life - we lose nothing that is truly ours.

(SLSU 55)

MacDiarmid's view of eternal life is usually on a more materialistic
basis. Compare this with the later "Island Funeral" (324). That poem begins with a magnificent description of a funeral in the Shetlands: the grey stones are again omnipresent. The islanders, with a dry-eyed certainty, reject the "sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life". At the end of the poem, MacDiarmid presents an alternative hope:

Yet if the nature of the mind is determined
By that of the body, as I believe,
It follows that every type of human mind
Has existed an infinite number of times
And will do so. Materialism promises something
Hardly to be distinguished from eternal life.
Minds or souls with the properties I love
- The minds or souls of these old islanders -
Have existed during an eternal time in the past
And will exist for an eternal time in the future.
A time broken up of course
By enormous intervals of non-existence,
But an infinite time.
If one regards these personalities
As possessing some value
There is a certain satisfaction
In the thought that in eternity
They will be able to develop
In all possible environments
And to express themselves
In all the ways possible to them
- A logical deduction from thoroughgoing Materialism

(330-1)

I quote this passage at some length, as it seems important to set this thoroughly logical view, which seems to me more consistent with the whole trend of MacDiarmid's thought, against the strange and almost mystical view which closes "On a Raised Beach". (Of course, someone with a greater faith in the individual than MacDiarmid has might retort to this argument that the number of possible individuals is also infinite.)
No exposition of the ideas it contains can do full justice to "On a Raised Beach". This is of course true of any poem, but less so in the case of MacDiarmid, whose poems are so often poems of ideas. That is, the ideas are the things which come across most strongly. "On a Raised Beach" is an exception, in that what comes across most strongly is the image of the stones themselves. The stones are real to us quite apart from the ideas which MacDiarmid builds around them; or, to put it another way round, the ideas don't exhaust the image. This is comparatively rare in MacDiarmid. Even in such a great poem as A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle, one gets the feeling that the images of the Thistle and the moonlight have been milked for everything they are worth, that the poet has squeezed out of them every possible application. This is not so with the stones; and this is one reason why the poem is likely to appeal strongly to readers who would not normally get along with MacDiarmid.

Another reason is that the poem, for all its anti-humanistic professions, does present more strongly than most a picture of MacDiarmid himself as a person. Perhaps the intensity of the image of the stones overflows into the intensity of his response. Certainly, the experience seems to have taken MacDiarmid back to a questioning of fundamentals, a re-assessment of the grounds of his whole position, which is a phenomenon more widely shared than the position itself. I have tried to show how the ideas in the poem are related to the ideas in other MacDiarmid poems; but what is most interesting, and perhaps most attractive, about "On a Raised Beach" is that in it the ideas are of secondary importance. To say that this makes it a greater poem, would be begging questions of value judgments, on the answers to which we must base our estimation of
almost all of MacDiarmid's later poetry. Certainly the poem stands
apart from much of MacDiarmid's other work; and certainly it is a great
poem; but we must be careful about using its kind of greatness as a
standard for other poems.

In *Lucky Poet* (110), MacDiarmid quotes the following statement.
(It was written by Van Wyck Brooks about H.G. Wells; MacDiarmid applies
it to Karel Capek, but admits its applicability to himself.)

He is an intellectual, rather than an artist; that is to
say, he naturally describes and interprets life in the light
of ideas, rather than in the light of experience.

In this sense, MacDiarmid is certainly an intellectual; but "On a Raised
Beach" is the work of an artist.

The last of the three central poems of *Stony Limits* is the "Lament
for the Great Music" (248; SLSU 121). MacDiarmid's introduction to the
1956 edition speaks of the book's

concern with Scottish Gaelic and its effort to bring out
the underlying unity of the Scots and Gaelic elements of
Scotland and rebut the sedulously cultivated idea of an
irreconcilable division between them. My "Lament for the
Great Music", celebrating the *piobaireachd* of the
MacCrimmons and other great pipers is a key poem in this
connection.

(SLSU vi)

The Ceol Mor is, for MacDiarmid, the greatest achievement of Gaelic art
in Scotland, and upon it, more than upon any other single foundation, he
bases his theories and ideals about art, and about the Gaelic Idea.
Of the pibrochs, R.L.C. Lorimer writes:

All but very few of the pibrochs that we possess were composed at various dates between 1600 and 1760. Pibroch was, indeed, a product of the efflorescence of native Scottish Gaelic culture which began during the sixteenth century, and ended soon after the suppression of the last Jacobite Rising in 1745-46; and no completely classical pibrochs have been composed since early in the nineteenth century.

Essentially it is a highly sophisticated kind of early post-medieval art-music, with its own tonal system, its own intricate metrical forms, its own characteristically heroic style; and much of its unique fascination is due to the fact that the West-European classical music of the last three or four hundred years has had little or no influence upon it.

The Ceol Mor, as opposed to popular bagpipe music (Ceol Aotrom or Ceol Beag), is an extremely complex musical structure, with little relation to Western music, but with great similarities to the Indian ragas and other forms of Eastern music: hence its importance for MacDiarmid's idea of an East-West Synthesis.

The "Lament" itself follows a familiar pattern. It begins by lamenting the loss of the Great Music, the fact that it no longer exists, and that in modern society it would, perhaps, be impossible for it to exist. The present debased idea of what bagpipe music is, is bitterly attacked, with the analogy, already used in A Drunk Man and elsewhere, of the contrast between Christ and the present-day Church. The degeneracy of the present is then contrasted by a high vision of the Ceol Mor itself, as an image of the ultimate spiritual reality. And in the closing sections of the poem, we are back again in the evolutionary context, with MacDiarmid explaining how it is necessary to work for the salvation of the
debased present, so that in the future society will come to be an embodiment of the vision. There is the familiar pattern; two opposites, then their evolutionary synthesis.

The poem is, essentially, a Lament: and the strongest emotion in it is one of loss, of separation. MacDiarmid is acutely conscious of the distance which separates him from the great masters of the pibroch: a distance not only temporal but mental.

your music
As I hear it is not as you did and may well be
Unrecognisable to you. You were good Catholics
- Watching me narrowly now from the dachaidh bhuan (eternal home)
And your attitude to the course of history
And to your contemporary duties was similar to theirs.
(252)

The poem is finally about MacDiarmid's attitude to the course of history and his contemporary duties. These pipers had values MacDiarmid could not share:

Your occasions were trumpery .. and far from my liking,
Welcomes to Royalty, Salutes to Chiefs; and I marvel
At the music that towered into Eternity from them
- From the kiss of a king's hand I would have given nothing for
And the like.
(255)

And not only their values: their whole attitude, their means of perception, were formed by an environment which has gone. The Lament is not simply for the passing of a form of music, or for the men who created it, but for the whole ethos which could produce such music. It is a
lament for an idea of Scotland.

These things will pass. "The world will come to an end
But love and music will last for ever."
Sumeria is buried in the desert sands,
Atlantis in the ocean waves - happier these
Than Scotland, for all is gone, no travesty
Of their ancient glories lives
On the lips of degenerate sons as here.
That is what is hard to bear.

This Scotland is not Scotland. How can I think of you
In these cities you never saw, a different world altogether,
Swollen huge with thoughts not thought that should have been
thought,
Watchwords not proclaimed, songs not sung,
Tears unshed for ever and deeds undone beyond achievement now?

This lament culminates in a short passage (256-7) which presents an
image of a Solway landscape at dusk. It is a magnificent piece of
imagistic writing ("the hunting tide of the Solway"), one of MacDiarmid's
finest pieces of simple natural description; but the symbolic interpre-
tation of it fits in so naturally, unobtrusively, that both become
integral parts of one glorious image.

The image of loss, of time passing, has, immediately prior to this
passage, been extended onto its largest scale, eternity.

Yet the waves will not wash the feet
Of MacLeod's Maidens forever...
The State has its root in time. It will culminate in time.
Greater things than this will fall. All religion will fall.
Neither moral principles nor artistic forms
Have any eternity ahead of them.
It is in this kind of context that MacDiarmid can contemplate that which the Ceol Mor really embodied. It begins with the image of the glass of pure water held up to the sun, here used incidentally, later to become the central image of a complete poem (469). It is a moment of revelation, outside time, in which paradox is possibility:

like a man bending his head
As from outside, as a man can, to look at his whole mind
As if it did not belong to him though he knows
It is yet that by which he knows all that he knows.

(258)

"Mind" is the key word here. Although MacDiarmid seems to be talking a kind of spiritual mysticism ("Our spirit is of a being indestructible. / Its activity continues from eternity to eternity" - 259), it is always rooted in the human mind itself:

It is the movement which the mind invents
For its own expression ...
It is the supreme reality (not the Deity of personal theism)
Standing free of all historical events in past or future,
Knowable - but visible to the mind alone.

(259)

It is for this reason that the particular form of the Ceol Mor is able to embody the vision:

But the Ceol Mor is only yours in your own perfect form ...
It is world-wide, ageless. It is the Sufi Nida and Saut;
It is the Indian Ragas, and melodies of the old slokas and ghazals,
Deliberately cast in a non-rhythmic mould because the composers knew
That rhythm is an animal function, whereas poetry and music,
Involving no bodily activity of the artist in their making, 
Can exist in a purely psychological relation to society 
And would be equally "true" in a world of disembodied spirits ... 
The supreme reality is visible to the mind alone.  

The particular forms of Gaelic art here point, for MacDiarmid, the way 
forward for the increasingly "dehumanized" evolution of the human mind, 
until that mind is capable of grasping the ultimate reality. It is a 
materialist apocalypse: eternity will not break into time, time shall 
become eternity by its own efforts.  

The vision, which fills the poet with "lightness and exaltation", 
is a passing one. It leaves him in an even greater darkness from its 
passing, it leaves him alone. Worse, it is a vision of a past glory: 
some see the future destiny of their nation  

But I am companioned by an irrecoverable past, 
By a mystical sense of such a destiny foregone ... 
Time out of mind ... Oh, Alba, my son, my son! 

Another natural image, again one of great beauty, illustrates this. It 
is a vision of dawn in the mountains, 

But the shadows of the hillside closed upon the salute, 
The silence came again, and in a minute or two the dawn was gone. 

He is left in the mire of present society: 

I am horrified by the triviality of life, by its corruption and 
helplessness,
No prospect of eternal life, no fullness of existence, no love without betrayal,
No passion without satiety.

This dejection, however, is only temporary, the immediate aftermath of the great vision; and the poem enters its last phase with the magnificent assertion:

Yet there is no great problem in the world to-day
Except disease and death men cannot end
If no man tries to dominate another.
The struggle for material existence is over. It has been won.
The need for repressions and disciplines has passed.
The struggle for truth and that indescribable necessity,
Beauty, begins now, hampered by none of the lower needs.

It is men who have achieved this, not Gods. (MacDiarmid is careful to note that "Scottish genius has played a foremost role.") There is a kind of grandeur in the sweeping optimism of MacDiarmid's vision. That such lines could be written by a man living in poverty on a desolate island, is a tribute to the greatness of his spirit. It is no easy optimism; it ignores none of the difficulties, none of the idiotic aberrations of men; it is, simply, an overwhelming statement of faith in a species which affords little rational ground for it. Nor are these words facile rhetoric: in their careful control of tone, their simplicity informed by passion, they are poetry.

MacDiarmid now turns back to the pipers, and compares their position with his:
This is the darkness where you have been; and have left
I think forever.

(265)

But his place is still here, his duty is here, to work on the long, slow
task of regeneration.

This must be done to lead men to cosmic consciousness
And as it cannot be quick, except on occasion
And that the creative instant, the moment of divine realisation,
When the self is lit up by its own inner light
Caused in the self by its intensity of thought
Possibly over a long period, it must be thought of as a craft
In which the consummation of the idea, not in analysis but in
synthesis,
Must be the subject of the object - life.

(266)

This he continues to see as the duty of the "Scottish genius", always
more prone to synthesis than to analysis. It is the work of the many, and
of the few:

Civilisation, culture, all the good in the world
Depends ultimately on the existence of a few men of good will.
The perspective will converge upon them yet.

(255-6)

In that last line, all of MacDiarmid's evolutionary vision is packed
into one concise image. The poem closes with a vision of

my beloved Scotland yet
As the land I have dreamt of where the supreme values
Which the people recognise are states of mind
Their ruling passion the attainment of higher consciousness,
a land in which the makers of the Ceol Mor would again be at home. The closing images do not quite come off - there is rather too much of the ludicrous about them - as "All ever born crowd the islands and the West Coast of Scotland / Which has standing room for them all" (267) to listen to the Ceol Mor, and MacDiarmid the poet/visionary gains his ultimate reward by leaping forward and hiding behind one of them. The event is too precisely visualised, and is absurdly inadequate as an objective correlative of the great vision.

The "Lament" is perhaps the least successful of the three central poems of Stony Limits, mainly because it takes rather a long time to get going. The first few pages are confused, garbled, and rather dull. But it also shares their virtues, which are the chief virtues of all MacDiarmid's poetry of this period. It sets out MacDiarmid's world-view: the future and the past in which he passionately believes, and the present, which he despises, but which, he knows, contains the seeds of the future, the inheritance of the past. These poems state this view coherently. At times it gets lost in verbiage and confusion; but at other times it is clear and splendid. This can happen in two ways - either through its being embodied in a clear and memorable image (such as, on a large scale, the stones or the Ceol Mor; or, on a smaller scale, the beautiful description of the Solway in the "Lament") or, more often, as it is stated in direct, passionate rhetoric.

What happens to MacDiarmid's poetry after the 30's, and what we must now go on to examine, is that he comes to rely less on the poetry of images, or even on the poetry of rhetoric. Instead, we are faced with the poetry of fact.
In Memoriam James Joyce is the central example available to us of the kind of poetry MacDiarmid has been engaged on for the past thirty years or so; and it, like everything else written in that time, is to be considered as only part of a vast and all-embracing project, which has over the years undergone numerous changes of title, from Mature Art to the latest Haud Forrit (announced in the Prefatory Note to A Lap of Honour.) In Memoriam James Joyce describes itself as an excerpt "from A Vision of World Language". Nevertheless, it possesses a certain unity as a separate work, and can best be treated as representative of that vast whole which, when it finally appears, will represent MacDiarmid's ultimate contribution to literature.

On page 64 of In Memoriam James Joyce, MacDiarmid states:

Shirokogoroff's Psychomental Complex of the Tungus;
(If that line is not great poetry in itself
Then I don't know what poetry is!)

Many readers have taken him at his word, and decided that he doesn't know what poetry is. Douglas Young, for instance:

A great deal of his stuff to me is exciting enough to read in the way of polemical rhetoric, but it's not poetry. I have the sensation of one climbing a slag-heap and just now and again picking up a semi-precious stone, semi-precious. That's what I feel about the later MacDiarmid. I'm devoted to MacDiarmid, but I don't think his later work will last at all; it's too formless, it's too diluted. He's a jackdaw. He seems to think that scissors and paste of heterogeneous ideas largely culled from the Times Literary Supplement somehow or other can be made into a poem. But it isn't so.
MacDiarmid himself, in the "Author's Note" to In Memoriam James Joyce, pages 16 to 17, indicates that he now considers it "folly" to make any distinction between poetry and prose, and cites such examples as Plato and Marcus Aurelius. He quotes with approval Jacob Fichman's statement that

In the region of the pure spirit everything is resounding poetry - even the barest geometrical formulae.

It appears to me that trying to decide whether or not In Memoriam James Joyce is "Poetry" is a fairly fruitless task, since it too often attempts to use the word "poetry" in an evaluative manner rather than a descriptive manner, and since it too often proceeds from an undiscussed assumption of one particular definition of "poetry".

In the first case, I do not think that the word should be used in this evaluative way. To say "In Memoriam James Joyce is/is not poetry" is not, critically, very helpful. One may attempt to describe the work's form (and then, possibly, to relate this form to accepted genres and definitions), but the critical task is not to question the validity of the form in the abstract, but to evaluate its validity in the particular context of this one poem, its theme, and its treatment.

As to what "poetry" is, there are obviously some limited definitions which would exclude In Memoriam James Joyce. These limitations have their value, in that they provide certainty amidst flux, giving both reader and critic fixed handrails to hold onto. But they do exclude a great deal of experimental writing, which could not be fitted into a correspondingly limited definition of "prose", ranging from In Memoriam James Joyce at one
extreme to "concrete" poetry at the other. It seems to me that there is a wider sense of the word "poetry" that does include these categories, and which we must accept, unless some more precise word can be found. It is, after all, good MacDiarmid doctrine that the more complex must always oust the more simple:

As in the clash between Red Indian and white man
Sophistication wars with simplicity everywhere
With only one possible conclusion.

(IMJJ 143)

Thus I am quite willing to describe In Memoriam James Joyce as "poetry", but I draw no evaluative conclusions from that description.

In fact, in certain notable ways, In Memoriam James Joyce differs decisively from a prose exposition of the theme. For one thing, it is, simply, divided into lines. And, even if the rhythm is so loose as to be almost non-existent, even if the line division appears completely arbitrary, this fact does affect the reader. It makes him expect poetry rather than prose. If he feels he's not getting it, at the very least it challenges him to realise what definition of poetry he in fact holds, and forces him to compare this with "the kind of poetry I want".

Even if he consciously rejects what he's reading as "poetry", I still think the line division creates certain subconscious responses which are too deeply ingrained to be easily or quickly dispensed with. The experience of reading prose is fundamentally different from the experience of reading poetry. This is true even if the words are identical: take the long passage on Karl Kraus, which is taken almost word for word from
a lead article in the *Times Literary Supplement.* (IMJJ 44-51; TLS 8th May 1953.) It is not just that MacDiarmid has brought out certain rhythmic patterns latent in the original, and not just that he has interjected the superb analogy to medicine, but that the very fact of the lineation sets up a tone, both in the poem and in the reader's mind, a tone of "being a poem" which gives the reader an entirely different set of expectations from the expectations aroused by prose, a tone without which the medicinal analogy itself would be impossible.

David Daiches has said of MacDiarmid's later poems that they represent an attempt to include in each phrase of the utterance every relevant phase of human experience, an attempt to thrust multiple ideas at the reader more quickly and forcefully than can be done in prose exposition.23

The key, I feel, is in the words "multiple ideas": for the form of *In Memoriam James Joyce* allows MacDiarmid to "thrust multiple ideas" in multiple ways, using at one moment one type of verse and the next something quite different. Within the same elastic form he can switch from passages of prosaic exposition to brilliantly conceived "far-fetched" analogies from all the arts and sciences; from passages of intense lyricism (such as the section on the wild hawthorn) to impenetrable catalogues of authors and treatises. What holds this all together, as I believe it is held, however loosely, is that overall tone, that assertion the lineation makes of simply "being a poem".

Of the devices which MacDiarmid does use, the one which has attracted most unfavourable attention is that of the catalogue, a long list of
names, books, or miscellaneous facts, without comment, and often intro­duced by such unfortunate phrases as "We are of course also familiar with". This aspect of In Memoriam James Joyce has been criticised by even such a sympathetic reviewer as Edwin Morgan. 

The main criticism is that the poem simply states a name, without giving any information about it. When the reader encounters whole pages of names, scarcely any of which are familiar to him, and is given no comment on them, no guide to their significance or relative importance, he is likely to retreat in bafflement, or simply skip the catalogue and carry on with the rest of the poem. It is the difference between the fascinating exposition of Karl Kraus's theories and their application to Nazi Germany, and coming across the name "Karl Kraus", unglossed, in a list with a hundred others.

I put this point to MacDiarmid when I interviewed him:

Q. Another criticism of your longer poems is that they tend sometimes to be catalogues, to list the names without doing anything with them. What do you feel about this?
A. Well, what I feel about this is, that some of the greatest poetry in the world has been catalogues in that sense. It seems to me that the criticism arises in the minds of people who accept too easily the conventional idea of poetry, that applies to the bulk of English poetry. But in Celtic poetry, and in Indian poetry, and if you go back to Homer, for example, with his Catalogue of Ships, and so on, you find the same device of cataloguing. And I think it's an admirable way of bringing together a sense of the variety and the massiveness of Creation; and you don't need to say anything, you don't need to do anything with these items that you pile up in that way. You simply leave it to the imagination of your readers. And that seems to me a much more desirable thing than to spoonfeed them with things that are too easily assimilated.

I do not find this answer completely satisfactory. The lists and
catalogues in *In Memoriam James Joyce* certainly do convey a sense of the massiveness, and perhaps the variety, of world language: but the same effect could be achieved by the index of a linguistics textbook. Whereas we do not expect MacDiarmid to expand this index in the manner of a textbook, we do I think have a reasonable right to demand its expansion in the manner of a poem. Edwin Morgan points out that it is a fault, both of the catalogues and of the work as a whole, that "its information is too inclusive, too uncritical." MacDiarmid behaves like a guide who leads us into a new, vast, and wonderful terrain, and then abandons us, lost, in the middle of it. Surely the task of the poet is to order his material in a poetic way (that is, in a way which bears upon the themes and organisation of his poem): this may not be the same kind of organisation as a textbook would use, but it is organisation. And it is this key task which the catalogues especially fail to perform.

In conclusion, and in fairness, it should be pointed out that MacDiarmid is not entirely unaware of the oddity, or even the inherent humour, of the form he has chosen. Too often in this poem the unsympathetic reader can find himself laughing at the poet; but there is at least one passage where we are entitled to laugh with him:

Hence this *hapax legomenon* of a poem, this exercise
In schablone, bordatini, and prolonged scordatura,
This *divertissement philologique*,
This *wort-spiel*, this torch symphony,
This 'liberal education', this collection of *fonds de tiroir*,
This - even more than Kierkegaard's
'Frygt og Bøeven' - 'dialectical lyric'
This rag-bag, this Loch Ness monster, this impact
Of the whole range of *welt literatur* on one man's brain,
In short, this 'friar's job', as they say in Spain
Going back in kind
To the Eddic 'Converse of Thor and the All-Wise Dwarf'
(Al-viss Mal, 'Edda die lieden des Codex Regius', 120, 1 f)
Existing in its present MS form
Over five centuries before Shakespeare.
You remember it?  

Thematically, *In Memoriam James Joyce* is an extension of the themes
and concerns of the poems of the 30s, and many of the ideas and attitudes
will be familiar to the reader. There is the same bitterly cynical
attack on many aspects of present day society (in the section "The
Snares of Varuna", pages 103-5), balanced against the vision of evolution.
(Also, MacDiarmid's literary Anglophobia reaches new and brilliant heights
in the section "England is Our Enemy", pages 119-129.)

The visionary sections of *In Memoriam James Joyce* are very intense,
and amount at times almost to a "mystical" attitude. The vision
towards which all evolution is moving is one of unity:

Making what a moving, thrilling, mystical, tropical,
Maniacal, magical creation of all these oppositions
...
Timeless, a symbol of the reality
That lies beyond and through the apparent
...
I know that in the final artistic
- The highest human - vision
There is neither good nor evil,
Better nor worse,
But only the harmony
Of that which is,
The pure phenomenon
Abiding in the eternal radiance.

(ImJi 87, 98.)

This takes us back to the vision of the Great Wheel, or even to "A
Moment in Eternity", from Annals of the Five Senses.

This vision of unity and harmony reaches its climax in the final section of the poem, "Plaited Like the Generations of Men", which utilizes again MacDiarmid's favorite illustration from Gaelic poetry, Aodhagan O'Rathaille's "Gile na Gile".

The opening pages of this section contain some of MacDiarmid's best visionary writing. There is in it a kind of exaltation, which communicates itself to the reader as a deeply emotional experience. MacDiarmid's poetry is often cerebral, depending for its impact on the reader's response to its ideas, and the dynamic of their interrelations; and this has often been held against him.

It is, for instance, the centre of Iain Crichton Smith's argument against MacDiarmid in his pamphlet The Golden Lyric. Crichton Smith's argument is that, whereas an idea can be contradicted, a poem cannot be, or should not be.

If you take a poem like In Memoriam James Joyce, all you have at the end of it is just an additional bit of knowledge, that is to say, you've got an additional bit of mental knowledge, which you could get from a philosopher, or from a historian, but I don't think this is what poetry should be doing. One should feel, when one has written a good poem, when one has read a good poem, one should be changed by it.

When the ideas in the poem are detachable they can be contradicted and often are. MacDiarmid can be contradicted when one discusses his In Memoriam James Joyce.

I think this is grossly unfair to In Memoriam James Joyce, and to MacDiarmid's work as a whole, though there are individual poems, and bits
of poems, to which it could be applied. But what it ignores is that
In Memoriam James Joyce is not simply giving us "an additional bit of
knowledge": it is the statement of a vision which proceeds from that
knowledge.

And the exaltation, the excitement of this vision, provide the
emotional depth which is too often missing in MacDiarmid's poetry:

Now you understand how stars and hearts are one with another
And how there can nowhere be an end, nowhere a hindrance;
How the boundless dwells perfect and undivided in the spirit,
How each part can be at once infinitely great and infinitely small,
How the utmost extension is but a point, and how
Light, harmony, movement, power
All identical, all separate, and all united are life.

This unity is set in the context of eternity. The thoroughly
materialistic view of infinity and immortality, which we saw in "Island
Funeral", is now supplemented by the further assertion:

In this realistic mood I recognise
With a grim animal acceptance
That it is indeed likely enough that the 'soul'
Perishes everlastingly with the death of the body,
But what this realistic mood, into which
My mind falls like a plummet
Through the neutral zone of its balanced doubt,
Never for one single beat of time can shake or disturb
Is my certain knowledge,
Derived from the complex vision of everything in me,
That the whole astronomical universe, however illimitable,
Is only one part and parcel of the mystery of Life;
Of this I am as certain as I am certain that I am I.
The astronomical universe is not all there is.

MacDiarmid's doubts certainly remain, and late in the poem he
can still turn back on himself and say

Ah! no! no! Intolerable end
To one who set out to be independent of faith
And of mystical perception.

(IMJI 135)

(MacDiarmid always shies away from the word "mystical").

Here we come to the final union of opposites in MacDiarmid's work: on the one hand, the materialistic distrust of the "mysticism" inherent in his nature, the prosaic insistence on the minutiae of human achievement and knowledge; and on the other, the vision of infinite harmony. The uniting of these opposites is achieved, as it is throughout his work, in his faith in evolution, which is the basic theme of In Memoriam James Joyce.

Edwin Morgan describes the "general meaning and argument" of the poem in these words:

Evolution is a fact, but man's evolution is being held up because the great diversity of human cultures and languages haven't learned yet how to communicate with one another, how to pool all their resources, how to make a single worldwide advance. Things of value are isolated and not known. It is the duty of the poet to help to bring cultures and languages together, and eventually to create a world language, just as the modern artist has drawn together so many styles and forms of art from distant periods and countries, because for the first time in human history modern methods of reproduction have made it possible for any one man to know all about all the arts of the world.

I think myself that the poem goes further than that. It is not
merely that the diversity of language is a hindrance to evolution. This is the negative side of the coin, but the positive side seems to me more important. Such a world language, once achieved, will be the most important single tool in the process of evolution: and this is the reason for MacDiarmid's passion for language as such. It is the centre of his whole system. The central statement of the poem is that made on page 52, and repeated and expanded thus on page 65:

Concerned, I repeat, with the shrewd analysis of the space-time network
As the distinctive character of human consciousness
And of language as the instrument
For the progressive articulation of the world
In spatial and temporal terms. Not retaining
The naive or 'copy' theory of language and creating
An artificial difficulty about space. As speech flows in time,
As it is time, there is no difficulty in its expressing
Temporal ordering, but how can the fugitive
Express or translate the static ordering of things in space?
The answer takes us beyond the theory that language
Reduplicates or reconstructs a pre-existently given world
And leads in the direction of the theory outlined
In Cassirer's masterly discussion of speech
In his 'Philosophie der Symbolischen Formen'
In which the temporal as well as the spatial functions
Are exhibited as underived, or properly creative, functions
Through which speech actually shapes and extends our experience;
Not reproductions of the given
But conditions of anything being given
And of its progressive elaboration,
'The supreme organ of the mind's self-governing growth.'

It should be noted that this passage reads exactly like some of the theoretical justifications of the bases of concrete poetry. While we can fully understand that the kind of poetry MacDiarmid has produced in his later years is completely antithetical to that valued by Ian Hamilton
Finlay, it is also true that there are great similarities in their view of language as creating experience. Edwin Morgan's interest in both concrete poetry and *In Memoriam James Joyce* is in fact a much more sensible attitude than Finlay's and MacDiarmid's rejection of each other.

The key term is obviously "progressive articulation", for evolution will end when all possibilities have been realised, when language has articulated the ultimate unity - and this is the goal towards which all mankind is moving.

So this is what our lives have been given to find,
A language that can serve our purposes.  

(Imjj 88)

This is the connection to Joyce, who, although (as Edwin Morgan points out) he had little or no interest in the kind of evolution MacDiarmid is talking about, takes his place in the poem as a mighty force in the development of language itself, the tool of evolution. And it is Joyce who is addressed in the magnificent passage at the climax of the poem which describes biological evolution in terms of linguistic evolution, and vice versa, so that the two become fused, both being metaphors for something far greater, as well as being essential parts of it.

Even as nerves before ever they function
Grow where they will be wanted; levers laid down in gristle
Become bone when wanted for the heavier pull
Of muscles which will clothe them; lungs, solid glands
Yet arranged to hollow out at a few minutes' notice
When the necessary air shall enter; limb-buds
Futile at their appearing, yet deliberately appearing
In order to become limbs in readiness
For an existence where they will be all-important;
A pseudo-aquatic parasite, voiceless as a fish,
Yet containing within itself an instrument of voice
Against the time when it will talk;
Organs of skin, ear, eye, nose, tongue,
Superfluous all of them in the watery dark
Where formed - yet each unhaltingly preparing
To enter a daylit, airy, object-full manifold world
They will be wanted to report on. Everywhere we find
Prospective knowledge of needs of life
Which are not yet but are foreknown.
All is provided. As Aristotle says,
'To know the end of a thing is to know the why of it.'
So with your work, vastly outrunning present needs
With its immense complication, its erudition,
(The intricacy of the connections defies description.
Before it the mind halts, abased. In tenuis labor.)
But providing for the developments to come . . . .

(IMJ 143)

And this takes us all the way back to the climax of A Drunk Man

Looks at the Thistle:

And organs may develop syne
Responsive to the need divine
O' single-minded humankin'.

The function, as it seems to me,
O' Poetry is to bring to be
At lang, lang last that unity.

(147)

Only a very superficial view of MacDiarmid's poetry could see
any decisive break or discontinuity in it. It is all a unity, being in
itself, with its immense variety yet continuity, a total prefiguration of
that harmony which is its ultimate vision.
And all this here, everything I write, of course
Is an extended metaphor for something I never mention.

What then is to be our final summation of Hugh MacDiarmid? About some things there can be no doubt. Critics may disagree about whether or not to call him a "great poet" (I myself have no doubt), but as a man of letters he has been, for half a century, an endlessly interesting writer and an immensely fertilising influence.

His various works, in verse and prose, in pamphlets and polemics, have presented a continual challenge to accepted ideas in almost every area of Western literary culture. If he is still too little known, this is due partly to the eccentricity of many of his views, but also to the polite indifference, or empty lip service, which has so often justified his own worst indictments of the English literary establishment. His reputation stands higher in Budapest or Peking than in London.

His influence in Scotland is all-pervasive. He can be held directly responsible for the emergence of a whole group of poets, and for the revival of poetry in the Scots language. How long that revival can last, is something which still remains to be seen: but that it should have happened at all is sufficiently remarkable, and something which could not have been logically foreseen fifty years ago. His poetic influence has not been confined to poetry in Scots, however, for he has also created, or re-created, in Scotland a climate in which any poetry of intellectual stature is again possible. If a poet like Sydney Goodsir
Smith owes much of his poetic existence to MacDiarmid, this is no less true of Norman MacCaig.

There now seems to be arising in Scotland a younger generation of poets who do not feel this debt to MacDiarmid, who are at best indifferent to his work, or even openly hostile. While it is true that this attitude is partly the product of the fiercely partisan nature of much of MacDiarmid's own literary polemic, I feel it is to be greatly regretted. Any young poet who dismisses MacDiarmid's achievement is depriving no-one but himself.

Direct imitation of MacDiarmid is probably impossible, for his type of writing is too highly individual to be copied, so direct signs of influence are few and far between. Certainly, none of his poetic followers have taken up his central theme of evolution; and the attempts of a young poet like Alan Bold to extend MacDiarmid's poetic treatment of Communist politics and scientific fact have been, so far, fairly disastrous. But we must remember that twenty years elapsed between A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle and the so-called "second wind" of the Scottish Renaissance. MacDiarmid's later poetry may yet bear fruit in some new and unexpected way.

But quite apart from his influence and his reputation, apart even from his political and polemical prose, we are left with MacDiarmid's achievements as a poet. If I have concentrated on this aspect of his work, it is because I believe it to be the most valuable and lasting part of his achievement. It is not sufficient to say that MacDiarmid is Scotland's finest poet since Burns, or that no English-born poet of this century comes close to him. MacDiarmid is a poet who has produced some
of the world's finest short lyrics, and a long lyrical-dramatic-reflective poem (A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle) of unequalled complexity and assurance; who has introduced into poetry the most extreme of political views and the most erudite of scientific facts and yet related them to a total poetic vision of the world; and whose poetry is informed by a faith in the potentialities of human evolution which is truly epic in scale.

By any standards, Hugh MacDiarmid is a great poet.
PART TWO

SYDNEY GOODSIR SMITH
ROBERT GARIOCH
NORMAN MACCAIG
IAIN CRICHTON SMITH
INTRODUCTION

The four poets discussed in this section, Sydney Goodsir Smith, Robert Garioch, Norman MacCaig, and Iain Crichton Smith, seem to me to be the most important writers in Scots and English to have come to the fore in the period (roughly 1945 - 1960) of what Eric Linklater called the "second wind" of the Scottish Renaissance. (MacDiarmid is, as it were, the "first wind." ) As I have said, their resemblances to MacDiarmid are more accidental than essential, but MacDiarmid was responsible for the kind of atmosphere in which they were working. This atmosphere is perhaps best reflected in the industrious editorial work of Maurice Lindsay, whose anthology of Modern Scottish Poetry for Faber in 1946 provided a convenient summary of the achievements so far, and whose magazine Poetry Scotland, in its four issues from 1943 to 1949, provided a platform for further achievements. The idea that poetry of literary worth and intellectual standing could be produced in Scotland seemed more possible to young writers in these years than it had done to their predecessors a generation before, faced with what was to them the stultifying influence of the "Kailyaird" poets, or Scottish Victorians.

But the actual achievements of this period are to be found in the individual contributions of the poets themselves, rather than in the programmes they drew up. The most obvious illustration of this is the vexed question of language.

The Renaissance poets, in the first flush of their enthusiasms,
looked forward to a complete renewal of Scots, in which it would once again become a spoken tongue, used not only in literature but also in everyday commerce, in newspapers, etc. In this they have obviously failed. Even the literary use is less common now than it was twenty years ago. Few of the young Scottish poets use Scots for anything other than comic effect. It is always possible, as it was possible in 1920, that a great poet writing in Scots will again appear: but MacDiarmid's example suggests that, even if such an event were to occur, its effects would be limited and temporary.

It is worth looking at the linguistic practice of the four poets of this section in this connection. For two of them, the question of writing in Scots simply never arises: indeed, for both MacCaig and Crichton Smith, the more natural language to turn to would be Gaelic. Goodsir Smith learned Scots, as if it were a foreign language; only with Garioch is it fully natural.

One of MacDiarmid's central contentions was that Scots was as capable as English was of being used in serious intellectual poetry, a poetry of ideas: but A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle stands as a sole, if magnificent, vindication of this statement. It is not borne out by either Goodsir Smith or Garioch. Goodsir Smith uses Scots for primarily emotional purposes; Garioch uses it naturally as a part of his intensely local humour. Neither of them write anything which could be called "poetry of ideas." MacCaig and Crichton Smith, on the other hand, do: their poetry concerns ideas such as perception and duality. This is not to say that either of them are original thinkers; few poets are.
Their achievement, like MacDiarmid's, is to synthesize other people's ideas into a personal vision, and, again like MacDiarmid, their best poetry is that which proceeds from this vision rather than that which proceeds more directly from the ideas themselves.

It is interesting, surely, that these poets do bear out the very distinction which MacDiarmid quarrelled with, namely, that Scots is a language of the emotions, and that when a Scot wants to think in abstract ideas he has to resort to English. Even a poet as stubbornly Scottish as Tom Scott is, in effect, writing in English in passages such as the following, from his most recent work, *At the Shrine o the Unkent Sodger* (Akros, 1968, page 16):

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Therefore the solidarity we need
In face o reality's indifference til us,
Is no an "international" non-entity,
(Veiled imperialism), but a true
Federal Union o Nations, free and equal,
The least wi the greatest, as aa human souls,
The idiot and Russell, are equal afore God.
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Scots is a language which is immensely rich and effective for certain purposes; and the success of Goodsir Smith and Garioch lies largely in the extent to which their own poetic purposes were exactly served by (or perhaps created by) the potentialities of the language. But equally, we have to acknowledge the extent to which the poetry of Norman MacCaig, Iain Crichton Smith, and other Scottish poets, depends upon the qualities of the English language.
SYDNEY GOODSIR SMITH
Of all MacDiarmid's followers in the use of Scots for poetry, none, except possibly Robert Garioch, has been more consistent or more successful than Sydney Goodsir Smith. Smith himself certainly acknowledges the debt. He says that he started writing in Scots as a result of reading *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, and he has always retained a great admiration for Hugh MacDiarmid, as well as a personal friendship with C.M. Grieve.

They have many things in common (not least their affection for the pubs of Rose Street), but in at least one aspect they are very different. Whereas a concern for the personal, individual relationships of men and women, for sex and/or love, is seldom apparent in MacDiarmid's work, it stands at the centre of Goodsir Smith's. MacDiarmid is, admittedly, a poet of the intellect; Sydney Goodsir Smith is a poet of the passions. This applies also to their political views. For MacDiarmid, the Scottish-Nationalist-Communist line of John Maclean is valued as a vital constituent part of his social vision; for Goodsir Smith, it is the practical embodiment of that love for liberty to which he gives a strongly emotional allegiance. The centre of his poetry is the "haill trinitie" (VPS 27) of Love, Life, and Liberty.

The two poets do, however, share a certain duality of approach, that which MacDiarmid has described as the Caledonian Antisyzygy. Goodsir Smith, in his *Short Introduction to Scottish Literature*, concisely defined this as:

the combination at once of two or more seemingly irreconcilable qualities; for instance .. the combination in one
This quality, as we have already seen, is reflected in the Scots language itself: and Goodsir Smith has used Scots consistently throughout his work. He shares MacDiarmid's passion for language as such; but his main delight is in the pun. *Carotid Cornucopius* represents the apotheosis of this delight. The Scots he uses could be called "synthetic"; when I asked him what kind of Scots it was he replied: "It's juist Scots - vernacular and littery mixed - like ony itha damned lingo." (Letter to the author, 20th August 1967.) The mixture of vernacular and "littery" is in fact Goodsir Smith's most characteristic feature, and from it he draws many of his finest effects.

His poetry relies more on aural than on visual effects. His imagery is not always vivid or original, but his ear rarely fails him. He is a master of tone: and it is here that the vernacular/literary dichotomy functions. Goodsir Smith can reproduce with equal facility either the dignified sonorities of Dunbar at his most rhetorical, or the natural comic force of the common speech of the Edinburgh pubs. These are the poles between which he operates. He rarely uses (as Burns was wont to do) the contrast between "low" Scots and "high" Anglo-Scots; rather he finds both "high" and "low" styles within the Scots language itself.

The trinity of Love, Life, and Liberty also implies two more dichotomies within his work. Firstly, there is that between love and politics: an inward-turning concern with a particular relationship, and
an outward-turning concern with the whole social community. This conflict appears several times in his early poetry (in *Under the Eildon Tree*, it is debated in Propertian terms), and in the later poetry there is a series of attempts to reconcile it. Secondly, there is the fundamental dichotomy between Life and Death, and the theme of mortality, the necessary imperfection of human life, underlies his attitudes to both love and politics.

The Scots language does provide a context in which Goodsir Smith can reconcile the opposites inherent in his style; but the opposites inherent in his themes are harder to reconcile. A great deal of his work consists of the search for a context in which this reconciliation might become possible. This search is complicated by the fact that his love poetry is generally much more successful than his political poetry.

These themes are apparent throughout Goodsir Smith's work, although there is a central period (roughly, 1948 to 1958) in which the political theme is dormant.

In the early books, however, especially *The Wanderer* and *The Deevil's Waltz*, the political concern is to the fore, but it does not exclude short love lyrics in both books. "The Wanderer" itself, or, to give it its full title, "Peter Morrison or The Wanderer, a Poem in 12 Cantos," is a loosely connected series of poems on the theme of Scotland's freedom, presented as the musings of Peter Morrison, a wanderer and social outcast. To him Goodsir Smith applies all his favourite words: "outlan", "gangrel", "skalrag", etc. This figure of the disreputable drunken outsider is to become the central part of Goodsir Smith's imagery.
culminating in "The Grace of God and the Meth Drinker" (FT 18); but in "The Wanderer" he emerges more as an imitation Byronic hero, standing

Sterk upo yir darklin crag
Brou naked tae the tourbillon.  
(WP 11)

The "outlan"'s position in society is akin to the poet's, and the poet stands along with him, both in his rejection of society, and in his love of alcohol. The climax of the poem comes in Canto X: "Pushkin and the Rebel Bards Rampage at Kenmore". Among the "rebel bards" are Byron, Burns, Lermontov, Lorca, Rimbaud, Villon, and Hölderlin, and to them Peter Morrison addresses this admonition:

Gangreis, makars, subjugated laans,
My Scotland - aa yir weirds are ane.  
(WP 20)

"The Wanderer" is by no means one of Goodsir Smith's better poems. It is heavy-handed in its effects, and too often gives the impression of striking cliched Romantic poses of rebellion. This is not to question Goodsir Smith's sincerity, but only to say that he had not yet sufficient control of the language to speak with his own voice. We must remember that Scots was not native to Goodsir Smith, who was born in New Zealand; it is a language he learned entirely from the outside. In this poem it seems rather too determined to be Scots, and the rhythms tend to get bogged down in the long lines. As with most of Goodsir Smith's political
poetry, the ideas are unoriginal, and remain on the level of slogans when not animated by the language. While the basic emotion - the desire for freedom - comes across strongly, one misses the precision, and the intellectual concern for all aspects of a problem, which are present in MacDiarmid's best political poetry.

"The Wanderer" does, however, give a first clear statement of Good sir Smith's themes of the outcast, and the poet as rebel, which, together with the poet as lover, form the central figures of his poetic world.

_The Deevil's Waltz_ is more systematically divided into three sections: Venus, Prometheus, and Mars. "Mars" deals with the Second World War; "Prometheus" with the Scottish situation. The statements are simple: the love of freedom, the bravery of those who die in the war, the determination that their death should bring freedom not only to Europe but to Scotland also.

The most elaborate exposition of the theme comes in "On the Don, August, 1942" (DW 47), which takes the form of an imaginary conversation between a Russian soldier at Stalingrad and a Scots soldier who wishes to "Mak Embro toun Sevastopol." The Russian soldier replies that

"Ye'se get ye free, I ken, as we did, frae The Mongers."

The idea is striking, but the poem as a whole suffers from a certain naivety of sentiment, which is apparent in most of the political poems in the book. These are slogans, stirring rallying-cries, competently
versified propaganda, but they are not good poems. They lack any strong sense of individual experience forming itself under pressure into words and lines. Perhaps the best way to explain the unsatisfactoriness of so much of the "Mars" and "Prometheus" sections is to look at the one really successful poem in them, for it contains what is lacking in the others.

This is "Largo" (DW 33), still among Goodsir Smith's best poems, and one of his few successful political lyrics. To start with, we are confronted with a particular situation, the decline of the fishing port of Largo, which can be expressed in a vivid image of direct experience:

Ae boat anerlie nou
Fishes frae this shore,
Ae black drifter lane
Riggs the crammasie daw,
Aince was a fleet, and nou
Ae boat alane gaes oot.

There are still romantic overtones in the picture of the single black boat seen against the crimson of the dawn, but the single boat is not simply a romantic image, it is also a hard economic fact.

In the second stanza, the single image is concisely related to the whole economic pattern of depopulation:

War ir Peace, the trawlers win
An the youth turns awa
Bricht wi baubles nou
An thirled tae factory ir store;
Their faithers fished their ain,
Unmaistered; - ane remains.
Goodsir Smith's mastery of the language and verse forms is now more apparent: in the third line, the long stress on the first syllable of "baubles" inevitably produces a tone of contempt in the speaking voice; and in the last line, the very strong caesura is exactly right for the contrast implied between past and present.

The third stanza completes the generalization of the image, again with great concision. The poem's economy of means is among its chief virtues, and also suggests the strength of the emotion which could inform such understatement.

And never the clock rins back,
The free days are owre;
The warld shrinks, we luik
Mair t'oor maisters ilka hour -

Then the last two lines bring us right back to the opening image, and introduce for the first time the actual presence of the poet, which has been implied throughout by the urgency of the emotion:

Whan yon lane boat I see
Daith an rebellion blinn ma ee!

The sentiment is exactly right: it has the heroic touch we would associate with the lone boat still bravely setting out, but it has also the hopelessness of that boat, the hopelessness that knows that the clock will not run back. The "rebellion" here is not confined to a political concept of Communism or any other ideology: it is an emotional reaction
against the whole plight of the lone boat, or the lone man, in the face of death and time and the inevitable workings of forces beyond his control.

These, then, are the qualities present in "Largo", the lack of which is responsible for the comparative failure of the other poems in the book: a strong sense of individual experience and emotion, stemming from a particular observed moment, the emotion providing the context for the elaboration of the particular image into a valid general statement; and all this done with a concision and force of language which does not need to fall back on slogans or accepted formulae, each word springing directly from the actual experience at hand.

Another Largo poem, "The Viaduct" (LM 32), attempts the same kind of movement, but the elaboration of the image is less convincing, more arbitrary. In Coleridgean terms, "The Viaduct" is a product of the Fancy, "Largo" of the Imagination. But the poem does contain Goodsir Smith's most characteristic image, that of the lone man, the outcast, looking at a separate society:

Godlike, spieran, miscontentit Man ....
Surveys his riven legacie.

One feels that Goodsir Smith is much more at home in the "Venus" section. The experience that underlies much of the political poetry remains hypothetical; but the intermingled joys and defeats of love are much closer to the actual lives of both poet and reader. Though many of the poems are conventional enough in sentiment and even in language
(Goodsir Smith does, for instance, grossly overuse the image of the "white doo", and there is always the suspicion that this is more because of the easy rhyme with "loo" than because he ever did see a girl in the image of a dove), we are never far away from flashes like:

Hert, ma hert, forgae
This dirlan o ma saul,
Ye steer ma deeps til a reel o flame
Lik a smashed coal.

(DW 14)

Further, while Goodsir Smith can speak of the "skaith" of love as well as the next man, he can speak rather better of the happiness of it, as in the lovely new words he sets to the tune of "Greensleeves":

Greensleeves waunered throu the snaw,
0 ma winter lassie 0,
Snaw flakes mang her curls did blaw,
Greensleeves 0 ma dearie 0.

(DW 26)

Another characteristic aspect is shown in the fourth of the "Five Blye Sangs for Marion":

I loo ma luve in a lamplit bar
Braw on a wuiden stool,
Her knees cocked up an her neb doun
Slorpan a pint o yill.

(DW 25)

The realism and force of this "low" style is informed by a warm affection. The girl who can sit in the bar "slorpan" her drink is in the same milieu
as Peter Morrison and the Rebel Bards at Kenmore. For Goodsir Smith, drink is a great force of friendliness and genuine comradeship, set against the shallow friendships of conventional society; and the love which flourishes in this atmosphere is more honest, more full-blooded, than any correct exchange of compliments.

Yet, at the opposite extreme, Goodsir Smith is equally attracted to the formalism of mediaeval love poetry, especially in the style of the great Scottish Makars. In The Deevil's Waltz, he writes an impressive variation on Dunbar's "Lament for the Makaris" in "In a Time of Deepest Wanhope" (20); and the Venus section closes with an elaborate medieval imitation, a "Hymn of Luve til Venus Queen." (27). This poem is too strictly a formal exercise to be successful as a modern poem, but it does indicate Goodsir Smith's grasp of the idiom, and the final introduction of "Marion an Sydney" is genuinely moving.

In the "Venus" section, the various elements of Goodsir Smith's love poetry are all present, but unfused. His future success was to lie in combining more closely the moods of "skaith" and happiness, the "low" and "high" styles.

By the time the Saltire Selected Poems appeared in 1947, Sydney Goodsir Smith had to his credit a fair number of moderately successful lyrics, and at least one great one ("Largo"). He could be seen as a very competent versifier in Scots, with a wide vocabulary and a good control of aural values. But there was really nothing to indicate that he might become anything like a major poet, or any indication of the astonishing outburst of genius which was to produce in the next two years the first editions of Carotid Cornucopius and Under the Eildon Tree.
Carotid Cornucopius is not, strictly speaking, "poetry", but no study of Sydney Goodsir Smith could be complete without some mention of it. It is perhaps his most characteristic book; freed from the formalities of verse his imagination runs riot with the language. The form invites chaos; and chaos, of a most agreeable kind, is in fact the result. But whereas the obvious parallels to Rabelais and Joyce have been drawn, what Goodsir Smith shares is more their zest than their breadth of reference.

To read Carotid Cornucopius at all, you have to be adept at puns, for almost every word of the text (except for 'the's, 'and's, 'in's, etc.) is punned on, transformed into some strange new growth in Scots or English. The punning is not entirely random; most of it carries either a sexual or an alcoholic implication.

The first four Fitts (published in 1947) take place in an alcoholic stupor; the second four (in the revised and expanded edition of 1964) contain more action and move slightly faster. But the general tone is leisurely, as befits a production which aims eventually at "in-containuinenting shree hunder and sexty-five fitts, ane for ilka nicht of the rear, with a Pologue and a Peppybogue." (Title page.)

In the second half, Goodsir Smith's love/politics dichotomy arises again, in the person of Rory, the precocious infant whose first act after birth is to dash off to the Battle of Preston Pans (or rather, the "bottle of Prancing Puns.") (CC 129). He spends his youth "straddling the glob with his rumvolutions, bounceructions, coups d'elites, thwackower beds and rumbellibreezes" (CC 132), but his political career comes to an abrupt end when he meets Biddy, the Scottish Aphrodite, who is born in a
rowing boat off Portobello, popping from the womb into the ocean, from
which she thus rises "and-a-dampo-bottomie" (Anadyomene):

Ay, sae it wisht. Rorie met his Matey Hurie in the sweet
and swacky shelp of Hotsie Doxie, or Biddie for shrift, at
the verry psuchalumpogal mopsiment that Dom Cupido, crossing
wingfolly through the beerimose air of the Ben Niveas
Tupfairm, let lowse by chancet a cassyouall dairt without
a thocht of annie harem in the whurld frae owt his twirly
quaver, twainspricking with the yea shuft the twa-twin
palpitearing hairts of bro and sis. Gane at frast dunt
ware all Rorie's draums of bottle and rumspirations of
glaurie, all his doddipatit phows to dung and dae for the
freedram and lowpity of Bonie Schottland the Bragf, gane was
owl thocht of ocht in his heid but the lampid ee and the
ploumpie chocks, the cheery laps and niddity paps, the
butterie yarrow locks and the roundontulous heaving hochs
of Biddie the Bride in a Gowden Cache, the walloway Avril-
subtitie of Auld Rakie, fantail womban if eve'r there wisht
wan, the bummie birdie.

(CC 142-3.)

Carotid Cornucopius is a very funny book, and an overwhelming
assertion of the carnalities of life; but its chief interest lies in its
use of language. It is a further example of the passion for language
as such which informs so much of MacDiarmid's work; and the compulsive
punning is completely functional. In the above passage, note the
conflation in "draum" of dream, dram, and the Scots "dwaum"; or the
deflation of the word "glory" when it is crossed with "glaur". A word
such as "freedram" is not merely the sum of "freedom" and "dram": it is
a synthesis which incorporates both of them, and has a further life of
its own.

This use of pun is in some ways similar to the use of pun in some
of the concrete poems of, say, Ian Hamilton Finlay. The puns are not
there simply for their own sake, as ends in themselves, but also as means to a further end. They are creative, they produce a synthesis which is a new concept; and it seems to me that this is an essentially poetic process.

The main difference is one of context: whereas a pun by Finlay would be set all alone on the page, to survive by its delicacy and beauty in the surrounding white spaces, a pun by Goodsir Smith is set in a continuous stream of similar puns and ribaldry. Finlay's humour is gentle and quiet; Goodsir Smith's raucous and bawdy. The choice between them is more a matter of personal than of literary taste.

*Under the Eildon Tree, "A Poem in XXIV Elegies",* is beyond doubt the finest single volume of poetry that Sydney Goodsir Smith has yet produced. In it, he is in complete control of his language and idiom, and has fully created his own personal mythology, or poetic world.

The basic idea is straightforward - that of a series of poems written by a lover who is no longer in favour with his mistress - but several other themes are brought into play, forming a structure of opposites, of dualities, of contrasting attitudes.

The most obvious of these dualities is that between the happiness of fulfilled, mutual love and the unhappiness of love rejected. In the poet's case, this is linked with a contrast between past and present, for most of his happiness lies in the past:

My luve that aince I had - and tint.
The poem is, after all, a series of "elegies", and its most obvious precedent (not quite source) is, as Goodsir Smith acknowledges, Propertius, or rather Propertius via Ezra Pound. The protagonist is looking back on past happiness: such beautiful moments as that recorded in Elegy VIII are recorded in the past tense.

Some kind of resolution of this conflict is to be found in the nature of love itself, which can give a kind of pleasure by its very pain. This is brought out in the lovely Elegy XXI, which describes a moment of meeting and insight between two strangers, united only by their knowledge of each other's "grame". The Elegy closes with a couplet from Gavin Douglas, which is also prefixed to the poem as a whole:

> O luif, quiddar ar yow joy or fulichnes
> That makis folk sa glaid of thair distres?  

(UET 59)

The idea of love as a "foolishness" is reiterated throughout the poem, but it is a foolishness inseparable from a kind of grandeur. The poem begins and ends with an address to his love as "my great follie and my granderie."

Thus the duality of the happiness and unhappiness of love merges with that of love's folly and grandeur: and the two aspects are inseparable.

The past/present dichotomy is also evident in the parallels drawn to great figures from the past: they are all, like Propertius, lovers who have lost their loves, whose happiness lies in the past, but whose "granderie" lies in their very tragedy. So it is with Orpheus (XII),
Dido (XVI), Tristram (XX), Antony (XXII). Cuchulainn (XV) is seen in relation to Fann rather than to Eimhir; Burns (X) to Highland Mary rather than to Jean Armour; even the Odysseus elegy (XIV) is addressed to Cynthia, not Penelope.

Of course, all these allusions to figures of history, legend, and literature are in themselves part of the past/present dichotomy. Complementing them is the poet himself, who closes the whole poem with his own precise signature in place and time:

Quod S.G.S., Makar
Embro toun, Dec.1946 - Feb. 1947
(UET 64)

The relation between the poet and his mythological characters is a real and dynamic one, by no means a literary pose. Past and present are brought into relationship, first of all by the language. The mythological figures are brought alive by the vigour of the language, which frees them from the deadening associations of centuries of English poetry. The fact that the language is a vernacular gives them a reality as individual persons rather than as universalised legends; at the same time the language is capable of the formal dignity necessary when they are viewed in a mythological context. Thus the present reality of the language is taken into the past; conversely, the past is brought into the present as Goodsir Smith applies to his own love (who is presumably Marion, although her name is never mentioned) all the mythological names and associations of Cynthia, Artemis, and Aphrodite. What would in most modern poems appear as anachronism, or as superficial
decoration, or as derivative posturing, does in fact work for Goodsir Smith, because his poetry convinces us of the reality of these mythological references as a living part of his emotional world. He addresses Marion as Cynthia because Cynthia is as real to him as Marion is; and not simply because other poets in the past addressed their loves as Cynthia.

Of course, this latter consideration is partly the reason also, because Goodsir Smith is very conscious of his own position as poet, or makar, standing in a great tradition of poets who have offered tributes to their ladies and their goddesses. Hence the conscious modelling of the poem after Pound and Propertius, hence the conscious use of "littery" Scots, the vocabulary and rhythms of Dunbar.

Most of the poem is written in "high" style, and achieves a genuine dignity of utterance. But we have already noted the contrasting possibilities within the Scots language, which are also part of Dunbar's poetic world (the contrast between "The Golden Targe" and "The Tretis of the Tua Mariit Wemen and the Wedo"). There is also in the poem a "low" style, which is very colloquial and richly comic, used mainly in Elegies V and XIII, but which keeps on making occasional appearances, in asides, as a comment on the more dignified utterance, antisyzygistically. Thus the Odysseus elegy (XIV) begins with the question "O wha can flee his ain love?", answers it with the colloquial "No me!", and immediately launches into an address to "My Cynthia, mune o the nicht."

This contrast between high and low styles corresponds very roughly to the past/present dichotomy, in that the high style is usually applied to the figures of the past whereas Sydney's own junketings in the pubs
of modern Edinburgh are described in the low style. But this is a
general rule which is made to be broken, and some of the most effective
moments of the poem result from the application of one or other style
to the opposite subject from usual. (This is most notable in Elegies
XII and XIII, which I shall be examining in detail.)

The low style is also used, after the Propertian manner, for making
comic, self-mocking comments, either on a grandiose scale (Elegy V), or,
more often, in single lines, as when Elegy VII ends with a quiet state­
ment of despair:

Gin ye didna ken
And you anerlie
That ahint the bravadie
This hert is near spent . . .

followed by the comment

(The sheer bress neck o the man!)

(The position of the bard in the poem, which is central to the use
of the different styles and of the classical references, also underlies
the other two main dichotomies of the poem. The first of these is the
familiar Goodsir Smith division between love and politics. In Under
the Eildon Tree, he adopts the position of Pound's Propertius, who
deprecated to write poems in the tone of "The Euphrates denies its
protection to the Parthian and apologizes for Crassus", and concluded
that
I should remember Caesar's affairs . . .
for a background.

Similarly, Goodsir Smith declares that

Forbye, there's ither subjects for a makar's pen
Maist wechtie and profound indeed,
Maitters o war and peace and dour debate
O' foreign levie and domestic malice,
As the preachers say
  - But no for me!
As weill gie me the wale o skillie or drambuie
As scrieve a leid o politics or thee!

Politics do, however, make other appearances in the poem. Sydney Slugabed Smith, the Oblomovian poet of Elegy V, is seen as, from Stalin's point of view,

The type, endpynt and final blume
O' decadent capitalistical thirldom.

This leads on, "by a route maist devious", to the East-West Synthesis, no less, and a suitably alcoholic tribute to Hugh MacDiarmid. The burlesque tone of this sequence should not obscure the genuine conflict here, that Goodsir Smith sees his vocations as poet and lover as being incompatible with his political responsibilities.

In this respect, the choice of the classical figures referred to becomes significant: Aeneas, who abandoned Dido for a political destiny; Dido herself, a Queen who kills herself for love, ignoring the
political responsibilities of her position as ruler of a kingdom; Antony, who lost a world empire for love; Cuchulainn, hero and protector of a nation, who left his Queen Eimhir for the love of Fann; Odysseus, whose long absence brought anarchy to Ithaca; Tristram, whose love for Mark's Queen disrupted a kingdom; Burns, adherent of the French Revolution. Only Orpheus is free of some association of the love/politics conflict.

Elegy XXII attempts some reconciliation of this problem, but it amounts only to an assertion of love's supremacy and durability under any political conditions.

For I ken weill, as ilka luver kens,
That e'en i the abysses o the thirldom
Sune to be born -
Yon bairn yet will haud
His regalitie and pouer - yon blind wee loun
Wi wings and bow and quiverfu o derts,
There, is your Tyrant and Czar Ultimate!

(UET 61)

Under the Eildon Tree itself, and the books of the next decade, concentrate on love almost to the exclusion of politics: but the problem is not solved, only put aside till a later date.

The last great dichotomy of the poem is the basic one of Life against Death. Again, this concern is present in the Propertian model:

When, when, and whenever death closes our eyelids,
Moving naked over Acheron
Upon the one raft, victor and conquered together,
Marius and Jugurtha together,
one tangle of shadows.
And again, the classical references reinforce the point: death comes to all lovers, to Orpheus and Eurydice, to Dido, to Antony, to Tristram.

Goodsir Smith's own vision of death, in Elegy XVIII, sees her as "Strumpet Daith", an old and wrinkled whore awaiting every man. The description is in vivid and forceful Scots, with a hint of the grim humour with which Dunbar also pictured the nether deities; yet it also has a tone of dignified seriousness. It is at one and the same time a set piece on a standard "poetic" theme, and a genuine experience of the comprehensiveness of death, and a vivid imagistic rendering of the long-felt connection between death and sexuality.

Nane ever flees her, nane
Escapes, no ever ane,
And she can byde, byde three
Score year and ten
And mair gif need there be -
I' the end we aa gae doun
The bricht and fleeran anes,
The runklit and forworn,
Aa i the end maun gratifie
Her deidlie aye-unstecht desire,
Clipped til her pyson-drappan paps
O' cauld, cauld alabaister.

- And nou me-ward I see her leer,
  The hure!  
  (UET 52)

It is in the face of this inexorable fate that the poet must write, before

The endmaist ultimate white silence faas
Frae whilk for bards is nae retour.  
  (UET 11)
The poet's only privilege is this, that what he has written, the poem itself, may survive, as have the poems of Propertius, as has the legend of Orpheus.

These, then, are the general themes which recur in the poem, and which hold it together as a system of dualities. Some admit to a kind of synthesis, within the linguistic medium of the poem, or are united in antisyzygy, as necessarily complementary opposites; some (notably the love/politics split) have not yet reached a satisfactory solution. But the strength of the poem lies in its continual interplay between these opposites, between ecstasy and despair, grandeur and folly, between past and present, death and life, between the noble language of noble sentiments and the vivid comic language of the lower passions. All these dualities come to a head in the central two Elegies, XII and XIII; and this study of Under the Eildon Tree may be completed by a closer examination of these two sections.

Elegy XII is a straightforward version of the Orpheus legend, told in the first person by Orpheus himself. It was later expanded as a "Dramatic Poem" with music, and broadcast in 1949. The text, as published in 1955, is much less successful than the original elegy. This is partly due to the necessity of presenting directly such scenes as Orpheus' song to Pluto, which is bound to be a failure; but, basically, the dramatic form lacks both the coherence and the personality of the first person narrative. That personality, the sense of Orpheus as a real character rather than a myth, is achieved by the use of the colloquial Scots language. Even such purely mythical figures as the Nereids
become more familiar as "water-lasses."

The Scots ranges from the standard, easily colloquial speech of the main narrative, to the more and less formal. More formal effects are achieved by the use of mediaeval forms - "Quhar art thou gane, my luf Euridices?" - and even the Gaelic lament blends beautifully with the Classical name to produce "Ochone, ochone Euridine." But the Elegy does not consist entirely of this "high" style, or dignified tone. Into it are introduced several comments on the Gods' behaviour in the affair, which are richly comic and disrespectful, and expressed in very colloquial language and rhythms. The poem makes light of the re-winning of Eurydice, concentrating rather on the losing of her; there is a prolonged exposure of the scene where she stumbles, cries out, and Orpheus looks round. It is this long scene, the climax of the tragedy, which is punctuated by the comic sections. It is an extraordinary effect, of seeing the incident both as high tragedy and as low comedy, as a deeply meaningful human myth and also as Jupiter's "wee ploy."

Orpheus' contempt of the gods -

Och, gie the gods their due,
They ken what they're about.
- The sleekans!

(UET 35)

- is combined with an overwhelming sense of his own guilt and sorrow.
The contrast in no way detracts from the intensity of the myth: rather, Orpheus' own tragedy is intensified by the comic indifference of the gods. There is also a kind of distancing effect, akin to Brecht; but the comic
passages come across as an arbitrary formal element whose main purpose, and effect, is to accentuate their opposite. The union of the two viewpoints is of course that attitude of mind which Goodsir Smith, like MacDiarmid, would regard as typically Scottish, an exemplification of the Caledonian Antisyzygy. Indeed, if one had any criticism of this Elegy at all, it would be that this passage is too self-consciously and obviously such an exemplification.

After this high point, the Elegy moves to a sombre close, concentrating on Orpheus' despair and self-accusation. The ending is magnificent, the last two lines expressing the archetypal nature of the myth with unequalled conciseness, simplicity, and resonance:

Aa this will happen aa again,
Monie and monie a time again.

Elegy XIII is the exact complement to its predecessor. Whereas XII is a dignified account of a Classical myth written in high style with the occasional intervention of low style, XIII is a rumbustious and most undignified account of boozing and whoring in Reekie, written in low style with the occasional intervention of high style.

In its force, its pace, its exuberance of incident, imagery, and language, Elegy XIII is certainly Goodsir Smith's finest piece of comic verse, a celebration of the carnal appetites unmatched in Scottish literature. The style is expansive, launching into long digressions and overburdened sentences as erratically as a drunk, but also with a drunk
delight in sheer rhetoric, the way words sound. And, as so often in Scots humour, much of the delight comes from putting Scots inflections on ponderous Latinate words, which are enjoyed both for their own sake (as in Dunbar’s aureate diction) and for the contrast they make with the more colloquial words around them. What I mean is the kind of effect we get when Goodsir Smith throws all the stress of his rhythm and lineation on the word “pullulate”, referring to “the hures o Reekie.” (UET 37.)

Classical references are introduced mostly for comic effect, from their incongruity, as in the long digression in which the barman is addressed as Ganymede. The most exuberant expansion of an image occurs when the body of the whore Sandra becomes a whole map, an archipelago for “Odyssean gangrels” to explore. These classical references also fit the tendency of drunken Scots (face to face with either a whore or a thistle) to exhibit their erudition.

But the central section of the Elegy is number iv (UET 40-41.) It opens with a vision, almost an apocalyptic vision, of the entire city of Edinburgh giving itself over to the sports of night. This is brilliantly visualised by the idea of the lights in windows all over the city coming on and off and on again:

The haill toun at it
Aa the lichts pip-poppan
In and out and in again
I’ the buts and bens
And single ends,
The banks and brass
0’ the toueran cliffs o lands,
Haill tenements, wards and burghs, counties,
Regalities and jurisdictiouns,
Continents and empires
Gien owre entire
Til the joukerie-poukerie!
Hech, sirs, whatna feck of fockerie!
Shades o Knox, the hochmagandie!
My bonie Edinburrie,
Auld Skulduggerie!
Flat on her back sevin nichts o the week,
Earnan her breid wi her hurdies' sweit.

This torrent of words is sheer intoxication and delight, but is none-theless under control. The rhythm mounts from the short quick rhymes of

the buts and bens
And single ends

through the reminiscence of romantic song ("Ye banks and braes") and the striking image of the tenement buildings as cliffs, moves into utter rant on the lines "Regalities and jurisdictiouns", the mediaeval inflection suggesting both Dunbar and endless legal charters, and comes to rest on the sublimely anti-climactic colloquialism of "joukerie-poukerie." The tri-syllable ending is then echoed four times in decrescendo, and the passage comes to a temporary halt with a vision of the city itself as a whore.

But then this image is transformed, and the poem switches suddenly, magically, into the high style, and the great city becomes an image of Romance.

- And Dian's siller chastitie
Muved owre the reikan lums,
Biggan a ferlie toun o jet and ivorie
That was but blackened stane,
Whar Bothwell rade and Huntly
And fair Montrose and aa the lave
Wi silken leddies doun til the grave.
- The hoofs strak siller on the causie!
   And I mysel in cramasie

The rhythm is slow and majestic, rolling lovingly around the great historic names, and culminating with an exuberant shout which uses again the trisyllable ending. (The last phrase is also an allusion to a great tragic ballad:

When we came in by Glasgow toon,
   We were a comely sight to see;
My love was clad in black velvet,
   And I mysel' in cramasie.

The lady in "black velvet" reappears in So Late Into the Night, page 22.)

This paragraph stands in relation to the rest of the Elegy as the comic passages do to the Orpheus section. Both aspects of the antiszyzygy gain by the juxtaposition: in this case, the "hures o Reekie", while remaining whores, partake for one great moment of the grandeur of their city. And if the "shades o Knox" had failed to appreciate Sandra, they would also necessarily have failed to appreciate the grandeur, for the two are joined. This technique of juxtaposition is simply the surface manifestation of what is, fundamentally, not a juxtaposition but a unity.

From here the Elegy moves swiftly to its close, addressing a "bardic tribute" to Sandra, who is by this time elevated to the position of
"Maistress o the white mune Cytherean", a title earned by the fact that she "cack't the bed in exstasie." The poem ends with a genuine tribute to the spirit of (almost abstract) generosity in Sandra:

You that spierit me nae questions,
Spierit at me nocht,
Acceptit me and took me in
A guest o the house, nae less;
Took aa there was to gie
(And yon was peerie worth),
Gied what ye didna loss -
A bien and dernit fleeman's-firth
And bodie's easement
And saft encomfortin'
O, Manon! Marguerite! Camille!
And maybe, tae, the pox -
Ach, weill!  

(UET 42)

The last line is a magnificent shrug of the shoulders, as well as an acceptance of all the possible contradictions in loving, all its grandeur and its folly.

Goodsir Smith's published poetry over the next decade is confined to the form of the short love-lyric. These appear in three small collections - The Aipple and the Hazel, Cokkils, and Omens - and in one larger one, So Late Into The Night. Of these books, The Aipple and the Hazel and Omens are, to phrase it kindly, undistinguished, while Cokkils has a reasonable proportion of successful poems; but the best of the lyrics undoubtedly occur in So Late Into The Night.

Hugh MacDiarmid has written:

I do not know that it is really a recommendation to mention
the fact that Dame Edith Sitwell thought very highly of
(Goodsir Smith's) lyrics and praised them most extravagantly.

(CK 228.)

It is to So Late Into The Night that Dame Edith wrote an enthusiastic
Preface, in the course of which she manages to draw analogies to T.S.
Eliot, Wordsworth, Emily Dickinson, Burns, St. Catherine of Genoa, the
Cure d'Ots, Henry James, and William Blake. The dust jacket adds
Sappho, Catullus, and Walter de la Mare.

It is probably more profitable to see Goodsir Smith, in these
poems, as working at an intense formal concentration of expression for
the subject he treated more expansively in Under the Eildon Tree: the
grandeur and folly of love. But the concentration loses more than it
gains. Although in the best of these lyrics (perhaps a dozen or so)
Goodsir Smith does achieve a remarkable intensity, does in fact succeed
in packing all his emotion into the sparse lines of the lyric, the bulk
of his work shows that he writes best when in a more expansive mood.
This trend is seen best in the fantastic elaboration of ideas in Carotid
Cornucopius.

The lyrics of So Late Into The Night are also more single-minded
in theme than Under the Eildon Tree. With the odd exception, such as
the ballad "The Wraith o Johnnie Calvin" (SLN 45), the poems are all
concerned with the poet's own obsessions with sex and death. The result
is that So Late Into The Night, read straight through, becomes monotonous
and repetitive; and in an uninspired collection such as Omens, the
monotony is intensified.
This is not, of course, entirely Goodsir Smith's fault: the lyric as a form is not meant to be read en masse, and So Late Into The Night is not intended as a sequence in the same way that Under the Eildon Tree was. Individually, as single poems dropped into calm and quiet silence, many of these lyrics would seem quite reasonable. There are no really bad poems in So Late Into The Night.

What distinguishes the best of the lyrics is more a matter of rhythmic and aural qualities than it is of imagery. The only really well-worked-out image in these poems is that of the burn in "Luve is a Burn in Spate" (SLN 17). Goodsir Smith tends to be conventional in diction, except where the Scots word for a familiar image transforms it by its sound.

Rhythmically, the most characteristic movement is that of the dying fall, often accompanied by a tri-syllable line ending, with the stress on the first of the three syllables, allowing the line to fall off after the rhyme. This gives an effect of weariness and resignation (especially when read in Goodsir Smith's own weary voice, which is magnificently suited to his poetry.6) The best example of this is the song "The Winter o the Hert" (SLN 24):

O, the rain that rains upo the toun
Greits i the hert o me,
And the saw that dings upo the shore
Is the tempest that has fiefit me.

The first line of each couplet is usually resonant, with strong stresses on long vowels, on a rising tempo; the second line opens on a strong
stress, then, after a marked caesura, falls off into the trisyllable.

The same thing happens on a larger scale in "Exile" (SLN 22), in which the first three lines of each stanza rise to a climax, then fall back in the short closing line:

I saw my luve in black velvet
And bresst it hiech was she,
Wi Mary's hair and the gait o a queen
- It wasna she.

Dame Edith's favourite, "Defeat o the Hert" (SLN 56), uses the same movement, but with a shorter, more definite downbeat. The superb second stanza opens with a sonorously rhetorical address, and drops to the colloquial "strauchle" in a falling line; then picks up slightly on "oblivion" before coming to its decisive conclusion:

O black-maned Artemis
The strauchle's dune,
And wi oblivion's kiss
Ye win.

I myself consider the best poem in the book to be "Simmer Nichtsang" (SLN 13), in which the dying fall is more thematic, moving from the expanses of the night to the stillness of a single room, from the sonorities of "euthanasie" to the tender phrase which drops quietly into the end of each stanza:

The nicht is far spent,
I hae heard the chime o three,
At my side my dearest luve
Sleeps like a bairn. Sleep on, my wee.

The airless nicht like a euthanasie
Haps the great toun - and we micht be
The last on a deean planet,
My bonnie burd. Sleep on, my wee.

This quality of tenderness, together with the contrast between the indoor room and the hostility of the outdoor world, is to recur in the best of the later poems, notably in "A Bairn Seick" and "Seal Poem".

In Cokkils, mention must be made of the short poem "The Reid Reid Rose", which manages, mainly by the intricacy and grace of its rhythmic movement, to create a fresh and exciting poem out of the most overworked cliche in love poetry. The transition on the word "deep", which connects with the first half of the poem by rhyme, but initiates the rhythm of the second half, is technically excellent as well as thematically apt. The repetition of "It is wi luve" sets the right note of formality, on which the closing image depends. The dying fall on the last line is less noticeable because of the striking oxymoron of "wearie burnan":

It is wi luve
The thick bluid dreeps
It is wi luve
The een owreshing wi sleep
It is my hert there skaitht
Wi hers, and deep
The twafauld spate
Thegither grows
Bluid-choked i the teeman hert
O' the wearie burnan rose.

But by Omens, the poetry is reduced to, at best, such pleasant
inanities as "Aa My Life" (p 17). It is evident that Goodsir Smith had exhausted, at least for the moment, the possibilities of the short love lyric. His poetry desperately needed expansion in other directions, both formally and thematically. This expansion happened in Figs and Thistles.

The most obvious sign of this expansion is the re-introduction of the political theme. Figs and Thistles contains poems of direct political statement, of a kind that had not appeared in Goodsir Smith's published work since The Deevil's Waltz, thirteen years earlier. In addition to the political poems, there are still a few love poems ("Cokkils" itself reprinted; the translation "Sappho", addressed to Edith Sitwell); a group of poems concerned with the position of the poet and the failing of poetic inspiration; two notable long translations; and a number of poems on the less directly political theme of the outcast.

A few poems at the beginning of the book discuss the nature of the bardic vocation (especially "Credo", the first poem in the book), and lament the loss of poetic inspiration:

The muse is gane, I say! Lea it at that! (FT 9)

When I asked Goodsir Smith about the sources of his inspiration, he replied:

Impossible question - Love, politics, injustice, "moments
Certainly, to judge from some of the blank years before *Figs and Thistles*, this may have been a very real problem for Goodsir Smith; but the volume itself is a sufficient answer to it. Even such a poem as "Octopus" (FT 13), which claims that

This makar's mynd is tuirn as sand,
A *Lusthaus* whance the pairtie's fled,

is yet capable of such a striking image as

As a schule o wee fish stick
Til the glaizie een o the suicede
Awash, hauí-sunk, aneath the brig.

The political poems are again at their weakest when making direct statements, which sound only like versified slogans:

The weird o Scotland bydes
In wir ain hands -
Povk o Scotland rise!
Lowse we the bands!

(FT 25)

This, and the perpetual appeal to such figures as John Maclean, is altogether too easy. One simply does not feel that the whole of the poet's intelligence or imagination is being applied to a problem.
Much more successful are those poems which approach the subject more indirectly, dealing with the relation to society of Goodsir Smith himself, or the poet generally, or the outcast. In such poems there is a point of contact with real human emotion (as in MacDiarmid's best political poems there is contact with real human intelligence.)

Thus the best political poem in the book is actually a translation, of Blok's "The Twelve," with its striking presentation of one small unit of the Red Guard marching through one particular town on a snowy night. And here again the Scots idiom has an individualising effect which lifts this version well above the more standard English translations, such as that by Babette Deutsch and Avraham Yarmolinsky. Whereas in that translation the English language co-exists uncomfortably with the Russian setting, Goodsir Smith's version brings the poem into an entirely homogeneous idiom, which a reader who did not know it was a translation would certainly take to be set in Edinburgh, but which is equally applicable to Russia.

Compare the two:

From house to house
A rope is flung.
On it the sagging sign is hung:
"All power to the Constituent Assembly!"
A bent old woman,
Tearful, trembly,
Stares at the canvas in despair.
Her blear eyes see
How many fine foot-wraps could be
Cut from the linen wasted there,
While the children's feet go bare.

Like a hen she picks her way
Across the snow-blocked thoroughfare:
"Oh, Mother of God, look down and see -
Those Bolsheviks will be the death of me!"

Frac house til house, athort the causie,
A raip is straucht whar sweys
A muckle hingan clout that tells ye:
ALL POUER TIL THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLIE!

An auld wife's sair fashed wi this;
She's greitan; she canna get what it means.
What for's the muckle banner, then?
Siccan a mightie swatch o claith?
It'd dae for leggins for the weans,
Maist aa o them's wantan claes. . . .

Like a hen the auld wife
Teeters across the snaw . . . .
0, Mither o God, thae Bolshevikies
'1l be the daith o us aa!

The Red Guards of Blok's poem are, in a way, integrated with society, at least with the coming society. But Goodsir Smith's more characteristic position is that of the outsider, the social outcast. This is expressed most forcibly in "The Grace of God and the Meth Drinker" (FT 18), which is, in diction and in sound-values, one of Goodsir Smith's richest poems. The words pour out in a thick stream of rhetoric, like the flowing of reid-biddie itself, words running into each other, like the vivid confusion of the drunkard's senses, the rhythm rising to sharp points of pain, but never stopping, until the final lines bring the poem round to its true subject, the poet himself. The poem is a rhetorical tour-de-force, overwhelming in the impact of its words and sounds, but it is also more than that. It comprehends both an objective and a subjective view of the meth-drinker; it sees the squalor of his world, but also its strange beauty. (Here a comparison with Baudelaire's Fleurs de Mal would not be inapposite; or even to such
works of the new American cinema as Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures* or Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising*.) It sees what is ugly about him without moralising about it; Temperance advocates might envy its eloquence, but it is not a Temperance poem. Goodsir Smith's own degree of sympathy for, or empathy with his subject enables him to realise it fully—not only what he looks like, but also what he feels like—and yet remain objective. The poet may satirise God in the language of Dunbar, but he acknowledges His Grace.

Politically, one of the strongest feelings for the individual today is that we are all outsiders, alienated, separate from the vast impersonal processes of world politics, which we are unable to alter. This variation on the theme of the outsider is brilliantly presented in "A Bairn Seick" (FT 23), in which there are three levels: the individual, world politics, and Nature. Of these, the political process is the most impersonal, its high-sounding verbiage being eventually reduced to a string of "etcetera"s. Contrasted are the personal forces, the poet himself watching by the bedside of his sick child, and the wind:

\[\begin{align*}
O \text{ wae the wind weaves wae} \\
\text{Its weari wey it wanders throu the autumn nicht} \\
\text{Frae far, thort continents and seas its traveillin,} \\
\text{Laden wi a generation's greit -}
\end{align*}\]

Both are seeking rest, amid the cruelties and insanities of men. At length even the wind "croodles doun til sleep", but for the poet and his child, "We canna sleep." It is a beautiful example of a personal political poem. The point of emotional contact is simple, obvious even,
but genuine; and the further extensions of the image - that all the
world is sick, that even if Katrine recovers from her illness the world
may not from its - are all the more effective for being left as impli-
cations.

But for Goodsir Smith, the position of alienation is not often as
comprehensive as this; it is generally occupied by the "outland skalrag
sauls", or, most characteristically, by the bard, whose position is
defined (after MacDiarmid) as one of "perpetual opposition":

Here I stand, auld Chris, wi ye:
As man is ne'er perfectible
The anerlie role for a bard can be
Opposition perpetual
...
Divine discontent alane
Can justifie God's weys til men. (FT 27-C)

Thus the political poems make contact with those on poetic
vocation: and, as Goodsir Smith looks for a resurgence of his own poetic
inspiration, so he looks for a resurgence of Scottish freedom. The
most ornately symbolic of the poems on poetic inspiration, "My World in
Nether Winter" (FT 14), admits of a political interpretation through the
Scots heraldic significance of the Lyon. The winter image is continued,
politically, in "The World's Winter" (FT 17), but, perhaps typically of
Goodsir Smith, "The Coming of Spring" (FT 40) is a love poem.

All these strands - poetry, love, and politics as the obsessions
of the outsider - meet in the poem "To Li Po in the Delectable Mountains
of Tien-Mu" (FT 32). (It should be noted, though, that this poem was written as early as 1950.) It presents three "skairag" poets — Goodsir Smith himself; his Edinburgh crony of a couple of centuries back, Robert Fergusson; and another worshipper of wine, women, and the moon, Li Po, to who Ezra Pound gave the epitaph:

And Li Po also died drunk.
He tried to embrace a moon
In the Yellow River.

These three (with memories of others, such as that "lean auld faggot, Wullie Dunbar") are out "on the bash thegither" in the night streets of Edinburgh. The poem (which recalls the Sandra Elegy from Under the Eildon Tree) is a roisterous celebration of their revellings, of their songs, and of the Edinburgh landscape through which they move. They are the classic figures of Goodsir Smith's mythology, outsiders past and present, united by their loyalty to their patron goddess the moon (Artemis, to whom Under the Eildon Tree was addressed; perhaps also resembling Robert Graves's White Goddess):

- While the world in its daith-dance
  Skuddert and spun
  In the haar and wind o space and time . . .
  Wi nane to accolad the goddess-mune,
  Invisible, but her foredoomed elect:
The bards, the drouths, the daft, the luvers,
We!
- Ay, here was aa wir companie,
  Tinks and philosophers,
  True Servants o the Queen.

(FT 35)
Figs and Thistles is not an entirely successful book: but it is
certainly the most interestingly varied collection that Goodsir Smith
has yet produced.

In two works written in 1959 and published in 1960 (The Vision
of the Prodigal Son and The Wallace), Goodsir Smith attempts a further
resolution of the political problems.

Of the two works, The Wallace is the more successful. I have
never seen it on stage, but I would imagine that it would be a very
effective piece of drama, of the historical pageant variety. The
characters are simply but forcefully drawn: the Wallace himself carries
a proper aura of dignity, and Edward, although conceived in a rather
conventional "intellectual tyrant" vein, is at least not presented as
an entirely uninteresting villain. The language is also simple and
dignified, less densely Scots than usual, and seems to be aspiring
towards the kind of tone achieved by Barbour in his famous lines on
freedom - lines which Goodsir Smith, almost too apparently, painstakingly
avoids echoing.

The political issues are of course much more clearly cut in
relation to 1297-1305 than they are to 1960; but the great heroes of the
past are always relevant still to any nationalist revolution. The
basic issue is still freedom, the integrity of a nation. The heroic
pageant form gives Goodsir Smith, at last, a context in which the more
sloganeering aspects of his political poetry are exactly what is required:
the result is that The Wallace contains his best purely political poetry.

But The Wallace is not purely political: Goodsir Smith is still
at the game of trying to reconcile love and politics. Mirren's Bloody Clute affords him a strong visual symbol which continues throughout the play; but Mirren, strangely, is not the centre of this sub-theme. Goodsir Smith expands a casual reference, in De Brunne's Chronicle, to Wallace's "leman" into the character of Ailish Rae, and gives to her and Wallace the following dialogue of awkward philosophising:

AILISH
... Wi you, aawhar is freedom, luve.
For you are libertie itsel.
You yoursel is freedom, Will.

WALLACE
And you are luve, Ailie. As Scotland is, and freedom tae. Freedom is nae Place set apairt; like tyrannie It's neutral. Aa men in chains the day Are Scots and Scotland the world o' slaves And prisoners. Juist as you, Ailie lass, Are luve and freedom huntit in this wuid, Sae ye are Scotland tae, and Scotland Freedom - ach, I hae nae words For what I mean. . . .

(W 123.)

This passage does not fit the play: it belongs too obviously to Goodsir Smith, not Wallace. The attempted synthesis is merely a flat statement of the identity of the two concerns, and it carries little conviction.

A very similar attempt is made in The Vision of the Prodigal Son. This poem was ostensibly written for the Burns bicentenary, but it has far less to do with Robert Burns than with Sydney Goodsir Smith. (Unlike, incidentally, Goodsir Smith's superb poem for MacDiarmid's 75th
birthday. I find The Vision of the Prodigal Son a rather dull affair: the language and rhythms do not come to life, and the sections on both love and politics seem tired echoes of previous achievements.

The thematic movement is a simple setting up of contrasts followed by an attempted synthesis. An account of meeting a woman in a bar leads into an address to "Archaic Aphrodite", an experience of love which culminates in silence:

... here is the end o' poesie
In stillness, in content,
The bluid-beat o' the hairt.
Wharfae I nou pit bye, renounce,
Forsweir aa poesie. This is the end.

(VPS 14-15)

But it isn't. Goodsir Smith, observing the state of Scotland today, concludes that the makar must "turn again". There follows an attack on the Scottish people who have sold their birthright for a mess of pottage, commenting ironically:

Pottage is guid. There's nae denyin yon.
The haill world can hae their pottage nou.
Nae mair is need for Dives on the yerth
Nae mair is need for nae man to be needy.
Man has wan; aa weyms can eith be fou!
Dune is a batell on the dragon black;
Want is beat at last. The kyte is fou.
Expropriation of the proprietors is dune, hauf dune,
And we hae new proprietors in their room -
A rich excambion indeed. Forsooth!

(VPS 19)

Compare this rather weary cynicism with MacDiarmid's completely non-
ironical statement of the same idea in the "Lament for the Great Music" (CP 264).

The climax, attempted synthesis, takes the form of a dream vision, a convention which Goodsir Smith cannot really restore to a serious purpose, despite the colloquial introduction:

- In the name o' names!
  I damn near dee'd on the spot - !

(VPS 25)

Here the assertion that "luve and libertie are ane" is embodied in the figure of a deity that only Goodsir Smith could have conceived of:

Aphrodite Scotia
In persona propria.

(VPS 27)

It is one thing for Aphrodite "and-a-dampo-bottomie" to be born in a rowing boat off Portobello; but quite another thing to propose this lady as the answer to Scotland's political and economic problems.

It remains true that the only context in which Goodsir Smith ever has been able to encompass all his divergent interests is the context provided by the figure of the outsider. This is true for Peter Morrison and the Meth Drinker; and it is still true in Goodsir Smith's last published volume, Kynd Kittock's Land. (Reading this poem, it should be remembered that it was written as a text to accompany photographs in
The presentation of Goodsir Smith's Edinburgh and its inhabitants is much more successful than in *The Vision of the Prodigal Son*; and for a mythological figure Goodsir Smith resorts again to Dunbar rather than to his own imaginings. The identification of Kynd Kittock with Edinburgh with Scotland is thus rather more satisfactory than the arbitrary equation of "Aphrodite Scotia". Political solutions are problematical; but there are things which endure:

Fresh bars and counters new
Whar bards commune wi infidels
And serious men o' lear can gie ye
Rotten tips for Also Rans wiout a hint o' shame
And lend a quid and never want it back
Till next day week - with luck -
"The frolic and the gay"
Without a care in the world but want o' cash

(KKL 18-19).

The reality of these images, as opposed to the eccentricity of Aphrodite Scotia, ensures the success of the poem, and the ending is genuinely moving. It seems to reach a state of acceptance in which the poet's political quest can, at least temporarily, rest:

And shall she get the richts o' it,
A diadem for the brou?
Shall Scotland croun her ain again,
This ancient capital - ?
Or sell the thing for scrap?
Or some Yankee museum maybe?
I'll be here bidin the answer . . .
Here I be and here I drink,
This is mine, Kynd Kittock's land,
For ever and aye while stane shall stand -
For ever and aye till the World's End.

(KKL 25)
Goodsir Smith has not published any more volumes since *Kynd* in 1965, but several poems have continued to appear in magazines, and indicate some possible new directions for his poetry. One personal event - the death of his wife Marion - undoubtedly accounts for the deep emotion and strongly elegiac tone of some of these poems, the bitter sense of loss which has broken the utterance into a more fragmented form.

The most remarkable of these poems is "Seal Poem"\(^\text{11}\), which displays a control of rhythm and sound values unmatched in all his previous work. The short lines, the accumulations of long syllables, the rhetorical cadences, all carry an intense emotion. The poem opens with a statement of the inevitability of fate, love and death both unavoidable:

When it haps it haps
The selkie sings
The green swaw rins in the skerry

When can love e'er love deny
The love it brings?

The love is described in natural imagery, the images of the seal, or a silent swan on a loch:

Hair like the sun's sheen, selkie,
Sun and mune thegither there,
Muved in the wind,
Gently steered -
A wee fine wind on the sea,
A ruffle, juist, mune-shot, sun-shot,
Autumn and spring there met.
Above this scene swings the old goddess, the "silly cauld oblivious mune", surrounded by astronauts, but powerful still. And inside is still the warmth of "the pub's thick bramblement", and the "lummer licht" of her eyes, and of the drink. But into this breaks suddenly the agony, not just of this one death, but of the world, and the overwhelming powerlessness of God and man:

Belt up, brither,
Brither meenister o' Gode!
Help us, Sir. Ye could
If ye cared a hoot, Sir. If ye could . . . sir -
- Napalm - Mercy -
We think.
But powerless.
Like you.

In the closing lines, the poet turns back to his own loss, the words becoming more and more condensed, carrying ever greater weights of emotion:

Cauld the gerss outbye in the nicht -
The hairt warm here, contentment.
The hills snug in the mist -
Are ye cauld, sweet seal,
Seal Baby?

The globe turned in the gale:
It was the morn com -
A sudden thing, it seemed.
Nocht said. The world changed then.
It was just tomorrow days.
- Nae end in sicht.
Nae end, it seems. . . nae end . . .

It seems . . .

Seal Baby . . .
"Seal Poem" seems to me one of Goodsir Smith's greatest achievements. It has a quality which is often missing in his love poetry, that of very private, personal, tenderness. At the same time as it expands effortlessly to include a whole world in its suffering, it also condenses all that suffering into a single phrase: "It was just tomorrow days." It would be hard to define precisely what that line means, semantically; poetically, it stands perfect.

The basic configuration of "Seal Poem" - the poet, alone, aware of the cold outside, and the fragile warmth indoors - which was first seen in "A Bairn Seick", in Figs and Thistles, is repeated in other recent poems. The short lyric "Serpent of Old Nile"\(^\text{12}\) is an even further condensation of the structure of "Seal Poem":

The glisk o' an ee
Black seas rinnan in the voe
Deep under cliff
The touch o' her leg, Dear God!

Cauld outbye
The room snug
The leaf in autumn
Haar frae the Forth
The street icy -

Hiech abune
The gibbous curlit mune
    Looks on a world grown desperate
    And we should care, surely . . .

What a lass I touched then
    - A serpent.

    Cover me, Nile.

The dilemma of the love/politics dichotomy is again apparent,
concentrated into the single word "surely". Where "Serpent of Old Nile" falls short of "Seal Poem" is that it does not so strongly suggest the synthesis in suffering of the longer poem. Also, I feel that the Cleopatra image, splendid as it is, lacks the intimacy and tenderness of "Seal Baby ..." For all that, this is surely the best short love lyric Goodsir Smith has written since "The Reid, Reid Rose" in Cokkils. The brief, fragmented phrases evoke the emotions, rather than merely stating them.

The most recent of Goodsir Smith's poems that I have seen, "Winter"\(^\text{12}\), follows the same pattern. Only here, the suffering is abated in a kind of tentative affirmation.

These few poems powerfully suggest another resurgence in Goodsir Smith's poetry, and it is possible that his next collection, whenever it comes out, may establish his position even more firmly than before.

That position, as I said at the outset, is that Sydney Goodsir Smith is the finest poet in Scots of those who have followed MacDiarmid. A good deal of his poetry depends upon a very personal mingling of classical, mediaeval, and modern figures and poetic devices; but his basic themes are timeless and universal. His poems about Edinburgh, like those of Robert Garioch, are worthy successors to the city poetry of Robert Fergusson. He has written the best love poetry of any Scottish writer in this century; and, if his more directly political poems are often less than satisfactory, those which centre upon the figure of the outsider, the "outlan skalrag sauls" of Kynd Kittock or the Meth Drinker, may be ranked alongside such great achievements as Under the
Eildon Tree.

It is, altogether, a most impressive body of work, and one to which, it is to be hoped, Sydney Goodsir Smith still has much to add.
ROBERT GARIOCH
Q. Do you have any serious theory of comedy?
A. Oh, no no. I don't even have a serious theory of serious things.

At the end of Robert Garioch's *The Masque of Edinburgh*, after its almost apocalyptic climax, which delivers Garioch's final blow to the Scottish Educational System, the Heilanman, undaunted as any American tourist, turns to his guide the Makar and requests: "Tell me all about the Scottish Renascence." (ME 37.)

Garioch's own career would be one answer to that question, though the Makar's actual reply ("Och, no in the High Street") is probably the best one. For thirty years, Robert Garioch Sutherland has been writing some of the best and most attractive verse ever produced in Scots. If his range is not as wide as that of MacDiarmid, or even Goodsir Smith, his technical skill in the use of the language is admittedly superior to theirs. His work has been admired by poets and critics of all persuasions, traditionalist to avant-garde; indeed, the best piece of criticism yet written on Garioch's work is by that very different Edinburgh poet, David Black. Yet this outstanding body of work has been produced largely in conditions of exile and neglect; Garioch has had to wait thirty years for a decently representative selection of his poems to be published; and we are still faced by such incredible facts as his total omission from Maurice Lindsay's revision of R.L. MacKie's *Book of Scottish Verse*. This neglect may be due to the modesty of both Garioch's themes and his personality; but it is nonetheless inexcusable.
Garioch's poetry is very much the expression of his own personality, which is at the same time a very private and a very public one. D.M. Black describes it as "a personality essentially social: informal, humorous, entertaining, melancholy, closely and affectionately observant of human rituals and absurdities"; but later he acknowledges that while this description certainly applies to the poetry, the poet himself can better be described in terms of isolation. "Isolation" and "exile" are strong words, but they may not be misused with reference to Garioch's long stay in London.

There is, however, a sense of self-sufficiency about Robert Garioch. He is a close friend of Sydney Goodsir Smith, but he does not read much, and the only really important influence on his poetry is that of Fergusson. He is not inclined to theorise about his own work. When I interviewed him he warned me that

I must say just now that I have to think of reasons for having done the things I've done in the past, which I did at the time without any particular reasons at all. And I suspect that my reasons aren't always the right reasons, although they seem to make sense now, so anything I say now has to be treated with caution in that way. And a good deal of it has been accidental.

This is no doubt an aspect of his modesty, which is in some sense excessive, but is also that which most clearly defines his character, and that of his poetry. It is this modesty which accounts for the character of his humour: quiet, gentle, amused, delighting in absurdities, but rarely informed by malice. (In this respect it is very close to the...
humour of Ian Hamilton Finlay.) It does not proceed from any theoretical position of satire; it is very much the humour of the "wee guy". And his more serious reflections on the hardships and injustices of the world are also modest in tone, characterised more by a rueful melancholy than by bitterness.

The modesty also accounts for Garioch's reliance on translations, which, if we include Jephthah and The Baptist, make up well over half of his published work. He shares the view that translation is a means of keeping the Muse in practice at times when the poet has nothing original to say - "and that happens to me a lot of the time", he claims. Insofar as his modesty constitutes an accurate self-knowledge of the limits of his own capabilities, it is his greatest poetic asset.

But what this modesty will not account for is the technical skill and accomplishment of Garioch's verse, his ability to use Scots on any level, colloquial to formal, and to use it with complete naturalness in the strictest and most difficult verse-forms. His sonnets are normally written on the Italian limited rhyme pattern, and "Sisyphus" (SP 79) is composed in perfectly regular Homeric hexameters:

Bumpity | doun in the | corrie gaed | whuddran the | pitiless | whun stane.

Garioch admits his liking for the challenge such forms present him:

Q. Do you enjoy strict forms?
A. Yes I like doing that, it's fun, you have the difficulty of
doing it, and you try to do it, and I like that sort of thing. It seems, whether you can make a general statement about it (or not) that that is the best way to write poetry. I don't know, but for my part, I like a strict form. It's good to keep to it, and it gives you something that you try to do, which is difficult, and it's good if you manage it and very often you don't.

In this sense he is a very conscious craftsman of verse, and this is always evident in his work. Whereas in poets like MacDiarmid or Goodsir Smith the energy of the idea, or the image, or the conception of the whole poem, may sometimes (and perhaps too often) sweep past weak lines or phrases, not pausing to correct every minor blemish, Garioch's poems are always perfect down to the last syllable. His poems have been constructed to last: they defy alteration.

A bad craftsman blames his tools: Garioch, a superb but modest craftsman, tends to give all the credit to his tools, specifically to the Scots language. Of his translations, he told me "Perhaps the secret is not so much in what I can do, as what the language can do." Garioch is a firm believer in the survival of Scots. He believes, as does Hugh MacDiarmid, that even if it were to die out altogether as a spoken language (which is by no means certain), it could still be preserved as a written, poetic language, because of its sheer usefulness. His account of the relationship between the "natural" and "artificial" aspects of the language is especially interesting:

In Scots we still have a certain amount of artificiality. This is rather curious - you start with something which is less artificial than Edinburgh English, which is
genuinely heard in the streets and round about; that's the real Scots, there's not very much to it, but it's genuine enough; and then you add to that from Scottish literature and you get your literary language, which can be a highly artificial thing, and somehow you can manage to use it as an artificial language, which it has become, starting naturally and becoming artificial. It is a literary language and I think you can do things with it that would sound awkward if you hadn't got this artificial language to use; and your Aureate diction somehow seems to sound not too strained.

My own view is that, if Scots were to die out altogether as a spoken language, the literary use of it would come to be purely artificial. The vitality of Scots today, as used by Garioch, Goodesir Smith, or MacDiarmid, lies in its interplay between artificiality and natural, colloquial use; if one of these poles were to be lost, the vitality would correspondingly decline and eventually atrophy. But that is mere speculation; for the present generation at least, the linguistic situation in Scotland is such that the use of Scots by these poets is still a viable proposition.

Of the writers whom Garioch has translated, the two most important are Giuseppe Belli and George Buchanan. Both are interesting from a linguistic point of view vis-a-vis Garioch's own situation. Buchanan was a Scot who wrote in Latin, because he believed Latin to be more permanent than the vernacular; history has proved him wrong, and Garioch has tried to correct the balance. As he himself says, very simply, Jephthah "would have been a good Scots play if Buchanan had written in Scots: well, the thing to do is just to put it into Scots, if you can." Belli took the opposite course, deliberately writing in the very localised
dialect romanesco; and here Garioch's task is to substitute an exact equivalent, not just Scots, but Edinburgh Scots; not just Edinburgh Scots, but Cougate Scots.

Garioch's best translations are those in which he has some personal interest, either thematic or technical, either when the sentiment of the original agrees with his own (as in much of Belli, or Buchanan's account of the schoolteachers in Paris), or when the difficulty of reproducing the original form offers him a severe, and thus enjoyable, challenge (as in the translations from Pindar.) It is the lack of either such interest, I suspect, which accounts for the comparative failure of Jephthah and The Baptist. Garioch's own account of this translation is amusing, and, at the end, all too accurate:

I got a curious feeling when I was doing it, I got very excited, it was a long job and it took a very long time, and I got terribly worried in case somebody else should be doing it and should finish the job first. It seemed such an obvious thing, there must be twelve people at it, all racing to be finished. I got really concerned and worried, and the job went on for months and months. When it was finished, I found that my fears were quite unnecessary after all. Nobody had been translating it, and nobody since then has been reading it. So that's all right, yes. 10

The reason that no-one has read them is not that they are bad translations, or even bad plays (though Jephthah is noticeably more interesting than The Baptist), but simply that Biblical themes treated in terms of Classical tragedy do not seem very alive or relevant to today's audience. Nor, I would guess, were the themes of any compelling interest to Garioch;
and the verse-forms are neither sufficiently difficult nor sufficiently varied to sustain the interest of a translator of Garioch's virtuosity.

It is quite a different matter if we turn to Garioch's translation masterpiece, "The Humanists' Trauchles in Paris" (SP 80). Here the chosen form is difficult enough to be rewarding (requiring two triple-rhymes in every stanza) but also open enough to allow for the colloquially conversational tone in which Garioch, like Buchanan, bewails the lot of the schoolteacher, a subject both knew all too well.

Garioch's translations always are based on literal prose versions of the original, and in this case the most probable source is the prose translation of Buchanan's poem published in the Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry, edited by Hugh MacDiarmid, page 25. This version aims at nothing more than a literal rendering of the meaning; but it is instructive to see the energy and wealth of invention with which Garioch transforms it.

Compare this passage in the two versions:

He proceeds with all his wits to examine the complicated passages, he emends and deletes, alters, the points he has worked on while others slept he clearly explains - points which have long been doubtful and hidden. Important facts, facts discovered not by the previous age's wits he digs out, and does not hide away for his own use the treasures he has found. In the meantime the lazy young men for the most part snore, or else many things take priority in their thoughts over the work before them. One is absent, there is a search for another who has bribed a neighbour to call his name, and by cleverness to make the teacher swallow the wily pretence.

Wi aa his micht he taks a text
apairt, examines and dissects
its moniplies, and sune detects
in measure luckie,
important facts that werenai gien
til earlier scholars; nou they're seen
rakt frae their shells, jest as a preen
howks out a buckie.

Meantime the students snore like grumphies
or waiken wi the thochts of tumphies
or nane ava, purr donnart sumphies,
as wyce as cuddies.
Tane's absent, and they seek the tither,
'adsum', altho he cam-na hither,
eydent in cheatrie, tho owre lither
for honest studies.

Garioch's version both condenses the original, making it more
economic and fast-moving (a natural result of the verse-form), and
expands it with the interpolated similes: "Jist as a preen/ howks out
a buckie", "as wyce as cuddies", and "snore like grumphies." These
new images are exactly right, both conceptually and aurally (the rhymes
on "grumphies"); their effect is akin to that noted earlier in Good sir
Smith's colloquial treatment of classical figures, namely, the rendering
familiar of the unfamiliar, the vivifying of subjects long deadened by
the associations of stilted English translations. This is undoubtedly,
as Garioch says, a property of the language; but the language is mute
unless someone speaks it.

The extent to which Garioch sympathises with Buchanan is evident
in the "Repone til George Buchanan" ([SP 87]), which acts as a modern gloss
and expansion upon the original, including some of the peculiarly
modern adjuncts of the schoolteacher's lot:
Whan schule has skailt, he maun awa,
whaur? ye may speir - to some green shaw
to meditate a poem? - Na!
    His lowsan-time is faur
ahead: to organize fi'baw
    and plouter in the glaur.
Late in the day he hirplies hame
wi bizzan heid, a wee-thing lame,
and indisjeesters in his wame,
    and that may cause nae wunner:
whan ither folk may dine at hame,
    he's dishan-out schule-denner.

(Garioch himself, incidentally, is no longer a schoolteacher,
but has found more congenial work with the School of Scottish Studies.)

Belli's sonnets on Roman life have had a very direct influence
on Garioch, in the shape of the Edinburgh sonnets, and Garioch shares
both his amused observation of human absurdities and his strong attach­
ment to a particular city. But there is also a seriousness in Belli
which Garioch shares, although in Garioch's work this takes other forms
than Belli's concern with the ultimate problems of the Resurrection.
There is occasionally in Belli a barb of some malice, stronger than one
would expect from Garioch: for example, the sonnet "A Suggested
Ceremony" (SP 20) has a note almost of viciousness. This is foreign to
Garioch, whose style is closer to that of Belli's "I Hae Witnesses"
(SP 20).

One possible exception to this is Garioch's "Elegy" (SP 30).
The tone of this poem is rather complex. It undoubtedly contains an
element of personal ill-will against its subjects, which is not quite
tempered by humour. Rather, it is the tone of elegy, the sense that
his tormentors are dead whereas he has survived, which gives "Elegy"
the context in which it can be regarded as a poem rather than as the
gratification of a personal revenge.

It is especially these characteristics, shared with Belli, which
have come to be associated with Garioch's most popular work: namely,
the affection for the city, and the delight in absurdity. When I
asked Garioch if his poems were written with any definite satirical
intent, he replied:

What is a definite satirical intent? Do you want to annoy
somebody? Or to correct him in some way? Or to show him
a better line of conduct or to stop him from doing ...
I don't really quite know. If I see something absurd, I
like to point it out, and if it can be done in reasonably
tidy verse I think that's something worth doing. I'd be
sorry if there was nothing to be satirical about, like
Belli when the Pope died: they got a sensible Pope to
take his place and Belli was quite sad about that. He
loved Pope Gregory, he said, because he had the pleasure
of hitting him - or knocking him, yes "knocking him" I
think is the best translation. And it would be a great
pity if everything was so well organised and so beauti-
fully arranged that there was nothing to make fun of.
I don't know if I'm much more serious in the matter than
that. I don't want to reform the world by satirizing
abuses, or anything like that, oh dear no.

The absurd, for Garioch, is the coming together of the natural
and the unnatural: the natural is exemplified by the common folk of
Edinburgh (such as the two brilliantly-earosed citizens of "Heard
in the Cougate" SP 25), whereas the unnatural is usually exemplified by
pretension, by the kind of separation from natural life of most social
or religious systems, from Pope Gregory to the Edinburgh Town Council.
Thus, in "Ane Offering for Easter" (SP 23) Garioch juxtaposes Calvinistic
Edinburgh with the Roman worship of Eastertide salami regeneration-symbols, and the resulting synthesis is, quintessentially, the absurd:

A sudden thocht has occurred to your auld makar, Garioch: let's venerate a hame-made mealie-pudden.

The city of Edinburgh certainly affords Garioch ample scope for the observation of the absurd; and the focal point of a good deal of it is the Edinburgh Festival. One juxtaposition here is that between the very idea of an arts Festival in Edinburgh, and the long-standing Calvinistic suspicion of the arts; another is between a sensible appreciation of the arts and the varied degrees of pretension and artistic snobbery of "sophisticated" audiences. These are the basic materials of "Embro to the Ploy" (SP 14), perhaps his best-known satirical work, which uses brilliantly the traditional Scots stanza-form of "Christis Kirk on the Green."

The poem is an open-ended structure, capable of expansion at any time. The version printed in the Selected Poems adds a stanza, not appearing previously, about the infamous McEwan Hall "happening"; and when I saw Garioch in 1967 he showed me another new stanza, concerning the decision of the Town Council to ban the showing of the film Ulysses at the associated Film Festival. Lord Provost Brechin (in the best tradition of Belli's Pope Gregory) had given it as his opinion that the film should be burned. Garioch responded nobly:

I truly hope we'll try to please
Our guid Lord Provost Brechin,
and burn your film of Ulysses
(I've read the bulk, a dreich ane)
in miles of bleizan celluloid,
a hunner pipers screichan,
and effigies of Dr Freud,
and fountains of free skeechan,
jist a copy,
at Embro to the ploy.

One result of this open-ended structure, and the continued use of the same stanza-form, is that the poem is becoming less satisfactory as a whole than it is in individual stanzas. It now goes on rather too long, and threatens to become monotonous. If Garioch continues to add stanzas on topical subjects - (as I hope he will: 1966 has provided the material in the censorship, at the insistence of two outraged Town Councillors, of a Canadian painting containing obscene words) - the best way to read it will be in short selections rather than attempting to go all the way through.

The satirical aim is always accurate, whether it be at the genuine Philistines who attack the whole affair, or at the pretensions of the cultural snobs:

loud pawmies of applause
frac folk that pey a pund a time
to sit on wudden raws
gay hard
in Embro to the ploy.

That quotation shows the use of the short penultimate line to deliver the punch of the whole stanza, which is the most successful
formal device of the poem. (Cf., in other stanzas, such choice comments as "verfluch!", "imphm", "(see Press)", "tut-tut", "jist a copy").

"About our heids the satire stots", as Garioch says of Lindsay: it ranges from a standard attack on the tartan-seeking American, delivered with vast gusto in a storm of "ch" sounds, to the gentle poking of fun at all those indignant worthies who attacked the "happening" in absentia:

A happening, incident, or splore
affrontit them that saw
a thing they'd never seen afore -
in the McEwan Haa:
a lassie in a wheelie-chair
wi naething on at aa,
jist like my luck! I wasna there,
it's no the thing ava,
tut-tut,
in Embro to the ploy.

The celebration of the city of Edinburgh takes place in the Masque and in the series of "Edinburgh Sonnets". Sixteen of these appear in the Selected Poems; others have subsequently been published in magazines. They are by no means uniform in tone: they range from the brilliant dialect piece "Heard in the Cougate" and the delightful absurdity of "Ane Offering for Easter" to the more serious tone of "Elegy", "Heard in the Gairdens" (SP 30), and "At Robert Fergusson's Grave" (SP 28).

This last poem is an extraordinary achievement in the control of tone, moving between a deeply respectful tribute to the dead poet and an almost casual, or satiric note. All this can be seen in the second quatrain:
Why are we here ourselves? We gather near the grave. Fergusons mainly, quite a fair turn-out, respectful, ill at ease, we stare at daith—there's an address—I canna hear.

The strong placing of "the grave" is immediately followed by the incongruous fact that the majority of people mourning this man do so merely because they share his name; then the estimation "quite a fair turn-out", which makes the affair sound like a Church Social, until the awkward word "stare", rhyming with "fair", brings us back to "daith". The "address" is back to the Church Social again, but the poet's own response is more clearly set apart: "I canna hear." Then the whole ambiguous experience is shrugged off with the word "Aweill", and an objective estimate is given, only to be immediately diverted back into the poet's own subjectively respectful attitude:

Aweill, we staund bareheidit in the haar, murnin a man that gaed back til the pool twa-hunner year afore our time. The glaur

that haps his banes glowres back. Strang, present dool ruggs at my hairt. Lichtlie this gin ye daur: here Robert Burns knelt and kissed the mool.

This brilliant sonnet is, I feel, superior, mainly by virtue of its economy, to the more discursive "To Robert Fergusson" (SP 33): but both poems are fine achievements, deeply felt tributes which show Garioch's "modesty" at its best. They are the precisely-made tributes of a great craftsman to his greater master.

The Masque of Edinburgh is the high-point, not only of Garioch's
love-affair with the city, but also, in a sense, of his whole work. It is a curious form: designed, at least theoretically, as a theatrical piece, it has only once been performed, and in many ways it is much better suited to be read. The dialogue is mostly in prose, punctuated by three poems, which mark off the sections of the play. It begins on a more or less natural level, and works steadily towards anarchy. Its characters are all symbolic, often historical personages. In all these respects, the title "Masque" has been very precisely chosen.

The central theme is stated by the Makar in his "wee recite anent Edinburgh":

Time merches on, but no in Edinbro,
Here Time adds up like an addition sum.

(ME 18)

This statement is ambivalent, in that Edinburgh's preoccupation with its past is the source both of its magnificence and of its stupidity. Thus the Masque opens with Donald, "got up ti look like yin o the auld Toon Guaird, wi a Lochaber axe an aw", describing himself as "A sham sodger in a sham capital. Nice for the tourists." Donald also describes himself as "a kinna historical ornament for an ancient monument", and comments: "It suits me fine. A'd raither be ornamental nor yisfy ony day." (ME 10-11.) But Garioch's satirical point is that the past is being reduced to ornament, whereas it should in fact be useful. This is concisely summed up in the image of the "tairtan nickie-tams", which the Makar prophesies as the ultimate commercial degeneracy, and which
duly appear in the final scene, (which is played out against a backcloth representing another of the play's images, the geographical, and actual, juxtaposition of John Knox's house and a cinema.) An image of the true, and (at least in some sense) useful, union of past and present, as against the fake commercial one, is provided in the Makar's song:

A've seen masel, abuin a score o times,
Burns, Ramsay, Fergusson gang airm-in-airm,
glowred-at by polis an the auld toon-guaird;
it's nocht bit glawmerie, but whit's the hairm?

(ME 18)

(Cf. Sydney Goodsir Smith's "To Li Po in the Delectable Mountains of Tien-Mu", Figs and Thistles page 32.)

The sum total of Time's addition sum literally appears on stage: beginning gradually, with the appearance of an actual detachment of the 18th century Town Guard, and ending in an anarchic scene (similar to portions of the Night-Town episode of Ulysses) in which personages appear without warning from all periods of Edinburgh's history. Garioch's deliberate confusion of stage and "actual" reality is beautifully illustrated in the stage-direction for the Makar's song:

This is the cue for Scots Music: "Scotia's Glory", a selection o Scottish airs wi brilliant variorums, rendered by Maister Hamish Smith (16) and his wee sister Morag (13½). A real waterfall splairges aboot the stage, amid the mists o a real Heilan glen. The Makar recites his wee poem.

(ME 15)

The villains of the piece are not so much John Knox (who eventually
"casts his duddies to the wark" like everybody else) as, of course, the English, and their allies. England's systematic plunderings are recounted in song, as all Scotland's history is surveyed to the appropriate tune of "The Ball of Kirriemuir". Their allies are "the Embro folk (who) try ti talk Mayfair, an feenish up wi Morningside" (ME 15), and most of all, the schoolteachers.

The catalyst of the play is an unsuspecting "Heilanman", who speaks impeccable English. He has a Highland lilt to his phraseology, but lacks the exaggerated "p" for "b" accent attributed, after Fergusson, to the Toon Guaird. This innocent's ambition is to go to Moray House (a teacher's training college), and then:

Then I'll be a teacher in a fine school in Inverness or in Edinburgh, yes, or maybe in London herself. And maybe some day I'll have a holiday in the hotel at Clachnaskeechan, along with the other gentlemen who go there for the fishing. (ME 14)

But the climax of the play is the collapse of the illusion of the Scottish Educational System, Garioch's ultimate, whimsical but devastating blow at his central target:

Up stours a Corporation fire-escape, crushing a nummer o Waiters, Tooncoincillors, Persons wi Nae Fixed Abode an Agents Provocateurs. The ladder zooms up in a monstrous erection, an in a break o the clouds, in a breeze o licht, mid strains o 'Land o (saft) Soap an Soddy' an 'Scots wha Hae', they see, climmin up the fire-escape thit leads ti Parnassus, John G. Smith, dux boy o George Watson's College, dressed as Sir Walter Scott, brandishin a copy o the 'Merchant Maiden'. They gaze, dumb-struck, as he grades towards Parnassus. Syne, ti the horror o mony prominent
Educationists an ither cultured folk, he's cam ti the tap o the ladder wi Parnassus a gey lang bittie abuin his heid. He wabbles an wabbles an faws wi an acceleration o thretty-twa feet per second per second, per second square if ye'd raither hae it that wey, plump on tap o a Secondary Skuil English Teacher (Chapter V) sae that he dees.

TEACHER

(deein)
Dem!
(dees)

It is, obviously, an unstageable scene: but even the last part depends on being read for its rhythm, and the splendid contrast between the long vowels of "deein" and "dees" and the refined short vowel of the Morningside "Dem!"

It is after this apocalyptic moment that the Heilanman quietly asks, "Tell me all about the Scottish Renascence."

The Masque of Edinburgh is a much more complex work than would appear from a first glance through its scant thirty pages. Its lines are a concentration of many of Garioch's main themes and preoccupations: the love of Edinburgh, the absurdities of its pretensions, the dignity of its history, the threat to that dignity of continued commercialization and the soul-breaking perversions of Morningside education. The true Masters of Arts are the doormen and the chuckers-oot in pubs; the antithesis to Moray House is Jock Hewieson's Bar, the true centre of Edinburgh culture. ("A man wha'd write in Edinbro", declares the Makar, "maun seek his language in a pub." - ME 16.)

The Masque is an image of disorder, of mounting chaos, but it is carefully controlled; Garioch, always the craftsman, has a purpose for
every line. In the Masque, he has created a completely autonomous image of his Edinburgh; similar in many ways to Goodsir Smith's Carotid Cornucopius, but bearing the marks of Garioch's own personality. For, despite the extravagant chaos of the play, its sense of humour is much quieter than Goodsir Smith's, it remains a comprehensive but non-malicious amusement, finding in the Masque the "objective correlative" of Garioch's delight in absurdity.

It is this quiet sense of humour which can be isolated as Garioch's characteristic tone. In one direction it reaches the warm satire and absurdity of "Embro to the Ploy" or the Masque; in another direction, it becomes the melancholy pessimism which underlies his more serious poems.

Garioch has said that he wishes to be regarded as "a highly serious sort of person." Generally speaking, his more serious poems have not been held in such high estimation as his comic or satirical work. It may be that he has to a certain extent been trapped by his own comic gifts, so that readers have come to expect a certain kind of mood from him, and thus feel that a poem like "The Wire" (SP 51) does not represent the "true" Garioch.

"The Wire" is a fairly long poem presenting an image of the world as a vast, deadly prison camp, in which both prisoners and guards are trapped without hope of escape. (It certainly reflects Garioch's own experience as a Prisoner-of-War.) The metaphor of the prisoner persists throughout a whole group of poems, some of which are comic in tone, some not. It would, I feel, be a mistake to think that one mode is more or less "characteristic" of Garioch than the other; but some aesthetic
distinctions are possible.

The most hopeful poems in this group are "The Canny Hen" (SP 60) and "The Percipient Swan" (SP 43), which are both cast in the gently satiric mode. Both of these poems start with a presentation of an individual lost in a vast, impersonal system which has somehow deprived them of their natural rights. The hen lays eggs only to lose them; the swan's wings have been clipped. Both poems present the triumph of the individual over its circumstances: the hen manages to escape its battery, and the swan prepares to sing. But the implication is that these are exceptional cases: not all hens are canny, nor all swans percipient. Garioch hails the hen's achievement in a paraphrase of Barbour which makes its initial comic point by the disproportion between the individual case and the noble sentiment, but which makes its further, serious point by suggesting that the juxtaposition is not so disproportionate after all:

A' Fredome is a noble thing!
and kinna scarce, to tell the truth,
for naebody has muckle rowth
of freedome gin he warks for wages,
nae mair nor in the Middle Ages.

But no-one escapes the Wire, and in "They that are Seick" (SP 67) Garioch, using the image of disease, proposes that the greatest and most widespread disease of all may be good health:

What if we suffer frae guid-heill
that rives body and saul asunder
with thoughts of what is and might be
diluting us in dark-brown scunner?

This awareness is something which has to be hidden, unlike physical sickness, which can be openly admitted and cured.

This ill is ours, we maun haud on
in privacy gin we shuid hae it,
or ither-ways keep til ourseil
our drumly thocht, and never say it.

A felloun sickness, ill to thole,
but weill for us gin it's negleckit;
tak tent as the Inspectors come
and gae: we're maybe no suspeckit.

(Again the prison image.)

Thus Freedom is rare, achieved only in the exceptional instance. The guards on the Wire are not free, as the ratepayers who watch the swan are "bored like masel / my desolat owners." (SP 44) Even when freedom is achieved, it may be denied; and this is the point of what may well be Garioch's finest individual poem, "Sisyphus" (SP 79).

We have already noted this poem's technical virtuosity, and the startling new interpretation of the myth gives it an immediate impact separately from its context in Garioch's work. But in that context, this brilliantly funny poem surely represents a nadir of pessimism, for here is a prisoner who has lost all wish for freedom, who is so completely resigned to his fate, to his torture, that freedom can only be something to be frightened of. So that, when he does break the system,
when his stone does balance on the top of the hill, his own strongest instinct is to tip it off again, to re-enter the system, to confirm his own slavery. Security, even the security of suffering, is preferred to the risks and responsibilities of freedom: the temptation to surrender in this way is one which Garioch himself must have felt strongly. Sisyphus himself is not to be too strongly condemned: his surrender is a very natural human failing, and a recognisable psychological trait, with reference to any kind of system or imprisonment. If the poem is deeply pessimistic about humanity as a whole, it is also very tolerant of its particular example. The final phrase "shair of his cheque at the month's end" establishes an absolute identification between the metaphysical ideas of man as prisoner and the very practical predicaments of, say, the schoolteachers described in the "Repone til George Buchanan." Again, there is an initial comic point of disproportion, followed by the more serious realization that the identification is neither comic nor disproportionate.

It is this double effect, I would suggest, which lifts "The Canny Hen", "The Percipient Swan", and "Sisyphus" above the more single-minded poems such as "The Wire" and "They that are Seick." These latter poems operate on a simpler level; they create images (the wire, the disease) which are direct expressions of their real content; "Sisyphus" creates an image which is a comic, and thus an oblique, expression of its content. On a purely practical level, the comic method is more effective: telling a joke is a better way of communicating than preaching is. Aesthetically, however, "Sisyphus" is again superior. The image
of "The Wire" has no existence except in relation to its message; the
details have all been created for this one end. But the image of
"Sisyphus", being oblique, has to stand by itself first of all; it is
a more complete aesthetic creation, an autonomous form, not merely an
illustration. It is comedy operating at its highest level, which is
only a hair's breadth away from tragedy; and it is proof of Garioch's
talent as a great comic poet that he is able to maintain that hair's
breadth with the utmost precision.

This pessimism, then, is another side of Garioch's nature, which
balances and complements the more gently humorous side. If Garioch's
delight in absurdity is warm and unmalicious, if it does not imply
too strong a censure of the people thus exposed, this is at least in
part because absurdity, in which we are all involved, is one way of
being human. It is better to be absurd than to be a schoolteacher.

Garioch's poetry often has a simplicity and a directness which
renders the critic's task not so much difficult as merely irrelevant.
D.M. Black rightly closed his article on Garioch by saying that his
poetry is "a poetry very much more rewarding to read than to read about."
The particular flavour of Garioch's comic personality will emerge more
clearly from the poems themselves than from any critical account of them.
And it is the encounter with that personality which, to a greater extent
even than his vast technical skill, provides Robert Garioch's readers,
past, present, and undoubtedly future, with their deepest pleasure and
satisfaction.
In a recent essay, Hugh MacDiarmid restated his belief that Norman MacCaig "is the best Scottish poet writing in English today. I would go further", MacDiarmid continues, "and claim that he is one of the best, if not the best, we have ever had." This estimate (at least the first part of it) would probably be fairly widely accepted in Scotland. MacCaig's reputation is also of good standing in England, where the Hogarth Press has regularly published his books for the last dozen years or more. From my own observation, the extremely enthusiastic reception of MacCaig's poems from students in the Creative Writing Department at the University of British Columbia might be regarded as a sign that MacCaig's poetry would be equally well received if it were to find an American publisher.

There are certain obvious reasons for this widespread popularity. MacCaig's poems are usually short, clear, characterised by brilliant images, hard unsentimental ideas, and a gift for paradox. He is also very clearly un-English, but his Scottishness is not manifested in that strange language which the English profess to find so incomprehensible.

MacCaig himself defines the Scottish, or more particularly the Celtic/Gaelic, characteristics of his poetry in these words:

I should think it's more a way of looking at experience, because contrary to the rubbishy ideas that were started off mainly by Matthew Arnold about Celtic twilight-ism and the Romantic Gael, contrary to that the truth is that the Gael is an extremely practical man and his art is very formal, extremely formal, and unromantic. And add to this, which I get through generations, the feeling for form, add to this the fact that I took a degree in Classics, and you'll see why the form of poetry has always been of special interest to me. I think I am a non-romantic fellow,
if the only reason is that I don't like romantic writing and I don't like romantic music and I don't like romantic people.

"Form", he also says, "is always one of the sources of my poetry, never mind the clothes that it wears." MacCaig is a fine craftsman who, like Garioch, has until recently preferred working within strict stanzaic forms. Within these forms, he has experimented considerably with different forms of rhyme (internal, feminine, off-rhymes), and has been able to achieve, where necessary, an easily colloquial movement. The strong connection between form and content in his poetry is shown by the fact that his recent explorations of free verse have opened up for him areas of subject-matter which do not appear in his earlier work.

But for all his interest in form, the formal range of MacCaig's work remains remarkably narrow. For one thing, he has never written any long poems. In the seven volumes from Riding Lights to Rings on a Tree, only one poem ("Snow in Princes Street", RA 35) extends onto a third page; his longest work to date is "A Man in Assynt", which was commissioned by the BBC for a television programme of predetermined length. He has never, to my knowledge, published in any other creative form, although he is a clear and penetrating reviewer. He has, almost alone among the poets of the Scottish Renaissance, never attempted translation. Even his free verse poems are not noticeably extravagant in their exploration of the form; and he has no use at all for such further formal experiments as concrete poetry.
Thus MacCaig's formal position is fairly restricted and fairly traditionalist. It may be that these forms serve his present needs quite adequately; but the expansion in his poetry which occurred when he began using free verse might certainly lead the reader to hope for some more formal adventuresomeness.

MacCaig's work exhibits a remarkably even quality. Even the poems of the very early period of The Far Cry and The Inward Eye cannot be entirely dismissed; and from Riding Lights on, the quality of the utterance remains on a very even level. The American poet J. Michael Yates told me that A Round of Applause was the best edited book of poetry he had ever seen.

This may be attributed to MacCaig's methods of composition:

Recently on television Vernon Watkins was talking about writing fifty versions of a poem, and I know Stephen Spender in one of his books describes the writing of a poem, and I think he got up to seventy-two versions. Well, I write one. Hit or miss, you see? If I write ten poems, about seven of them go in the back of the fire, where they belong. I'd rather write a new poem than work on an old one. And this isn't a matter of choice, it's because I can't work on an old one. It either comes out straight, or else it's lost. So I write a great deal, and the bulk of it is burnt.4

MacCaig's books seldom contain any poems so outstandingly good, or bad, that they stand out from the others. Who knows how many bad poems land in the fire, or how many great poems exist in unwritten revisions?

Many of MacCaig's basic concerns and techniques also remain fairly
constant throughout his work, from the earliest "Apocalyptic" poems right through to Rings on a Tree. For this reason, I propose, rather than attempting to approach MacCaig's work from a chronological standpoint, to deal with it as a whole, and under three main headings. The first deals with the stylistic movement from elaboration to simplification; the second (and most important) examines MacCaig's central thematic obsession with external nature, in itself and in relation to the observing human self; and the third looks at some of the new directions being opened up in MacCaig's most recent books by his use of free verse.

I

Norman MacCaig's first publications were associated with a group of poets who called their movement "The New Apocalypse." These poets came mostly from the Celtic fringe areas of Britain - Scotland, Wales, Cornwall - and the characteristic of their style was their reliance on torrents of surrealistic images. Thought, or any kind of logical content, was decisively subservient to the image, which was indulged mainly for its own sake. At its worst, this poetry looked like third-rate imitation Dylan-Thomas-on-an-off-day.

Several Scottish poets were involved in the movement - G.S. Fraser, J.F. Hendry, and Tom Scott in his pre-Scots days among them - but only two emerged from the movement with any stature. One was W.S. Graham, who, remaining closer to the Apocalyptic tradition, produced at least
one really important book, The Nightfishing. The other was Norman MacCaig.

MacCaig has progressed by rejecting this early period. When I told him that I had been unable to find any copies of his early books, The Far Cry and The Inward Eye, he said he was glad, and he hoped all copies of them had now been burned. Of the Apocalyptics he said:

I think there's more to be said about that fatuous movement than has been said, because suddenly a number of writers, all of them young, from Cornwall up to at least Edinburgh, where I was, found themselves writing in this deplorable way. The odd thing was that they were all at it without knowing each other. Nicholas Moore I think it was, and Henry Treece, discovered this odd fact, published two or three magazines, gave it this awful name, wrote portentous, woolly, and extremely nonsensical manifestoes about it. All of us have been running away from that label ever since.

He also described the change which occurred in his poetry around 1948 as "sudden, complete, and absolute."6

This is not, of course, entirely true. However bad the early poems are, they do contain certain basic elements of MacCaig's kind of writing. The images may be random, exotic, and pointlessly profuse, but already MacCaig is able to pinpoint an image in a few precise words; and the assured use of strict stanzatic forms is also already present. One recent critic has said of these poems, "Visually (they) were wild, 'romantic' if you like; aurally, they were already sophisticated."7

The visual "wildness", the elaboration of images for their own sake, held together only by private and obscure connections, is well illustrated in an early poem by MacCaig, published in 1941 in the
Apocalyptic anthology, *The White Horseman*:

This false in fur that throws my weather out
to writhe in doorways cries Bring in your dead.
There is a floor of needles for the martyr,
a bite of angels to crown his wormy blood
if he will walk the scale of crusted water
that floats as beetled armour on my moat

and so on for another two stanzas.

The reliance on images is of course a constant factor throughout
MacCaig's work; but the vital difference is that in his later work
the images are aimed at communication. They go out of their way to
establish some point in common with the reader, rendering familiar the
unfamiliar; whereas the images in the poem quoted above seem designed to
establish the exclusiveness of the poet, by setting up a system of private
obscurities which draws the reader away from, not closer to, the realities
of common experience.

This kind of elaboration of images for their own sake drops
right out of MacCaig's style. "No Escape" (RL 29) is perhaps the last
sign of it. Some critics, notably Robert Tait, have argued that
MacCaig still tends to pile up images which are only tenuously connected
with each other. Tait wrote:

MacCaig seems particularly easy prey to a temptation to
use the flashy but unilluminating metaphor. An image is
conceived but immediately aborted to make room for the next
eye-catcher. By doing this, he can at least be said to
temper a lack of overall integration with entertainment and
a genuine liveliness of detail.
While this criticism could obviously be applied to the early Apocalyptic verse, and perhaps to some of the less successful poems in the later books, I feel it is unfair to MacCaig's work as a whole. (It should also be noted that Tait was writing mainly about Riding Lights.) It may be true that certain individual poems appear to lack "integration," and are somewhat loosely held together; but in the context of MacCaig's whole output, they find their place. There is an overall integration in MacCaig's work, a unity of theme and outlook, in which the role of the image or metaphor is central, and is also more apt, precise, and justifiable than in these early poems.

The whole movement of MacCaig's poetry has been away from elaboration, towards a greater simplicity. From Riding Lights on, he told me,

I've been moving, in a rather helplessly guided way, towards a simplification of utterance, hoping of course that the content isn't reduced in its meaning, or importance of meaning, but trying always to become more and more lucid. And that again is a Celtic thing.

One other kind of elaboration, which is especially prominent in Riding Lights and The Sinai Sort, and which has also progressively dropped out of MacCaig's work, is the elaboration of ideas, especially of paradoxes, into fairly long poems with a very intricate conceptual movement. These poems depend on a clever manipulation of abstract language and involutions of paradox; thus:

For mile and moment are no larger than
Each other is; and that is less than what
Divides one thought of you from another thought;
And that is nothing - space to hold a man
It must be, though, since taking your thought from me
Leaves me and nothing; for I'm a fantasy
Your thoughts unghost into reality.

(RL 26)

It is, in effect, a kind of "wit" which could well be described as
"metaphysical." Indeed, at times MacCaig does sound very like Donne:

If I could kill this poem, sticking
My thin pen through its throat,
It would stand crying by your bed
And haunt your cruelty every empty night.

(RL 18)

Nowadays, MacCaig rejects the label "metaphysical", and he made
gentle fun of it in the opening poem of Surroundings, "Metaphysical Me."
But it does seem to me a useful word for describing the kind of poetry
he was writing, especially in the volume The Sinai Sort, such poems as
"Golden Calf", "Descending Word", "Growing Down", "In No Time At All",
"Shadow of Love", and "Non Pareil." (SS 10, 20, 34, 38, 46, 50.)

One characteristic of these poems is that they tend to start from
an idea and set out to illustrate it, or make use of it in a witty way.
Thus, "Growing Down" (the title itself being a "witty" variation on
"growing up") is prefaced by the statement "There is a theory which finds
language more and more metaphorical as it is traced back in the past."
This idea serves as the basis for a discussion of the attempt to describe
or define a loved one in terms of images.
And with a simian hand I pin some phrase
Upon your seeming.

(SS 34)

A great many of these poems are concerned with trying to define the exact essence of another person - see "Particular You" and "Non Pareil" (SS 12, 50) - and the questioning of the usefulness of image and metaphor in this task. The degree to which the (subjective) metaphor distorts its object (the person) is of course one central aspect of MacCaig's whole obsession with the nature of perception, which we shall be discussing later. In "Non Pareil" he concludes that no two things (except perhaps opposites) could ever be identical; thus, the image and "you" can never be identical; therefore, the only way to define "you" is by "your separateness from all / That I can see or say of you", in the same way as the orbit of an unknown planet can be defined by its effects on other, known, planets. (This same image is repeated in "Students in a Library", CG 16.) In this case, the image (which is basically a conceit of much the same order as Donne's famous "twin compasses") is used to illustrate the paradox of knowing the unknowable; there is a further paradox, of course, in the use of an image to illustrate the inadequacy of images, and this further paradox is one which remains throughout MacCaig's work.

Another feature of these poems which persists in later works is the curious impersonality of the "you" of MacCaig's love poems. Even though so many of these poems have as their main concern the definition of "you", that quest is always carried on on a purely abstract level.
One can read all the way through MacCaig's poetry and emerge without the slightest idea of what the woman to whom these poems are addressed is like. Neither her personality nor her physical appearance are ever mentioned; she exists in a kind of abstract vacuum. This is not intended as a criticism - indeed, MacCaig, with his dislike of romantic excesses, certainly intended this effect - but the average reader of MacCaig's work will probably be slightly disconcerted to discover more real emotion in his poems about landscape than in his poems about love. (But see also the final section, on the free verse poems.)

MacCaig is certainly a believer in the role of intellect in poetry. The thought in his poems is seldom particularly original, but it is usually clear and logical. A definite line of thought can be traced through the most involved paradoxes of The Sinai Sort; and many poems in A Common Grace and A Round of Applause demand very close reading if they are to be followed. But the general movement of the verse has been away from the elaboration of idea and paradox in the early volumes, and towards a much simpler form of communication. This process was helped by the adoption of free verse; much of the difficulty in MacCaig's poems stems from following an idea around and through the fixed stanzaic forms, which tended to complicate matters with forced inversions and awkward rhymes. (In particular, the "what/thought" rhyme crops up with annoying frequency, e.g. RL 26, 41; SS 13; CG 39, etc.)

The move towards simplification is noticeable even in small typographical points. For instance, the free verse poems in Surroundings still begin every line with a capital letter, but in Rings on a Tree
this has been dropped, and capitals are used only where grammatically correct. The result is that the poems look much less formal, and the conversational flow of the verse is increased, there being less of a full stop at the beginning of each new line.

Compare the involved intricacies of a poem like "In No Time At All" (SS 38) with the lucid simplicity, the absolutely clear organization of idea in images, of the following poem from MacCaig's latest book, Rings on a Tree.

A Difference.

Trying to recall
the feel of pebbles underfoot
on the beach at Kirkaig, I
recall it. But my feet
are not hurt.

Or, remembering the well
at the Bay of the Lambs and its water
exploring
the length of my throat,
I remember it, but
remain thirsty.

Memory keeps from me
that trivial hurt, this
trivial pleasure.

What it does is not
trivial, when I
remember you -
my sore journey, my draught
of pure being.

(RT 17)

My feeling is that MacCaig's move from elaboration to simplicity has been pure gain. Rings on a Tree seems to me the best single volume.
that he has produced so far. He may have lost some of the complexity, some of the density of texture, of the earlier poems; but this loss is far outweighed by the gain in communication. The thought is only less involved, not less valid. The earlier poems betray a kind of anxiety all too common in Scotland: the need, on the part of the poet, to create "significance" for his own work by making it as apparently complex as possible; but the result is frequently merely clutter. Precision and simplicity will create their own "significance": the poet doesn't have to bother his head about that.

II

"The outside world ... fascinates me. I've got a greedy eye. I love landscape, landscape is my substitute for religion."11

The central theme of almost all Norman MacCaig's poetry is his idolatry of landscape, his love for natural things. Not just some things, not just beautiful things: everything. The opening lines of the first poem in *Riding Lights* state this theme:

In my eye I've no apple; every object Enters in there with hands in pockets, I welcome them all, just as they are, Every one equal, none a stranger.  

(RL 7)

His response to the extraordinary, ordinary things of external
nature is full, joyful, and undulled by custom or repetition. He writes with equal facility about city or country, about the streets and courtyards of Edinburgh or about the mountains and lochs of his beloved Wester Ross. And his short visit to New York in 1966 produced a brilliant series of descriptive poems about that foreign city. Of the Wester Ross landscape, MacCaig has written:

.. it and I have a love-affair, so nearly human
we even have quarrels.\textsuperscript{12}

This love of nature is a kind of axiom for MacCaig. It exists, there's no point in questioning why it should be so, it just is. His poems explore aspects of this idolatry - how it works, what it shows him, and so on - but they do not attempt to explain why it should be this way for him; that is merely assumed, even in a poem which makes quiet fun of the fact:

He fawned on objects.
He serenaded the dust in the streets
And made himself ridiculous about fish. \textsuperscript{(§ 7)}

I can recollect only one poem in which MacCaig is even vaguely on the defensive about his obsession. That is "Balances", in his latest book, \textit{Rings on a Tree}. It opens:

Because I see the world poisoned
by cant and brutal self-seeking,
must I be silent about
the useless waterlily, the dunnock's nest
in the hedgeback?

The defence is scarcely necessary, except against the most narrow-minded conceptions of poetry's role. If MacCaig's idolatry of landscape needs any justification at all, it finds it in his poetry.

MacCaig loves nature for its own sake, and also for the further meanings it can suggest.

I love landscape not only for its aesthetic appeal, but because there seems to be a sort of web through all the outer world, never mind the inanimate landscape with the living people and creatures in it. It isn't a thing to be called Pantheism, because it doesn't seem to me to have anything to do with religion. ... I have a feeling, which I can't explain, not being a philosopher, of a tremendous inter-connectedness of things and people and ideas; and a great deal of what I write are little probes and projections towards an understanding of this feeling, which I don't think is anywhere a private thing of mine, I think this is quite a common thing. But it is a compulsive one with me, I can never escape from it.

This "interconnectedness of things and people and ideas" centres on the process of perception. Perception is the confrontation of two selves: man and thing, observer and observed. Perception is also a process, by which the observer assimilates the observed into his consciousness. MacCaig's love of nature leads him naturally to a concern for this process, and what happens during it, the ways in which the process of perception (and especially his own poetic, metaphoric mode
of perception) alters that which is perceived. Thus the main ideas which MacCaig explores in his poems on landscape are that of perception, the subject/object relationship; and that of metaphor, which is his own individual way of perceiving things.

A poem which finely expresses these ideas, and which may be taken as programmatic for a great deal of MacCaig's nature poetry, is the following, from *A Common Grace*:

Ardmore.

The track that stops there is a final one.  
So absolute its ending that it seems  
What other tracks are lesser copies of  
- Paradigm of them all. The sea, the sun  
Are the next stage, with nothing in between.  
A quick place this to know your journey's done.

The journey, not the direction. It goes on  
Beyond the wild rose and the barking dog  
With a bird's rush to soar out into space;  
It shows the lie the journey is, undergone,  
It seems, for the direction's sake and not  
The croft it set its endless love upon.

The sea rips in between two claws of stone  
Or races out, as meaning does with words.  
- So, here's a statement at its seeming end.  
Only who makes it knows that it has flown  
Into a space where dogs need never bark  
Or roses in their thorns be overblown.

(CG 22)

In the first place, this poem presents an individual scene, precisely localised in the title, in a very vivid and compelling way. The reader may receive only a general idea of what the place looks like (sea, croft, rose, dog), but the first stanza surely gives him a very
precise idea of what it feels like. Secondly, while respecting the integrity of this individual image, the poem is able to use it for further purposes: this is because the ideas are in fact inherent in the image. Thus the image of the track naturally gives rise to the distinction between the journey and the direction, the particular and the general, and the way the general may be contained in the particular.

The general is, in the first instance, the idea of the "paradigm" of track, a kind of Platonic Ideal track. The idea is then expanded, so that the general becomes that interconnectedness of which MacCaig was speaking: the direction leads beyond journey's end, the croft at Ardmore, to the general interconnectedness of all nature, in which the croft partakes, that "space" of perfect harmony described in the closing lines. But notice that this general is impossible without the respect for the particular. The journey only "seems" to be for the direction's sake alone; in fact, it is also for the croft itself.

Similarly, the poem is about the nature of perception: Ardmore is perceived both in itself, the particular (journey's end), and as a means of realising the greater whole (the direction). The question is, which is the "true" Ardmore? Can there be only one "true" Ardmore? Is the conception of Ardmore in the mind of the person who sees it as a means of perceiving the greater whole false to Ardmore as it exists as a specific geographical location? Or if it is false, does that matter? And so on.

On a third level, it is a poem about poetry. After all, this transformation of Ardmore is achieved in words, in the metaphor of the
track whose direction continues beyond journey's end. If there are doubts about the nature of perception here, how far are they traceable to the inadequacies of words? This doubt about the role of metaphor is expressed, as is, ironically, usual in MacCaig's poetry, by means of a metaphor, in the first lines of the third stanza.

The poem itself is thus a track which has reached its end: but MacCaig's assertion is that this is only a "seeming" end, because the poem itself is not a journey but a direction. The poem also can create a harmonious "space"; but it does this through the use of metaphor, for metaphor demonstrates interconnectedness by seeing all natural things as capable of expressing each other. So that each individual metaphor would also be not only a journey but also a direction.

"Ardmore" is a very rich and complex poem, compressing into its eighteen lines a great many of MacCaig's basic themes, approaches, and problems. If a more general survey of these themes does not wholly resolve all the questions raised by "Ardmore", that is because MacCaig himself has not resolved them. His work asks more questions than it answers - which is one major reason why it is worth reading and studying.

Of course, many of MacCaig's poems have much simpler intentions. Very often, the main purpose of a poem is merely the accurate description of a particular scene, or a particular moment. In these poems, speculations about the further meanings of the scene, or of the process of perceiving it, are present only by implication, in the use of metaphor. Every time MacCaig uses a metaphor, he is in effect presenting to us that process of perception; but his purpose in this type of poem is not
primarily to question or to discuss the role of metaphor, but simply to share with his reader a landscape, or the ways a bird moves. "Nearly all the poems I write", MacCaig has said, "are poems praising things." He praises them, not in any extravagant terms, but simply by presenting them, as accurately as possible, the way they are.

When I write about places in the Highlands, which I know very well, the local people there - and they're no fools, gamekeepers, poachers - who know that landscape in a way that I can't because they live among it, they please me very much when they say, "You know, I saw that, but I didn't really see it till you wrote it down." This kind of illumination of the ordinary is the kind of thing which some people say I have a little gift for. And indeed I don't really try to do very much more, because the ordinary seems to me most extraordinary.  

This aspect has always been present in his work - see for instance "Climbing Suilven" (RL 38) or "Maiden Loch" (SS 25) - but it is most notable in later books such as A Round of Applause, and, most of all, in Measures. Two poems in A Round of Applause demonstrate the range of MacCaig's subject-matter. The majority of his descriptive poems are about scenes in the Western Highlands, such as the poem "Dunvegan" (RA 45), which ends with a brilliant evocation of the castle itself, and its history:

.. cubed on a kilted stone,
Stands the great honeycomb
Filled with claret and blood
Where a great music arose
And Mary, Red Alasdair's daughter,
Made poems and ladled her snuff
Into her randy nose.

(The "great music" is the Ceol Mor, which MacDiarmid also celebrated.)

But MacCaig is equally adept at a subject such as "Thaw on a Building Site" (RA 61), a purely urban scene. This poem is a model of concise and brilliant creation through images -

A concrete mixer cleared its throat
For a boring speech, all consonants

- and it catches exactly, not a static scene, but a moment of process, of renewing life. The subject is a building being built, coming into being. The shapes as they are now represent "Not yet a language, but its grammar" (a brilliant metaphor for the bones of a building, its girders and foundations.) The artificial growth of the building is compared to the natural growth of the thaw, so that, just as the frozen crust of earth collapses and crumbles downwards, the buildings "crumbled upwards into being." This is MacCaig at his best: the simple, straightforward creation of a scene through images, and, through the creation, praise.

The book in which this type of poetry is really dominant is Measures. Alexander Scott has said of this book that "In Measures, MacCaig gives the impression of marking time, of going through the motions as before but without any great conviction of their value, except as an
I cannot agree with this. *Measures* seems to me one of MacCaig's most attractive books: his intellectual concerns are less prominent, and the book concentrates on praise. The poems attempt to "measure", to describe precisely, the elements of the landscape.

Take, for instance, this poem:

**Heron**

It stands in water, wrapped in heron. It makes
An absolute exclusion of everything else
By disappearing in itself, yet is the presence
Of hidden pools and secret, reedy lakes.
It twirls small fish from the bright water flakes.

(Glog goes the small fish down). With lifted head
And no shoulders at all, it periscopes round -
Steps, like an aunty, forward - gives itself shoulders
And vanishes, a shilling in a pound,
Making no sight as other things make no sound.

Until, releasing its own spring, it fills
The air with heron, finds its height and goes,
A spear between two clouds. A cliff receives it
And it is gargoyle. All around it hills
Stand in the sea; wind from a brown sail spills.

This is not the kind of poem which requires exhaustive analysis. One can only point out the brilliant exactitude of such similes as "Steps, like an aunty, forward"; or admire the originality of such a conceit as "Making no sight as other things make no sound." Take just the last phrase of the poem: "wind from a brown sail spills." The verb is precisely right for describing what a sail looks like as the wind leaves it, and the phrase fits beautifully into the poem as the heron disappears, leaving the observer free to look at that "everything else" which the
heron had excluded, turning from the bird to its environment. The various metaphors and comparisons have been used to define the essence of heron, to "measure" it, from various standpoints: now it is set in the context of hill and sea and boat. But further, there is an affection implicit in that last phrase, an emotion which is, simply, praise.

Here one is compelled to make a comparison with Ian Hamilton Finlay, to suggest, not an influence (because MacCaig does not like Finlay's work), but a similarity. Finlay's basic motive is also praise, and he too sets out to record natural phenomena in as precise a verbal form as he can. The main difference between them is that, whereas MacCaig is incapable of looking at anything without seeing it in terms of something else, as metaphor (heron as periscope, aunty, spear, gargoyle), Finlay's great achievement is the creation of beautiful autonomous objects, which are only themselves. This is bound up with the form: MacCaig's metaphors, however concise, are still aspects of discursive syntax, talking about the objects of his praise; Finlay's poems are these objects.

The "brown sail" of the last line is very reminiscent of Finlay (and perhaps I am guilty of reading some of Finlay's emotion about fishing-boats into MacCaig's line here.) But despite their autonomy, Finlay's poems exist on a more human level than MacCaig's do. Finlay's fishing-boats, windmills, and so on, are valued in a very human (although not anthropomorphic) way. MacCaig's subjects remain firmly of their own kind. The comparison to the aunty does not deprive the heron of any of its birdness; and the poem is designed to demonstrate the heron's separateness from humanity. It is a measuring of heron-ness.
Measures is filled with poems like "Heron", and they form the basis for much of one's enjoyment of MacCaig. They are simple and attractive poems, which create landscapes for the reader: and that in itself is a perfectly adequate and worthwhile aim for poetry. The critic naturally finds himself talking at greater length about the more complex poems, but this does not mean that they are in any way "better".

When MacCaig does attempt to do more than merely describe a natural scene, when he sets out to ask questions about it, and about his observing of it, these questions all proceed from the fundamental one about perception, the relationship between subject and object. When I asked him about this, he admitted:

Yes, that has always been, from the very start, a fundamental interest of mine. I don't philosophise about it. I write a lot about that sort of thing - the appearance of a thing, and what it is in its reality. There's a tree outside the window there; Pasternak has a poem about a tree and he says, "That is not a tree, that is a way of feeling." Well, this notion - before I'd read Pasternak - this has been a compulsive notion with me. What is the tree? The tree I can only know subjectively etc etc etc. Of course, this is a very feebly philosophical idea: they do it in first Philosophy in Universities, don't they. But all the same, the people in the Universities and the philosophers haven't explained this away. (my italics)

Nor does MacCaig's poetry "explain it away". The poems do not offer any answers: they are merely fascinated with the problem, and each is, in some way or another, an exemplification of it. The idea - that the tree-in-itself is not the same as the tree-as-I-see-it - is
present in almost all of MacCaig's poetry, at least as an implication. But it is comparatively rarely that the problem is stated directly.

One such occasion is in the opening poem of *Riding Lights*, "Instrument and Agent", the first stanza of which was quoted above, (page 215). The poem continues:

Yet in the short journey they make  
To my skull's back, each takes a look  
From another, or a gesture, or  
A special way of saying Sir.

So tree is partly girl; moon  
And wit slide through the sky together;  
And which is star - what's come a million  
Miles or gone those inches farther?  

(RL 7)

This of course assumes that there is one, and only one, "true" star, and that the problem is to decide which it is: the physical thing out there, or the image within the brain. I doubt if MacCaig really sees this as a problem; he would probably agree that each of these two choices has its own kind of validity. Rather, his concern is the examination of the discrepancies between the objective reality and the subjective reality; and of the ways in which a subjective reality is externalised, and thus becomes, for some other observer, objective:

Or the mind fidgets and a thought, grown green,  
Born of nowhere and marrying nowhere,  
Fakes a creation, that is one and goes  
Into the world and makes its difference there.  

(RA 28)
The process is of course reciprocal: just as the object being observed is altered, so is the observer altered. But both these changes are internal, perhaps imperceptible, as MacCaig acknowledges in one of his rare humorous poems on the subject, "Signs, Not Omens" (RT 23):

I gaze at you so hard
I alter you by gazing, I alter me by gazing.

Surely others see evidence
of this in you, of this in me?

I feel like the Inverkirkaig man
who had pointed with pride so often
to the Barrel Buttress on Suilven
one looked to see his fingerprint on it -
or a sandstone fingerstall
on his finger.

- Except that I am not he, and
what, good heavens, could be more unlike you
than a Barrel Buttress?

To perhaps a surprising extent, MacCaig conceives of the observer as separate from the landscape, even a stranger within it.

One poem in an early book, Riding Lights, presents a different view:

Trees and stars and stones
Are falsely these and true comparisons
Whose likenesses are the observer. He
Stares, in the end, at his own face, and shame
Of his deep flaw, mortality,
Shines in the star, and from the tree the same
Pity is shed that weakens him when he knows
That he is going where even the stone goes.

(RL 25)

But the more common MacCaig view is expressed in the later book, Measures:
I, in a safe place, as I always am,
Was, as I always am, observer only

(M 46)

That is, MacCaig conceives of himself as being separate from what he observes. In another later poem, "Crossing the Border" (RT 9), he presents the situation metaphorically: he is sitting in a railway carriage, looking through the window, at a world of experience from which he is decisively cut off, and which is (since he has his back to the engine) receding from him. Or again, it is a common trick in MacCaig's descriptive poems to spend the bulk of the poem describing one thing and then, in the last few lines, to turn away to something different. As examples of this, take "Heron" (above, page 223, or the following, final stanza of "Looking down on Glen Canisp":

Even the ravens
Have sunk into the sandstone cliffs
Of Suilven, that are dazed blue
And fuzz into the air around them -
As my mind does, till I hear
A thin far clatter and
Look down to where two stags
Canter across the ford, splashing up before them
Antlers of water.

(S 53)

This typical movement seems to emphasise his isolation from the landscape, his ability to make a choice, by the exercise of his will, of what he will perceive in it, as he does in the poem significantly named "Outsider" (RA 44).

Given this separateness, however, the observer yet attempts to
assimilate the landscape, in various ways. The most obvious way is through his memory:

And memory gathered tarry splinters,
Put shadowy sparkles in her bag,
Slid up her sleeve the hills of Harris
And stole Orion and the Dog.

I sat with that cruel thief inside me;
I sat with years I did not know
Heaped on my knees.

(Note here how the imagery of theft emphasises the separateness of the observer from the scene. He comes as an outsider, an intruder, and takes things away, back to his own place.)

This is stating the idea at its most straightforward: these stanzas are only a variation on Wordsworth's daffodils. But not only memorising, any kind of perception is a form of assimilating. The experience of the external world becomes part of the mind, which will in turn perceive more.

The process is clearly outlined in the poem "Absorbed" (§ 57). The first stanza describes the poet in the natural scene; this is the basic, initial experience.

Each footstep parted
From the sodden earth it clung to
With a vulgar kiss. I breathed webs
And gossamers of water - if you clenched your fist,
I thought, you'd squeeze waterdrops
From mid-air. A hawk flew by,
Almost leaving a wake, and buzzards
Aquaplaned over the ridges.
The observer remains separate from the scene, like a bird tucked away in its nest.

My mind, snug
In its wren's nest, was its own element
As it has to be.

But the mind is capable of looking out and perceiving things, entering into them as they enter into it.

Yet it could creep into
A tormented thorn bush, a flat palm
Of water, a reed in the wind
Playing an invisible fish. It could wear
The curved nose of an affronted ewe
And tug so, like this, with
A rocking lilypad.

For MacCaig himself, with his "greedy eye", this process is practically inevitable. Next, the mind observes its own observation:

Now at home it spreads out that landscape
Like a chart and follows the course
Pricked on it by a line
Of vulgar kisses. And it knows
That for it this journey will never end.
A transference has been made. A squelching Countryside has become
A dry thought, and square miles
Fluff their feathers in the wren's nest.

It is not only a transference, but a transformation. The mind may recapitulate the early images ("vulgar kisses"), but the "squelching
"countryside" is now a "dry thought", and the two things are separate, different in kind. The poem ends with a dry, understated comment:

To be one's own element
Seems more inhospitable
Than it is.

The mind is not, however, as hospitable as it might be: when it admits what is outside it, it does not take things as they are, it changes them to conform with its own nature.

The mind imposes upon its perceptions its own categories, and ways of arranging things. It subjects them to such abstract and analytical descriptions as those of space and time, so that

a rose tree was
Where space must thicken and where time must pause.

( RA 50)

The idea of an object as the "thickening" of space, or of planes of light, is a common one in MacCaig's poetry. ("And spaces ... contracted into selves." RA 18.)

The observing mind creates order, and composition. It picks out a centre, and organises the landscape around it. In a sense, this is done in every poem: "Heron", for instance, creates its own universe and organises it around the central focal point of the heron. Other poems do this more explicitly. "Buzzards fly", MacCaig writes in "Treeless Landscape" (CG 44), "To be a buzzard and create a sky". In
the same way, the "Solitary Crow" (RT 42):

Where he goes he carries,  
Since there's no centre, what a centre is,  
And that is crow, the ragged self that's his.

This happens in time as well as in space. In "Ordinary Home-coming" (RA 23), all past events lead up to, and all future events away from, the single moment of a knock on a door.

The most extended treatment of this idea comes in the poem "Blue Chair in a Sunny Day" (CG 19). (Note the precision of the title: not "on", but "in" a sunny day.) The poem opens, again, with a general scene:

A serious contemplation, this scene is,  
A listening stillness, a rapt way of looking.  
The sky's blue and the sea's blue make a shell  
The land lies at the mouth of.

Out of the landscape, the observing mind consciously chooses its centre, its focus:

But take this  
Improbable blue chair and let it tell,  
It, of the many objects, what it knows:

What it tells, at first, is all of itself, its own existence.

Nothing of blue or of the summer's colour
Nor of the moment in whose door it sits
Nor of that scratch in air that states a rose
Nor of the drawling speech the sea commits

To any landward breeze.

The chair is a structure in space, of horizontal and vertical lines, of opposing forces balanced. The chair is an "idea of chair" realised in physical form; two modes, physical and metaphysical, combine to create it. Thus the creation of it modifies existence and "thickens" space and time into a material, and thus "perishable" object:

It is the ache
Of forces soothed away by equal forces.
Angle and square and pull and thrust prepare
A balance of well-being and they make
Chair solid in the idea of chair,

Where two modes interpenetrate and are;
An accent and a thunderclap in being;
Existence modified; angelic nous
Become a geometry of strut and spar;
A universe of violences that house

All that a summer can, or a man's mind;
Blue time and space made perishable;

As the focal point of this interpenetration of two modes, the chair is the centre of its own universe; but also, since it is set "in a sunny day", it is the centre of the landscape around it, it is the centre around which the poet has organised his perception of the whole scene:

a centre
Of its own landscape - or, indeed, of this
That stretches with a stillness so defined
It seems to show what contemplation is.

(The function of these "central" objects in MacCaig's poems may well be compared to that of Wallace Stevens' famous jar on a hill in Tennessee; and indeed, MacCaig is a great admirer of Stevens. But it should be noted that "Blue Chair in a Sunny Day" comes from the volume *A Common Grace*, which was published two years before the book which most clearly shows Stevens' influence, *A Round of Applause*. MacCaig found in Stevens a confirmation of many of his own ideas rather than a source of new ideas.)

It will be seen that in all these poems, whether MacCaig is merely praising nature, or transforming it, observing it, organising it, in all these functions the central role is played by metaphor. Metaphor is MacCaig's mode of perception: he can scarcely see an object without transforming it in his mind.

At its simplest, the metaphor is a way of praising, a way of communicating praise, by presenting an object which is unfamiliar to the reader in terms of another object which is familiar. The metaphor is the link in common between object, poet, poem, and reader. It is used to illuminate the particular object, to make the reader see it. Thus in "Fetching Cows" (M 16), for instance, the last two lines -

The black cow is two native carriers  
Bringing its belly home, slung from a pole.

- are used entirely to convey the physical appearance of the cow, its
protruding spine, its hanging stomach.

But the most characteristic thing about MacCaig's use of metaphor is the fact that it is metaphor, not simile. He does not say, "The black cow is like two native carriers"; he says, "The black cow is two native carriers." Metaphor implies something stronger than likeness or similarity: it implies identification, equation. Metaphor is the direct expression of MacCaig's sense of the underlying unity of all things.

On the track to Fewin I met
heaped hills - a still life of enormous apples:
and an owl swivelling his face like a plate
in a fir tree: and a grassgreen beetle
walking like a brooch.

All themselves and all likenesses.

This is how MacCaig regards nature: all themselves and all likenesses, all things metaphors of all other things.

Thus MacCaig's perception of any one thing involves immediately the metaphors by which he sees it, and the objective reality of the thing perceived becomes immediately involved with the subjective reality of his metaphoric perception. Often MacCaig uses the title of a poem to indicate the original objective reality, leaving the text free to explore its metaphors.

Half-built Boat in a Hayfield.

A cradle, at a distance, of a kind:
Or, making midget its neat pastoral scene,
A carcass rotted and its bones picked clean. (CG 8)

Metaphor is the enactment of the subject/object distinction.

MacCaig's conception of the observer as being outside the scene is expressed in metaphors; and the observer's organisation of the scene in terms of his own categories is expressed in metaphors. So it should come as no surprise that when MacCaig is describing the role of metaphor in his own poetry, even when he is expressing doubts about the efficacy of metaphors, he still uses metaphors to do it.

One such metaphor - a fairly common one - is that of the poet as explorer, making familiar impossible worlds on his continuing and (by definition) unending quest. The idea is worked elegantly through its paradoxes in "Explorer" (SS 62). The explorer/poet goes off "beyond the impossible", but the impossible soon becomes familiar again: "The monsters withdrew beyond his ring of light." In this familiar land the poet and his readers meet again, for the readers had been there waiting for him; so, paradoxically, they meet and are also separated, for they still wait for him at the next stage, which he must also take:

until one day
Wanting to meet us, he prepared to go
Further impossibilities away.

A Round of Applause contains another poem entitled "Explorer" (53), a vivid portrait of a sea-captain of the Elizabethan sea-dog type,
straightforward enough until the last line's suggestion that the "wild uncharted world" which he explores is in fact himself.

The latest instance of the idea comes in "Writers' Conference, Long Island University" (RT 25), in which MacCaig describes his experience at this function. After describing the hall, he turns to the speakers:

The panel, tails feathering, give tongue after an elusive quarry.

They will not, of course, catch it. The point of the chase is never to catch the quarry: the point lies in the territories through which the chase will take them.

But the quarry will not stop running. And the sweet vocables will carry their human thoughts in pursuit of it into territories where, though the quarry always escapes, new thoughts will meet them and new worlds seem possible. (RT 26)

These poems express a certain confidence in the poet's vocation, and in his ability to use poetry as a means of exploration into new, and worthwhile, territories. But another group of poems express a kind of distrust of the very process of metaphor itself.

The statement is made most clearly in the closing poem of Rings on a Tree, "No Choice":
I am growing, as I get older, 
to hate metaphors - their exactness 
and their inadequacy.  

This statement is in one way incongruous, coming as it does in the 
middle of a poem of delicate and beautifully apt metaphors. But some 
poems in the previous book, *Surroundings*, suggest that we must take 
this statement seriously. Nor, as we have seen, should we be put off 
by the fact that these poems use metaphors to question the use of 
metaphor. 

The inadequacy of any kind of language or metaphor is explored 
in "Linguist" (§ 30) and "Above Inverkirkaig" (§ 28). "Linguist" 
refers to the impossibility that 

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these shapes with which I blacken  
White paper have some reference  
To the thoughts in my mind  
And the feelings in the thoughts.  
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The real meanings must be taken on trust from words hopelessly in-
adquate for their expression, from "all the lexicons and languages / 
Of imprecision."

"Above Inverkirkaig" describes the poet looking at Suilven and 
Cul Mor, "my / Mountains of mountains", and feeling within himself a 
tremendous emotion and upswelling of insight, 

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as though  
I were about to be enlarged,  
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To enclose informations and secrets
That lie just beyond me.

But he knows that any attempt to realise this in words will fail; there will be only the "usual miscarriage." Success would be as monstrous and unnatural as if Suilven and Cul Mor themselves would couple and produce

A litter of tiny Suilvens, each one
The dead spit of his father.

There are some things in nature - mountains and ideas - which cannot be reproduced.

Suilven is also the subject of the poem ironically entitled "Humanism" (§ 8). The first stanza presents a metaphor, nature treated in anthropomorphic terms.

When the glacier was defeated
In the siege of Suilven and limped off
To the West, it left behind it all that
Burdened its retreat -
Stones, the size of
Sandgrains and haystacks:
Abandoned loot of Glen Canisp.

Then the poet revolts from this easy anthropomorphism to assert the validity of the glacier as glacier. But in doing so he introduces another metaphor, over which the verse lovingly lingers.
What a human lie is this. What greed and what
Arrogance, not to allow
A glacier to be a glacier -
To humanise into a metaphor
That long slither of ice - that was no more
A beaten army than it was a horde
Of Cinderellas, each,
When her midnight sounded,
Leaving behind her
A sandstone shoe.

The poem closes with the statement of some kind of an ideal.

I defend the glacier that
When it absorbs a man
Preserves his image
Intact.

But there is of course a distinction to be made here. The
glacier is able to preserve a man's image intact only because it is a
glacier, not human. The distinction (perhaps for good, perhaps not,
but either way unavoidable) of man is that he cannot be inhuman in this
way. Anything he perceives, anything he describes, no longer remains
intact. It has his mark upon it, he has invaded it. The "image"
has become metaphor.

MacCaig would doubtless agree with this statement by the novelist
John Fowles:

One cannot describe reality; only give metaphors that
indicate it. All human modes of description (photographic,
mathematical, and the rest, as well as literary) are
metaphorical. Even the most precise scientific description
of an object or movement is a tissue of metaphors.
But in this "tissue of metaphors" there lies, always, a kind of truth. MacCaig may distrust metaphors for their exactness, because by being exact they usurp the priority of that which they supposedly describe, but he also recognises that the different thing which metaphor creates carries its own validity. Art is not life: but its very differences from life enable it to reveal life.

Thus it seems to me that MacCaig's best and truest poem about his art is the one called "Leaving the Metropolitan Museum" (RT 34), which describes his encounter with Picasso's iron statue of a goat. Here, especially in the third stanza, is MacCaig's final justification of art, of the metaphoric vision which transforms the natural objects of his love into images of a different but in no way inferior order of validity.

I went out from the unsheltered world of art into the unsheltered world, and there, by the door - Picasso's Goat -

a shape of iron entered into by herds, by every aspect of goatishness. (What are you to say of a man who can carve a smell, who can make a goat-smell out of iron?)

This is the lie of art telling its great truth: a shape of iron, destructible and created, being a revelation about life, that is destructive and indestructible.

From now on, whatever of life passes my understanding, I know more of it than I did, being
a professor of goats, a pedant of goatishness.

III

Nature, and the ideas connected with it, have been the dominant themes of MacCaig's poetry, and they are by no means dead for him. His descriptive talent is apparently inexhaustible, and the workings of his metaphoric imagination will continue to fascinate him. But in his last couple of books, *Surroundings* and *Rings on a Tree*, there has been an opening-out, an exploration of some new themes, or moods, or attitudes.

This expansion is to be directly related to the formal expansion into free verse. Free verse has enabled MacCaig to become more colloquial in tone, less formal. The ideas flow more easily, they are less caught up in the rigid structures of MacCaig's intricate stanzas. It is then only natural that, in this more conversational mode, MacCaig's poetry has turned more towards people.

Some of the poems, especially in *Surroundings*, have been satirical in tone. MacCaig himself describes them this way: "You can hardly call them political poems, but they're ironical, or, in a Chanel Number 5 way, satirical poems." Their tone is slightly bitter, sardonic, at times almost vindictive.

The earliest of these poems, and the only one to pre-date free verse, is "Street Preacher" (M 27). Here the bitterness is alleviated
by the poet's self-mocking. The contrast between the public figure
and the private reality is repeated in "Leader of Men" (§ 29). The
petty demagogues of both these poems are regarded in an unsparingly
bitter light, and "Responsibility" and "To a Pragmatist" (§ 22, 25) both
take a grim sort of delight in envisaging the eventual fate of their
targets. I find the personal bitterness and animosity in these poems
most unattractive: they seem to me to deprive the poet of any moral
superiority over the characters he attacks.

Rather better is the poem "Smuggler":

Watch him when he opens
His bulging words - justice,
Fraternity, freedom, internationalism, peace,
Peace, peace. Make it your custom
To pay no heed
To his frank look, his visas, his stamps
And signatures. Make it
Your duty to spread out their contents
In a clear light.

Nobody with such luggage
Has nothing to declare.

(§ 21)

This poem takes a fairly obvious idea and works it out well through a
clever image, but its effect is only one-dimensional, and there is
little to be gained from further readings. Satire, however scented,
does not seem to me to be one of MacCaig's gifts.

His best humorous poems are rather those in which he makes fun
of himself, such as "Metaphysical Me" (§ 7), and the delightful "Sleeping
Compartment" (RT 48). In this latter poem, MacCaig is trying to sleep
on an overnight train, but is bothered by the fact that he is lying sideways to the line of the train:

I feel at rightangles to everything,
a crossgrain in existence. - It scrapes
the top of my head, my footsoles.

... I draw in my feet
to let Aviemore pass. (RT 48)

This quieter, more warmly personal humour, is in line with what seems to me the most important feature of the free verse books, the development of a truly personal tone in the poems about people.

As I mentioned previously (above, page 213), if we examine one of MacCaig's early "love" poems, even a good one such as "Gifts" (SS 24), we find a curious impersonality in it. "Gifts" has a strong central idea, and is also obviously genuine in its emotion; it is written with great elegance and skill; but the woman addressed remains a blank. The emotion of the poem is somehow abstract. One almost feels that MacCaig's real centre of interest is in himself, not in the other person. Indeed, it is not until Surroundings that we discover any poem genuinely centred on the portrayal of another person, or any poem which draws its emotional strength from the feelings it arouses in us for another, individualised, human being.

The expansion of subject-matter has been coincidental not only with the exploration of free verse but also with two trips abroad.
The New York trip is superbly chronicled in *Rings on a Tree*; but before that was the trip to Italy, and it is in two Italian poems in *Surroundings* that I see the beginnings of MacCaig's new attitude.

"The Streets of Florence" (§ 12) presents a sudden expansion of vision, spurred by the paintings in the Uffizi Gallery, but applied to the people in the streets outside. The result of this is the astonishing poem about the dwarf at Assisi. (§ 35)

The poem presents two of the most beautiful achievements of mediaeval Christianity - the legend of St. Francis and the frescoes of Giotto - and sets them against the banality of the modern tourists and their guide, and against the image of the dwarf, the "ruined temple"

whose eyes
Wept pus, whose back was higher
Than his head, whose lopsided mouth
Said Grazie in a voice as sweet
As a child's when she speaks to her mother
Or a bird's when it spoke
To St. Francis.

(S 35)

The control and selectivity of the poem is perfect: the images are presented, and their juxtaposition provides all the comment that could be necessary. But what is really impressive is the fact that the poem centres, not on the facile satire of the tourists, nor on any overt attack on the hypocrisy of Christianity (which MacCaig personally detests), but upon the emotion felt towards that dwarf, as an individual. He is not a symbol, he is a person.

*Rings on a Tree* contains a good many poems which proceed from
this same attitude. "Learning" (RT 12) seems almost a rationale of it. Again, the understanding is derived from art, from a distinction between Blake and Bosch on the one hand, and Brueghel and Bach on the other. As in "Balances" (RT 10), MacCaig is asserting and defending his desire to praise, to look for the good side of things, to present positive values. (Again, a comparison with Ian Hamilton Finlay would be in order. This is an attitude which Finlay has always had, and the main attraction of his work for me is its tremendous warmth and humanity, its unaffected joy in simple beauty. MacCaig and Finlay are very different poets in many ways, but some of the values of the later MacCaig poems approach those which Finlay has always held.) "Learning" ends with these words:

I begin to understand, I begin to reject the bad lie of loneliness. (RT 12)

The book contains a group of poems about the inhabitants of MacCaig's favourite landscape, Wester Ross. A strong concern about the problems of depopulation is evident in the television poem, "A Man in Assynt", and again in "The Red Well, Harris" (RT 43). The former describes the people as the land's "richest of riches" - a new departure for MacCaig, whose earlier poems centred their passion on Suilven rather than on those who lived under it. "Country Postman" (RT 15) doesn't quite work, but "Aunt Julia" and "Uncle Seumas" (RT 44, 46) are vivid and affectionate portraits. "Aunt Julia" establishes
the individuality of the character so strongly that it carries through successfully a potentially disastrous ending. (The "But I hear her still" formula could so easily have disintegrated into the kind of sentimental slop MacCaig so strongly despises.)

Aunt Julia spoke Gaelic very loud and very fast. By the time I had learned a little, she lay silenced in the absolute black of a sandy grave at Luskentyre. But I hear her still, welcoming me with a seagull's voice across a hundred yards of peatscrapes and lazybeds and getting angry, getting angry with so many questions unanswered.

(RT 44-45)

Among the New York poems, perhaps the most outstanding is "Brooklyn Cop" (RT 29), which takes a most apparently unlikely subject and treats it with rare compassion and understanding.

Built like a gorilla but less timid, thick-fleshed, steak-coloured, with two hieroglyphs in his face that mean trouble, he walks the sidewalk and the thin tissue over violence. This morning, when he said, "See you, babe" to his wife, he hoped it, he truly hoped it. He is a gorilla to whom "Hiya, honey" is no cliche.

Should the tissue tear, should he plunge through into violence, what clubbings, what gunshots between Phoebe's Whamburger and Louie's Place.
Who would be him, gorilla with a nightstick,  
whose home is a place  
he might, this time, never get back to?  

And who would be who have to be  
his victims?  

The slightly incantatory rhythm of the penultimate line, followed by  
the decisively conclusive stress on "victims", is a perfect means of  
setting the context for the reader's feelings. The inversion is  
beautiful: a lesser writer would have started by evoking sympathy for  
the victims and then, with almost self-conscious generosity, attempted  
to transfer it to the cop. MacCaig operates the other way round:  
having established sympathy for the cop, he then sets both cop and  
victim in a context of necessity (the only way to read that penultimate  
line is to put all the stress on "have") which deplores the violence  
without depriving the characters of either their vulnerability or their  
responsibility. This poem displays a humanity and insight possible  
perhaps only to an outside observer in the American cities of today.  

Among the New York poems also, "New England Theocritus" (RT 56)  
is one of MacCaig's best love poems. Again the "you" is generalised,  
but the emotion is stronger and more personal on MacCaig's part.  

Finally, mention should be made of the small but perfect poem,  
"Old Man Thinking":  

Oars, held still, drop  
on black water  
tiny roulades  
of waterdrops.
With their little sprinkling
they people
a big silence.

You who are long gone,
my thoughts of you are like that:
a delicate, clear population
in the big silence
where I rest on the oars and
my boat
hushes ashore.

(RT 49)

It is, in MacCaig's poetry, a new attitude of mind that could consider
the thoughts of people long gone to be "a delicate, clear population."

"I am growing, as I get older", MacCaig writes in "No Choice"
(RT 62, quoted above, page 238), "to love gentleness." This is a very
different poet from the cold, ascetic, intellectual, non-Romantic
author of Riding Lights and The Sinai Sort. Not that the "new"
MacCaig has become "Romantic" in the senses MacCaig has always despised -
but to the hardness of thought and the brilliance of image he has
added a warmth of humanity which truly gives his poetry an added
dimension, and augurs well for the future.
Iain Crichton Smith is a truly bilingual writer. His work, both in poetry and in prose, is split fairly evenly between English and Gaelic, and he has made some fine translations of Gaelic poets such as the great Somhairle MacGhilleathain. In addition, the major themes of his work run through both languages: ideas born in his English poems will be developed further in his Gaelic short stories, and his English novel, Consider the Lilies, is an expansion of a Gaelic play. I must therefore open this brief study of his work by admitting its incompleteness, in that, since I do not have the Gaelic myself, I have had to confine it to work done in English. A final and complete estimate of Crichton Smith's achievement will only be arrived at by a critic who is as qualified as the poet himself is in both languages.

Nevertheless, quite apart from his Gaelic work, Iain Crichton Smith has built up a body of writing in English which is clearly worth study, and which establishes him as one of the most considerable of contemporary Scottish poets writing in English. (It should be noted, further to the language problem, that Scots has never been even a possibility for Crichton Smith. The choice has always been between Gaelic and the clear, lilting English of the West Highlands.)

Crichton Smith may in some respects be compared to Norman MacCaig. Both are "established" poets, and both have been published regularly by a London firm. But Crichton Smith is much more diverse than MacCaig is formally, having ventured into the short story, the novel, and the drama. He has also published a critical pamphlet on Hugh MacDiarmid, The Golden Lyric. Thematically also, Crichton Smith has a wider range
than MacCaig, especially in his Gaelic work:

I tend to experiment more with Gaelic than I do with English, because the field is wide open in Gaelic. You can do practically anything, because so little has been done, and therefore you get a very great sense of freedom. For instance, in some of the Gaelic short stories I did, there are some of them which are about concentration camps, and Jews, and nuclear war and things like that - things which I don't quite dare to do in English, but you can do it in Gaelic, you can try practically anything, because so few people have taken a particular thing and pushed it to its limits and exhausted it.

Although his poetry, like MacCaig's, tends to concentrate on one or two central themes and preoccupations, Crichton Smith possesses, what MacCaig does not, a dramatic ability. That is, not only in his novels, short stories, and plays, but also in his poetry, Crichton Smith is able to present other characters, to enter into their minds, to write dramatic monologues.

On the other hand, it must be admitted that, in his English poetry, Crichton Smith is, formally, much weaker than MacCaig. His handling of verse forms is less assured than MacCaig's, both in stanzaic forms and in free verse; one rarely feels any great tension between the form and the subject. His images are less brilliant and exact than MacCaig's; and his way of saying things is sometimes unnecessarily confused. Perhaps Crichton Smith is not as ruthless an editor of his own work as MacCaig is; his poetry is at times patchy and uneven, good poems are marred by weak lines. At the very climax of Deer on the High Hills, he is capable of such atrocious line division as
Are fountains poetry? And are rainbows the wistful smiles upon a dying face? 

(DHH XIII)²

These faults, however, are not universal in Crichton Smith's work. Often, the worst that can be said of his style is that it is adequate, but uninteresting. But at his best, he attains a clear and dignified simplicity, resonance, and precision which identify his verse as uniquely his own. Robin Fulton summed up a brief article thus:

First, as a poet Crichton Smith is developing, exploring certain elementary themes with an increasing maturity; second, his use of language, despite the softness here and there, has risen to particular occasions with resonance and precision; and third, his more successful poems are unmistakably the work of one imagination. It is surely one of the most obvious (and therefore most readily forgotten) criteria of a good poet that his poems cannot be mistaken for someone else's. ³

A good deal of Crichton Smith's attitude to his poetry, and to its themes, is determined by his environment, Oban, Lewis, the West Highlands. This influence is certainly a limiting one, though the limits occasionally produce a greater intensity of expression: it would be difficult, for example, to imagine his poems about Puritans without the West Highland background. When I asked him if he himself was aware of his environment as a limiting factor, he replied:

I think there probably will come a time when I will, but it'll be very difficult to find out what to replace it by. I think one of the difficulties may not be so much
the environment itself, that is the physical environment, but the kind of person one has become because of that environment. The change would have to be a purely psychological one, I think. I don't know whether this is possible. The kind of environment you're brought up in here is, I think, limited from an aesthetic point of view, from a psychological point of view. I think the ultimate determining thing is not the physical environment but what the environment has made of you before you've actually started writing.

I think the restriction may well go deeper than Crichton Smith himself realises. When talking of his intense admiration for Robert Lowell, he mentioned that Lowell had the advantage of "living in a place which is now on the frontiers of human consciousness ... more than Britain, and certainly Scotland, is." This is surely ridiculous: in the modern age of communications, any man is as near to the "frontier" as he chooses to be. Crichton Smith has only to look to his friend Edwin Morgan in Glasgow to see a writer who is continuously on the frontiers. But the comment is typical of Iain Crichton Smith personally. He is a shy and withdrawing person with (it seems to me) an unwarranted inferiority complex.

He is uncertain about the value of his own poetry, or of any poetry for that matter. This is in part a heritage from Lewis, where, as he says in the fine "Poem of Lewis":

Here they have no time for the fine graces of poetry.

(LR 16)

The later poem, "A Young Highland Girl Studying Poetry" (TR 41) seems
to accept without demur the idea that "Simple affection needs no complex solace"; and Edwin Morgan is surely correct when he questions "the absence of disappointment on the poet's part" that such a life "should have no access to the world of art."  

The doubts are most powerfully and most directly expressed in "Studies in Power" (TR 47), which begins:

Today at a meeting while I sat confused by motions, counter-motions, and the vague appalling ardour of the dialogue I was struck by terror (being thus bemused) that I (certainly no albatross of a dear unearthly climate) should be there, somehow a stranger, at a total loss (no, not uncommon, let me be quite clear) till this fear struck me with a dizzy force that this was real and the poems I make mere cardboard coins to fill a childish purse.

And I was terrified lest my world be fake and these blunt men who make all words opaque should stand like giants by my dwarfish verse.

This doubt is certainly real to Crichton Smith, and the second half of the poem (another sonnet), which attempts to reassert the values of poetry, is more hesitant, and not wholly convincing.

Again, the figure of Robert Lowell is of great importance to Crichton Smith in this connection. When I asked him about these doubts and uncertainties, he replied:

The doubt basically is that there's such a lot of poetry being written, and not very much of it can be very good, and one often wonders whether one should write unless one
is perfectly sure that one is really very good. I used to feel like that, there was a time when I couldn't see anyone who was really doing anything new, I mean the period before Lowell started writing, and it seemed that poetry had reached a dead end. But I've got a feeling now that Lowell has made it important again, that he's managed to make a breakthrough for everybody into a new kind of field. .... I can see that in recent years there is this new breakthrough in poetry, and poetry can be made to be important. People listen to Lowell, they think he's saying something which is important, not just in poetry but, for instance, about Viet Nam and things like that; he's writing about these in a very important way; and I think that men of action even listen to him, which I think is important. 7

But this seems to me to be yielding the field entirely to the "men of action", the "blunt men" of the school meeting. The way Crichton Smith seems to see it, poetry has to be "made" important, and Lowell's value lies in his gaining the approbation of the "men of action", being accepted by them on their terms. For a poet, this is surely the wrong way round.

This attitude derives again, in my view, from Crichton Smith's sense of inferiority, a modesty so excessive that it is in fact timidity. And it is this attitude which has led Crichton Smith to take refuge in Gaelic whenever he writes about subjects like nuclear war. However, in the summer of 1960, the Mull Little Theatre put on a play by Crichton Smith, which is described as "a monologue in which the President of the United States, awaiting a hot-line call from Russia, vocalises his imprisonment to all the American myths to a background of Frank Sinatra and High Noon film music." 8 It is perhaps a sign of hope that this play was written in English.
There is one other poem about poetry which deserves mention. Again, it seems to take a somewhat limited view of the function of poetry, seeing it as a kind of psychological defence-mechanism; but the poem itself establishes its image and its application so completely that its very existence demonstrates more about poetry than its words state.

Girl with Orange Sunshade.

An orange sunshade wheels about her head. The sunshade shading sun is yet a sun mimicked by colour, halo of the red and mild attendant of the coloured bone.

Yet it is mimic as if the other sun should not attack her, being saved by this paper not passion which she learns to spin as if herself were Fortune, pert-faced miss.

And this cool wheel about her ordered hair is like the art we nourish in our rooms on little water and a jar of air. It holds us steady from the searing flames. We mimic fire to shield us from the fire and shade our heads with bright and paper poems.

Crichton Smith does have very definite ideas about poetry, and about the kinds of thing which poetry should or should not do; these ideas form the basis of his essay on Hugh MacDiarmid. He begins this essay by saying:

When one discusses the poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid one is forced to make an evaluation of the importance of ideas in poetry or to put it another way to discuss how ideas are related if at all to poetry.
The important words here are "if at all"; for Crichton Smith is not at all convinced that there is any value in "poetry of ideas". "You can contradict an idea", he told me, "but you shouldn't be able to contradict a poem." He complains of a poem like In Memoriam James Joyce that "all you have at the end of it is just an additional bit of mental knowledge"; against this he sets Yeats' "Easter 1916" which, he says, actually changes the reader as he reads it, and which probably changed Yeats as he wrote it. And he applies to poetry Marx's dictum that the main thing is not to consider the world but to change it.

For himself,

I don't like writing poetry of ideas. The kind of poetry I like, and the kind I would want to write, would be ones about human beings; it would be an existentialist poetry, not a mental kind of poetry. It would be completely about people, or about myself, possibly, in some kind of crisis or something like that; some kind of poem where the person is changed during the process of the writing of it.

With this in mind, he has written several dramatic monologues, notably "The Widow" (WN 22); but he has admitted himself that these poems are largely unsatisfactory.

A lot of them are just sort of historical analysis. But what I would like to do would be to write dramatic monologues in which I could see this sort of human change going on at a particular moment, or in which I would take someone who was like myself at a particular point, and see what happened to him and see if the same thing might happen to me.
This movement is clearly carrying him away from poetry towards the forms of the drama and the novel; and his most successful examination so far of "human change going on at a particular moment" is in his English novel, Consider the Lilies.

This novel also illustrates the kind of character with whom he is most able to empathise. Early in the novel he writes "You had to be old to know what it was to be old" (CL 14); but Crichton Smith himself, born in 1928, gives the lie to his own statement. The concern with old people, especially with old women, runs throughout his work, being the subject not only of Consider the Lilies but also of some of his best poems, especially "Old Woman" (TR 9). It is, in fact, one of the most attractive aspects of his writing. (This concern again derives from his own personal experience, from his close relationship with his own mother, who still lives with him in Oban: alone together, they always speak in Gaelic.)

It may be that if Crichton Smith really wishes to write "about people", his work will increasingly fall into dramatic or novelistic moulds. Consider the Lilies is a very respectable novel: the characterisation seems to me to be at times not wholly successful, but it is certainly deeper, and carried out on a more extensive scale, than has previously been possible in the poems.

But despite Crichton Smith's disavowal of "poetry of ideas", the most profitable critical approach to the bulk of his English verse is to see it in terms of ideas, or rather, in terms of one central idea expressed in a variety of recurring images.
This idea is that of dichotomy, the balance of opposing forces. It is, in one sense, very similar to MacDiarmid's ideas of dichotomy and antisyzygy, but Crichton Smith develops it in a very personal way, shaped by his individual concerns and obsessions; it becomes so much his own that comparisons with MacDiarmid are not central, and are of no great relevance or helpfulness.

There are various dichotomies in Crichton Smith's poetry (indeed, writing about ideas as against writing about people is itself one), but there are three fundamental ones: the mind and the body; order and disorder; and, most basic of all, that summed up in the title *The Law and the Grace*.

The mind/body dichotomy is straightforward enough, and has obvious close ties with the religious background of the West Highlands. Few modern writers have been able to write so sympathetically about Puritans. Mrs. Scott, the central figure of *Consider the Lilies*, is, from one point of view, a narrow-minded bigot; but Crichton Smith combines an awareness of her limitations with a warm understanding of her personality. Indeed, at times in his poetry, there is a definite note of admiration for the Puritans. As opposed to the poets, who

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mimic fire to shield us from the fire
and shade our heads with bright and paper poems
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*(TR 17)*

the poem "A Note on Puritans" begins

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There was no curtain between them and fire.
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*(TR 11)*
But the Puritan ethic is ultimately a limited one, as Crichton Smith concludes at the end of this poem:

That was great courage to have stayed as true to truth as man can stay. From them we learn how certain truths can make men brutish too:

I accuse these men of singleness and loss of grace who stared so deeply into the fire's hues that all was fire to them. (TR 11-12)

And for Crichton Smith, as we shall see, "loss of grace" is the ultimate damnation (as it also is, in a rather different sense of the word, in Puritan theology.)

What interests Crichton Smith more is the Puritan who is himself aware of his limitations, and who is trying to break from them. A key figure here is Kierkegaard, about whom Crichton Smith has written articles in Gaelic and poems in English (TR 35, LG 30). He sees Kierkegaard as "part artist, part moralist," a figure striving to express new truths against a repressive background - and thus, of course, Kierkegaard becomes a figure of Crichton Smith himself, trying to write poetry in Lewis.

The most extended exploration of this theme comes in the two sets of "Love Songs of a Puritan" (TR 24-32). These poems are not always successful: they appear needlessly obscure, and suffer from a complete lack of definition of the "you" to whom these "love songs" are addressed. The endlessly repeated theological imagery (especially devils) becomes tiresome, though at its simplest it can be very
strikingly and effectively used:

My eyes are heresies to the clear
and grave theology yours speak to me.
I make a Luther in your catholic air
though speechless sermons should have made me free.

(Tr 24)

Another aspect of the mind/body dichotomy is the mind's love of order:

the brain being brain must try to establish laws.

(WN 33)

This line comes from the poem "For the Unknown Seamen of the 1939-45 War Buried in Iona Churchyard." It is a typically hesitant, diffident Crichton Smith poem. Even the first line -

One would like to be able to write something for them - indicates the uncertainty. "One would like." But it is impossible.

Yet these events are not amenable to any discipline that we can impose.

And as he tries to imagine the events, the extent to which these victims may have "concurred" in their fate, he is forced to the
conclusion "One simply doesn't / know enough." If the brain is ever to establish laws, to impose order on disorder, it will need a more decisive movement than this.

Death is, for Crichton Smith, the ultimate disorder, and in several poems he deals with it directly. (It connects also, of course, with his interest in old people, those who sit waiting only for death.) He is also very concerned with war, especially the First World War, which keeps on cropping up in his poetry, and is the subject of a fascinating short story, "The Angel of Mons."¹³

I've always been fascinated by that war, the sort of general chaos and lack of order about it, and the image ... I often think of the First World War as a lot of people splashing about in the mud in a very chaotic way, and then you have these planes flying above in a very geometrical way and all looking down on everything that is going on. And I think this also comes out in "The Angel of Mons", the angel representing some kind of order, trying to impose it on this general chaos.¹⁴

The angel appears above a battlefield just as an attack is about to get under way. In the story, it is described from various viewpoints: the officer who is only dimly aware of it as a threat to discipline; the general who sees it as an "imponderable", perhaps even a German secret weapon; the revolutionary who sees it as a symbol of "the death of the bourgeois system"; and the common, religious soldier, who describes it as

a great white angel with wings and a beautiful, beautiful
gentle face, that's what it was, gentle, it was so
great and kind so that the light no longer blinded
your eyes but you could look at it without being
hurt. I can't describe it to you but you'd have to
see it yourself its face was so gentle. And I think
I went and told the others and they saw it too. Their
faces became gentle as they looked, it was a miracle,
dad, the way their faces seemed to become gentle like
water, all these men.

(This angel goes beyond being a symbol of order in the usual order/
disorder dichotomy of the war poems: it is in fact a symbol of Grace.)

A series of poems towards the end of The Law and the Grace
deal more directly with death itself. "Whether Beyond the Stormy
Hebrides" (LG 58) rejects the easy, traditional consolations of
Milton's answer; "To Forget the Dead" (LG 48) is an eerie ghost-lyric,
vaguely reminiscent of Donne. "The Chess Player" (LG 52) is a
narrative which uses the traditional image of Death as a player of
chess. A man playing chess is told of his brother's death, and the
depth of his emotional reaction is shown only by his comment on the
board and its pieces:

They do not know, you see, none of them knows.
They're all quite evidently so far apart.
What do they know of each other? I dispose -
but each is wooden, in archaic pose. (LG 52)

The theme of death, and the concern for old people facing death,
are finely combined with the imagery of the Puritans, of Renaissance
and Reformation, in the poem "Preparation for a Death" (LG 46). (The
"you" of the poem is in all probability his mother.

Have I seen death conquered at last in you
dying by inches, yet with lucid sight
examining its gains? The world was new
and sparkled with a gay Renaissance wit,

but now the Reformation has set in.
A narrow Luther hedges the red blood
and bellows from his pulpit like a pain.
The blossoming angels in their painted red
are withered into devils. All the pardons
are snatched inhospitably from your open wound
and nothing's left but a creeping host of sins
which you consider with a bleak mind

on the very edge of nothingness looking out,
like Drake going off beyond all human shores
and no Elizabeth to dub you knight
but mind itself to open its black doors.

(LG 46)

Another image of order and disorder is the school image,
prompted by Crichton Smith's own experience as a schoolmaster.

I can see in a school the images of order and disorder.
A school is a kind of society, it's a kind of crucible,
where you can see the forces, the natural forces which
are beating against the ordering forces, and I find this
interesting to work out. 15

The schoolmaster attempts to impose order: and by a personal associa-
tion (the similarity between gowns and togas), Crichton Smith
connects the image of the schoolmaster with the image of the Roman.
He has described himself as a "late cold Roman" in the poem "Encounter
in a School Corridor" (LG 47). This poem also plays a variation on
the normal theme by dressing Death in the black schoolmaster's gown.

The most fruitful combination of the various themes I have been discussing so far comes in what is still one of Crichton Smith's very best poems, "Old Woman" (TR 9). This poem opens with the picture of an old woman facing death, while her helpless husband prays

to God who is all-forgiving to send down
some angel somewhere who might land perhaps
in his foreign wings among the gradual crops.

But angels are not forthcoming. "Outside", the poem continues, "the grass was raging." This is a very common image in Crichton Smith's work: he seems to feel, in external nature, a power, a passionate energy, which is itself a threat to the mind's compulsive attempt to "establish laws."

The poet himself is also present, "imprisoned in my pity and my shame." The presence of death, the embarrassment of his own powerlessness and the husband's futile faith, the raging of the grass: these images of disorder induce a strong desire

to be away, yes, to be far away
with athletes, heroes, Greeks or Roman men
who pushed their bitter spears into a vein
and would not spend an hour with such decay.

But this escape is not possible either, and the poet is forced to return to the situation as it is. Here the poem falters, for it has no solution or conclusion to this situation; and the last stanza
falls back on a weak and unsatisfying image of

all the salty waters where had died
too many waves to mark two more or three.

However, the attempt of the mind to establish order continues. Edwin Morgan has noted the recurrence in Crichton Smith's poetry of images of geometrical order, for instance in arrangements of boats and masts. In the quotation above (page 263), note how the planes flying above the chaotic trenches are described as "geometrical".

For Crichton Smith, the question applies also to the writing of poetry:

It applies to everything you do, I mean, how much discipline does one need? It applies to one's own poetry too, it applies all along the line; if you discipline your own poetry too much you may be losing some of the spontaneity, on the other hand if it becomes too spontaneous, without discipline, it may become valueless. 17

The word "spontaneity" brings us now to the central concept of "Grace". Whereas "Law" is always fixed, rigid, the rational dictates of the Puritan mind, "Grace" is something entirely unpredictable, and essentially spontaneous - "bright angels of spontaneous love" is how he describes it in the title poem of The Law and the Grace. (38)

Grace is the ultimate value of Crichton Smith's poetry. His greatest accusation against the Puritans is of "loss of grace". Grace is an inherent beauty, an element transcending limitation, a unique
sense of movement and "inner style" (TR 26). "Grace is what speaks behind the words you speak." (WN 36)

The images of grace are images of beauty: the "unpredicted ... human sweetness" of "Two Girls Singing" (LC 20); the accumulated images of pure white - gull, dress, moon - in "By Ferry to the Island" (TR 36); or the instinctive sense of the right thing to do possessed by a young boy playing football in the poem "Rythm" (sic) (LC 44). Football is a recurring image of grace: at the climax of Consider the Lilies, there is the image of football played by moonlight:

And the footballers too, all the young footballers had streamed home across the moor, sweating and high coloured in their big tackety boots, their short trousers and their long. In the ghostly moonlight they had played, shooting a ghostly ball into a ghostly goal mouth, diving and dribbling about in the ebbing light as if under water.

(CL 176)

When I interviewed Crichton Smith, we talked about football, and he attempted to define the nature of it:

I decided that it was probably closer to jazz, because, like jazz, it allows for the instincts, and the spontaneity of the instincts, and yet at the same time it orders the instincts in a particular way.18

(On jazz, cf. "A Blind Negro Singer", TR 38.)

Note this "ordering" of the instincts, even within Grace; for Grace is a concept broad enough to include both order and disorder.
Grace is not mere spontaneity; it is also an order which springs from spontaneity (as opposed to Law, which is an order imposed on spontaneity.) In the poem "Grace Notes" (WN 38), one of the definitions of Grace is the following:

I speak of the glowing light along the axis of the turning earth that bears the thunderous sea and all the chaos that might learn to wreck us if the chained stars were snapped and the huge free leonine planets would some night attack us.

I speak of the central grace, that line which is the genesis of geometry and all that tightly bars the pacing animal. (WN 39)

Grace is also geometry, is order; it comprehends the order/disorder dichotomy, and also judges it. Law is false order, which leads to chaos.

The title of that poem is also significant: "grace notes", in pibroch, are only possible if they arise out of the pre-set pattern. You cannot have a piece of music which is nothing but grace notes; but neither can you calculate or predict the grace notes in advance.

Grace has its dark sides too; it can torment. Take the poem "Johnson in the Highlands", in which Samuel Johnson, the spokesman of Law, is yet incapable of escaping Grace. The poem ends:

A classical sanity considers Skye.
A huge hard light falls across shifting hills.
This mind, contemptuous of miracles

and beggarly sentiment, illuminates
a healthy moderation. But I hear
like a native dog notes beyond his range
the modulations of a queer music
twisting his huge black body in the pain
that shook him also in raw blazing London.

Even stronger is the poem "Nothing Human" (LG 39), which presents an aspect of Grace as something unknown, sinister, alien, "unroman".

Grace may be further defined if we turn to the one poem which seems to be resolving, or at least attempting to resolve, the basic dichotomies of Crichton Smith's work. This is Deer on the High Hills.

It is worth noting that, after his two early books, all Crichton Smith's titles have been dichotomies: in English, Thistles and Roses; The Law and the Grace; in Gaelic, the titles translate as "Bread and Water", and "The Blue and the Black." The projected title of his next English collection is "The Blue and the Green." (A really thorough study of Crichton Smith's work will have to explore his use of colour symbolism, such as his intense dislike of yellow.) These titles reflect the dichotomies present in his work: but the title Deer on the High Hills is a unity, and the poem itself is about a unity, an achieved synthesis, a state of grace.

That the poem is in some way set apart from the rest of Crichton Smith's work is confirmed by his own account of its origins:

Well, Deer on the High Hills is a very strange poem, because I don't even know how I wrote it. Most of the other poems I've done, I've had quite a lot of intellectual control over them, but Deer on the High Hills was written
in about ten days and - well, I was in school during the day, and I used to come home at night and I just used to write this down, it was almost as if it were actually dictated to me, I've never written a poem like this before. In fact, I don't understand Deer on the High Hills, I don't understand half of it myself, and I don't quite know how it got there or what it came from. I know the point of origin of it; some weeks before I was going along the road in a car and we saw a deer in the headlights, that had just come down to the road, and we passed it very quickly, but it was in the wintertime, and then some months after that I started writing this poem. I just don't understand how it was made, I had very little control over it, and it just started and then stopped, without my knowing why it had started or stopped.

These conditions of composition may explain why the poem is a good deal rougher than much of Crichton Smith's work. The rhythms are very uneven, and the images often break insistently through awkward phrases and muddled syntax. Too often, Deer on the High Hills seems like a first draft which still needs a good deal of polishing.

The poem is divided into fourteen sections, the first of which is only a couplet:

A deer looks through you to the other side, and what it is and sees is an inhuman pride.       (DHH I)

The poem is to develop only one aspect of this - the pride that the deer is. The pride that the deer sees remains unexplored; the poem's subject is not man, but the deer, and the deer's possession of Grace.

The second section starts from the incident described above:
Yesterday three deer stood at the roadside.  
It was icy January and there they were  
like debutantes on a smooth ballroom floor.  

The image of pride is developed: the deer had "the inhuman look of  
aristocrats / before a revolution comes." The revolution will come  
in the spring, when the ice breaks: now is the most dangerous period,  
when the deer, although at the end of their tether, forced by starvation  
down out of the hills,  

might suddenly open your belly  
with his bitter antlers.  

In contrast to this state of potential savagery is the summer, in which  
the deer "crop gently" and "can be ignored." Later in the poem (XII)  
the summer/winter dichotomy is to be repeated as an aspect of the body/  
mind split. At this stage, there is no doubt that Crichton Smith  
admires the wintry deer, their pride, their jealous preservation of  
aristocratic values.  

A beggared noble can conceal a sword  
next to his skin for the aimless and abhorred  
tyrants who cannot dance but throw stones,  
tyrants who can crack the finest bones:  
tyrants who do not wear but break most ancient crowns.  

Section III opens with a wish to be with the deer, "finished
with these practical things', returning to the clear heights of the
mountains. But this can only be done when a thorough familiarity
with these "practical things" has bred "a real contempt, a fine hard-
won disdain." "Contempt" here is being used in a very similar sense
to its use in MacDiarmid's *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*, except
that, whereas it is a quality which MacDiarmid himself undoubtedly
possesses, one feels here that Crichton Smith is wishing he might have
it. The point is illustrated in another deer image:

> a deer might walk along a sweating street
> stare in a cramped window and then go
> back to the hills but not on ignorant feet.

(DHH III)

Crichton Smith himself still tends to be inside that "cramped window."

These opening sections have established the aloofness of the
deer, their aristocratic pride; and there has been in Crichton Smith's
tone a touch not only of admiration but also of envy. Section IV
opens with a characteristic disavowal of the ability of poems to solve
all problems:

> Forget these purple evenings and these poems
> that solved all or took for myth
> the pointed sail of Ulysses enigmatic.

(DHH IV)

This rejection of poetry is to be repeated in the final sections.
The image of Ulysses is swiftly and wittily downgraded -
He wears the sharp look of a business magnate.
Late from the office he had a good excuse. (DHH IV)

- and opposed to the image of the deer, who inhabit "the metaphysics of an empty country."

Idea clash on the mountain tops.
By the appalled peaks the deer roar. (DHH IV)

This is where the deer are at home, where clouds become a looming expression of death in a metaphysical countryside,

deranged, deranged, a land of rain and stones
of stones and rain, of the huge barbarous bones,
plucked like a loutish harp their harmonies. (DHH IV)

The next section goes on to insist that this land of rain and stone is the only true foundation for building on. What has to be built is Grace, which is not the "inhuman music" of "geometry or algebra", nor the sentimental romantic history of "Prince Charles in a gay Highland shawl." No: it is the deer who exemplify Grace.

You must build from the rain and stones
till you can make
a stylish deer on the high hills,
and let its leaps be unpredictable! (DHH V)
The role of poetry in relation to Grace is the main sub-theme of the poem. The present image of Grace has been established as a contrast to the myths of Ulysses, which cannot solve all; later in the poem, the final images of Grace are to be questioned in terms of their poetic validity. But in section VI, the central point of the poem, Crichton Smith presents a poet who is at one with the deer, at one with Grace. This is the great Gaelic poet, Duncan Ban McIntyre (who is also one of MacDiarmid's heroes.) He was both a poet and a hunter of deer. He knew their music and it became his own: "Nevertheless he shot them also ... And the clean shot did not disturb his poems." He possessed not only the Grace of the deer but also the "grace that's kind enough to kill." ("Grace Notes" - WM 39). How are these apparent contradictions resolved? The final stanza of this section, in its calm acceptance of the simple existence of things, points forward to the poem's conclusion:

And the rocks did not weep with sentiment.  
They were simply there; the deer were simply there. 
The witty gun blazed from his knowing hand.  
(DHH VI)

The poem now returns to the deer, and begins to examine in more detail the conditions of their aloofness, the aspects of their Grace. It questions their knowledge, whether "rumours of death disturb them": for Crichton Smith, as we have seen, the rumours of death are persistent and overwhelming. The deer possess a kind of freedom:
They do not live
by local churchyards, hotels or schools.
They inhabit wild systems.

(DHH VII)

For Crichton Smith, the key word would be "schools"; and again, later in this section, he says that no "remonstrant gods schoolmaster their woods." There is death, certainly: the deer fight, "Their horns have locked in blood, ... have gored bellies." But their fighting, and their mating, are natural and instinctive forces - not evil, because not conscious, not intentional. Their violence has the inhuman quality of pride, the spontaneous quality of Grace.

Yet the deer can die. Section VIII insists that it is this very mortality which makes them beautiful. Death is involved in Grace. The deer

stand, precarious, of a style,
half-here, half-there, a half-way lustre breaking
a wise dawn in a chained ocean far.

(DHH VIII)

This section rather complicates matters by introducing a "you" or "she", who does not appear anywhere else in the poem, whose equally mortal beauty is compared to that of the deer.

God may not be beautiful, but you
suffer a local wound. You bleed to death
from all that's best, your active anima.

(DHH VIII)
That is, God is not beautiful, because He is perfected; but "you" (the deer and/or the unspecified "she") are, because of a "local" wound (a wound within the bounds of time), and because you are dying from what is best in you, your imperfection and mortality.

This idea of mortality introduces us again to the basic dichotomy of mind and body. The next section opens:

Deer on the high peaks, calling, calling, you speak of love, love of the mind and body.

Section IX is about the mind; section X about the body. The section on the mind opens with the thoughts of the deer, which are "like daring thoughts, half-in, half-out this world." Contrasted are the thoughts of great, proud men. At first it seems as though these "heads of a thirsty intellect" share the qualities of the deer: but they bring in their trail war, destruction, fanaticism; and section X opens with the warning "fanatic heads deceive."

Section X is devoted to the love of the body, and declares:

Deer on the high peaks, the wandering senses are all, are all.

It contains some very fine, vividly concentrated descriptions of the passing of the seasons:

The hind crowned with her wanton sex,
rage of the sap in trees, the urgent salmon 
pregnant with oceans dying into streams.  
(DHH X)

(Cf. "Outside, the grass was raging!") The seasons "return in spite 
of the idea", and in spite of "mad Ulysses." But even Ulysses (a 
softening of the earlier attitude) returns at last to the natural 
scene of Ithaca. This particular encounter between the mind and body 
has ended decisively in favour of the body; whereas section IX 
presents a confused and disturbing picture of violence and destruction, 
section X is full of light and air and beauty, with some of the 
strongest and most attractive writing in the whole poem.

Section XI returns to the deer on their high hills, and con­
trasts to the hills the flat plain, with its slow, winding rivers. 
The "rampant egos of the flat plain" aspire towards grace but are 
unable to attain it. They remain

Contorted selves that twist in a dark wind, 
far from the mountains, from the far and clear 
ordered inventions of the stars ongoing.  

(DHH XI)

All the paradoxes of Crichton Smith's conception of Grace are con­
centrated into that phrase "ordered inventions". The deer stand on 
these hills, they "look down" on the plain, they possess the true 
"style" of Grace.

the deer stand imperious, of a style,
make vibrant music, high and rich and clear,
mean what the plain mismeans, inform a chaos.  

Section XII consists of a magnificent apostrophe to the deer,
who have previously been described as "half-here, half-there" (VIII)
and "half-in, half-out this world" (IX). It is the ultimate definition
of the achieved poise of Grace, a concept which can only finally be
defined in poetry, since it is a poetic rather than a philosophical
concept. This is also, it should be noted, the only use in the text
of the poem, apart from a similarly climactic moment in section V, of
the actual title phrase.

Deer on the high hills, in your halfway kingdom,
uneasy in this, uneasy in the other,
but all at ease when earth and sky together
are mixed are mixed, become a royalty
none other knows, neither the migrant birds
nor the beasts chained to their instinctive courses.

...  

Your antlers flash in light, your speed like thought
is inspiration decorous and assured
a grace not theological but of
accomplished bodies, sensuous and swift,
of summer scents enjoyers, and of winters
the permanent spirits, watchful, unappeased:

of summer hills a speaking radiance
the body's language, excellent and pure,
discoursing love, free as the wandering wind:

of scentless winters the philosophers,
vigilant always like a tiptoe mind
on peaks of sorrow, brave and scrutinous:
on peaks of sorrow, brave and scrutinious,
on breakneck peaks, coherent and aplomb,
the image silent on the high hill.

(DHH XII)

This is undoubtedly the climax of the poem: and nowhere else in Crichton Smith's poetry is there such a note of achieved certainty. And yet, and yet. The doubts return. The exaltation vanishes. Section XIII begins a retreat from this position, based, as before, upon a doubt of the validity of poetry. What has been achieved is only an image, and images may be false. In roughly the same way as Norman MacCaig questions the validity of his own use of metaphor, Crichton Smith now turns on his images and challenges them:

Do colours cry? Does "black" weep for the dead? Is green so bridal, and is red the flag and eloquent elegy of a martial sleep?

... Are rivers stories, and are plains their prose? Are fountains poetry?

(DHH XIII)

He turns at last to the deer themselves:

And you, the deer, who walk upon the peaks, are you a world away, a language distant? Such symbols freeze upon my desolate lips!

(DHH XIII)

Are the deer in fact separate from his conception of them, set apart
by a whole language, by a whole system of images? Such a distance might well leave him "desolate".

Section XIV opens by accepting all the doubts of the previous section:

There is no metaphor. The stone is stony.
The deer step out in isolated air.

All things are only themselves; the deer are "isolated" from all the meanings we may attempt to give them, they are "not nobles now".

Men try to inform a landscape with their own emotion, but they remain "a language distant":

"You called sir did you?" "I who was so lonely would speak with you: would speak to this tall chair, would fill it chock-full of my melancholy."

So being lonely I would speak with any stone or tree or river. Bear my journey you endless water, dance with a human joy.

This distance deadly! God or goddess throw me a rope to landscape, let that hill, so bare, blossom with grapes, the wine of Italy.

But this section achieves a different kind of resolution. The repeated lines and phrases - "the stars are starry, the cloud is cloudy, the sun is sunny" - and the continuous refrain - "the deer step out in isolated air" - achieve a cumulative effect, sonorous and dignified, of acceptance. Sad, perhaps, and melancholy, a little
weary, but acceptance nonetheless, so that at last the poet can see that he must "Forgive the distance", and accept, even as the stones, and the deer themselves, accepted that Duncan Ban McIntyre would kill the deer he loved. So the poem ends, calmly, quietly:

for stars are starry and the rain is rainy,
the stone is stony, and the sun is sunny,
the deer step out in isolated air.

(DHH XIV)

In effect, Crichton Smith has offered us two endings. One, in section XII, is a climax of elation, an achievement of the delicate balance and style of Grace, which is, necessarily, brief, mortal, something inhuman, a moment's glory. It is not a state in which mankind can or should rest; it is an object of contemplation. We, who are not deer, who are only human, must be content with something less; and in the final section, Crichton Smith offers his alternative: the calm state of acceptance, knowing all too well the "deadly" distance between us and the deer, but able at the last to forgive it. It is up to each reader to decide his own preference; but there is little doubt which choice Crichton Smith himself has made.

Deer on the High Hills, for all its roughness in expression, seems to me to be the best poem Crichton Smith has yet written, the most sustained examination and exposition of his central ideas. It was published in 1962: since then, Crichton Smith's work has tended more towards narrative and dramatic forms, and it may well be that a final estimate of his writing will find that his concern with people
is ultimately more rewarding than his concern with ideas. But he is
still writing poetry; his work appears regularly in magazines, and
another collection is, I would have thought, overdue.

I would like to close this survey of Iain Crichton Smith's
work by quoting the poem which closes The Law and the Grace. It is,
again, addressed to his mother, and is about death; again, it reveals
his deprecatory attitude towards himself. But it is strangely
moving in its imagery, and in its sombre cadences; and it reveals
also that warmth of feeling and depth of human understanding which
make Iain Crichton Smith's poetry most rewarding, and which constitute
perhaps his own truest claim to the quality of Grace.

Envoi.

Remember me when you come into your kingdom.
Remember me, beggar of mirrors, when you are confirmed
in the sleep of fulfilment on the white pillow.

Remember me who knock at the window,
who hirple on my collapsing stick, and know
the quivering northern lights of nerves.

Remember me in your good autumn.
I in my plates of frost go
among the falling crockery of hills

stones, plains, all falling and falling.
In my winter of the sick glass remember
me in your autumn, in your good sleep.

(LG 60)
PART THREE

CONCRETE POETRY:
Edwin Morgan
Ian Hamilton Finlay
INTRODUCTION

It is perhaps too early to make any very definite statements or generalisations about the works of the younger Scottish poets who have come to the fore in the last decade or so. Indeed, the bulk of this final section of the dissertation will be concerned with two poets - Edwin Morgan (born 1920) and Ian Hamilton Finlay (born 1925) - who are not really "young" poets at all, and with a movement - Concrete Poetry - which has been steadily expanding over a period of almost twenty years, and which has far longer antecedents. But it would be wrong to suggest that Concrete Poetry monopolises the Scottish poetry of the late '60s, and I feel that a few words are necessary about such younger poets as Robert Tait, D.M. Black, and Stewart Conn.

We can, I think, make some tentative generalisations about the three central topics of language, influences, and form.

The young Scottish poet writes naturally in English, and uses Scots only for very specialised purposes. Edwin Morgan has found Scots useful for translating certain linguistic effects in Maiakovsky's poetry, but for the most part Scots is used only to give colloquial and humorous effects. Alan Jackson, for instance, used Scots in his early joke poems, but his more recent work has been predominantly in English.¹ Stewart Conn has used Scots in poems of the dramatic monologue type, such as the delightful "Elephant Girl"², but normally he writes in English, as do Tait and Black. (Black has also invented his own, dwarf language.³) Maurice Lindsay, talking about his work
in editing the annual *Scottish Poetry* anthology, told me that "we hardly ever get any verse in Scots, and all that we do get's 19th century pastiche."^4^ The conclusion would appear to be that Scots is dead as a valid poetic language in present-day Scotland. This is certainly the logical conclusion, but we must remember that language and poetry do not always develop logically.

The question of language is not unconnected with that of influences, for these influences are, to a great extent, non-Scottish. For poets like Robert Tait and Colin Kirkwood, the strongest influences are those of McLuhan, Burroughs, Creeley, the Black Mountain poets, and other writers of the international "avant-garde." Many of D.M. Black's fantasies are reminiscent of Surrealism and the Theatre of Cruelty; Stewart Conn is also very concerned with subjects of violence, and his play *The King* shows marks of Pinter and Beckett. Although they are certainly aware of the achievements of Scottish poetry over the last forty years or so, few of these poets show any signs of being greatly influenced by it. Only Alan Bold has attempted to do anything directly analogous to MacDiarmid.

Indeed, there has been something of a literary feud between MacDiarmid and some of the younger poets, culminating in 1962 in MacDiarmid's vituperative and wholly unwarranted attack on Ian Hamilton Finlay's *Wild Hawthorn Press* and its magazine *Poor, Old, Tired, Horse* (POTH). (The title, significantly, is derived from Creeley.) Among the counterblasts were Robert Tait's highly critical article "The 'Renaissance' in Scottish Poetry"^5^, and Finlay's often-quoted remark
(spoken, I believe, more in sorrow than in anger) "Really, everyone I know under the age of 40 is bored stiff by Mr. MacDiarmid."

Thirdly, there is the question of form. Whereas the poets dealt with in Part Two were, to a great extent, formal traditionalists, the younger poets are almost all experimenters. The most "traditional" of them is Stewart Conn, but even his stanzas employ some exceptionally strong enjambments, and the general effect of his verse is much stronger, and less smooth, than that of, say, MacCaig. Tait and Black, however, are willing to try just about anything, as is indicated by their contributions to a recent number of Lines Review (number 26.)

Black's "Anna's Affairs" is a narrative poem which uses very long lines and prose rhythms; the form is still poetic but the poem seems to be a strong attempt to incorporate into the narrative poem all the conveniences and advantages of prose narrative. Tait's "Please Be Careful With The Secret Lives of J. Campbell Barclay" operates in the opposite direction. It is a strange, fragmented, non-linear prose narrative, combining elements of Surrealism and social satire in an almost Dadaist manner, which pushes prose towards the condition of verse. It is laid out as prose, but with gaps between words at irregular intervals which establish a fairly jagged rhythm in much the same way as line division does in Black's poetry. Both writers seem to be trying, with a commendable open-ness, to find a medium which will serve their purposes.

It should be noted, finally, that Concrete Poetry shares all these general characteristics. Neither Morgan nor Finlay use Scots in
their concrete works; and Finlay's reason for this is, in fact, an interesting tribute to the potency of the language. His poems operate in a mood of calm and contemplation, and the Scots words, he told me, "move around on the page too much." Concrete Poetry is also the most international of all modern poetic movements; and it is, by definition, a continuous experiment in the form of poetry.

The most encouraging thing that can be said about the Scottish poetry scene today is that it is alive, that there are young writers active and prepared to experiment, to break away from established forms. The shadow of Robert Burns lay very heavily over the poets who followed him; and it was over a century before Scottish poetry completely recovered from a suffocating dependence upon him. This has not happened in the case of MacDiarmid: the poets who have come after him are their own men, doubtless influenced by his work, but not dependent on it. Whoever the major poets of the next Scots generation turn out to be - and Robert Tait, D.M. Black, and Stewart Conn seem to me the most likely candidates - this independence and willingness to experiment will be their greatest heritage from the '60s.
Concrete Poetry is a general, and in some ways unsatisfactory, term used to describe a large area of artistic experimentation in the medium of language. It challenges the distinctions and separations between various art forms; it cannot be approached solely on literary terms, or solely in terms of fine arts or music, though all these approaches are useful, and often necessary.

It may be questioned, then, whether the word "poetry" can properly be used to describe these works. It must be admitted that "poetry" is being used in a very loose sense, and it might be better to abandon it, if a better word could be found. But until such a word is found, or invented, I would continue to defend the use of the term "poetry" on the grounds that we are concerned with ways of manipulating elements of language in a very precise and controlled manner, with a view to achieving clearly defined artistic ends. This concern with language seems to me to be a distinctively literary attribute; and thus the word "poetry" seems more accurate than any term drawn from fine arts or music would be.

Perhaps the following diagram will indicate more precisely the "field-area" within which concrete poetry operates.
The diagram indicates the three major orientations of concrete poetry: semantic, visual, and phonetic. Since all concrete poetry is, as I have said, concerned with language, these could be taken to represent, respectively, language as meaning, language as writing, and language as sound. These three aspects border upon the conventional divisions of literature, fine arts, and music.

Most concrete poems can be "placed" somewhere in this diagram, on one or more of the three main axes, or sides of the triangle. The "ideal" concrete poem would combine all three elements in equal proportions, and would thus be placed in the very centre.

Probably the most common type is the "ideographic", or visual-semantic poem. Here, the actual visual form of the poem as it appears on the printed page bears some direct relation to the semantic meaning, in the same way as Chinese ideograms or Egyptian hieroglyphics illustrated their meaning as well as denoting it. At its simplest, this type produces such poems as the "mouse's tail" in Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland, or other "shaped" poems such as George Herbert's "Easter Wings." But, as we shall see in our examination of Finlay's work, the visual-semantic relationship is capable of far more complex expressions.

Obviously, a poem could be "placed" along this axis depending on whether the visual or the semantic element was stronger. For instance, the Brazilian "semiotic" poems, which create their own sign language, would be very close to the visual extreme.

Secondly, the "onomatopoeic" division would contain poems in
which there was some direct relationship between the meaning and the sound of the words. At the semantic end of this axis would come poems which depended on simple puns to establish their connections; at the phonetic end would be the "phonic poems" of Ernst Jandl, Paul de Vree, and the Dadaists Kurt Schwitters and Raoul Hausmann.

The "audioptic" axis is certainly the least common of the three; (most concrete poems use one or other, or often both, of the first two.) It consists of manipulations of the form of letters with reference to their sound (or vice versa) but without reference to their meaning. For example, a single letter 'h' implies a sound, but it does not imply a meaning. At the visual end would be works such as Hansjörg Mayer's brilliant designs with elements of typography; at the phonetic end would be Raoul Hausmann's use of typography to indicate the pronunciation of his abstract phonic poems.

In terms of this diagram, it should be noted that both Finlay and Morgan work mostly at the semantic end of the ideographic and onomatopoeic axes; their work is thus much closer to conventional poetry than that of many other concretists. Finlay himself would probably insist that the retention of some element of semantic meaning is essential to any work claiming to be a "poem."

The "limits" of concrete poetry are very hard to define. At what point does an experimental work cease to be "concrete poetry" and become pure music, or graphics? This question is, perhaps, little more than verbal pedantry; but the diagram suggests, tentatively, possible limits at the three extremes.
At the phonetic end, the defining limit may be the use of the phoneme, the smallest possible phonetic element of language. Beyond that, we move into music, sounds produced by musical or electronic instruments, which are beyond the range of the human voice, and which contain not even the possibility of semantic meaning. Visually, the corresponding limit would be the grapheme, the letter-form itself. A pure abstract design may have a meaning, but it is not a semantic meaning.

The literary "limit" is harder to define; but I would suggest that perhaps the crucial element is the abandonment of syntax. Concrete poetry is basically non-syntactical; in fact, if we were to approach the subject from a purely literary point of view, I would say that "non-syntactical poetry" is a more precise term than "concrete poetry" is.

Most writers who approach concrete poetry from the literary standpoint share a very strong sense of language itself, language as an instrument of creation rather than mere reportage. This is, basically, the attitude expressed, as I have previously noted, by Hugh MacDiarmid in *In Memoriam James Joyce*.

Concerned, I repeat, with the shrewd analysis of the space-time network
As the distinctive character of human consciousness
And of language as the instrument
For the progressive articulation of the world
In spatial and temporal terms. Not retaining
The naive or 'copy' theory of language and creating
An artificial difficulty about space. As speech flows in time,
As it is time, there is no difficulty in its expressing
Temporal ordering, but how can the fugitive Express or translate the static ordering of things in space? The answer takes us beyond the theory that language Reduplicates or reconstructs a pre-existently given world And leads in the direction of the theory outlined In Cassirer's masterly discussion of speech In his *Philosophie der Symbolischen Formen* In which the temporal as well as the spatial functions Are exhibited as underived, or properly creative, functions Through which speech actually shapes and extends our experience;

Not reproductions of the given But conditions of anything being given And of its progressive elaboration, 'The supreme organ of the mind's self-governing growth.'

(SMJJ 65)

Similarly, in an article on the theoretical foundations of concrete poetry, Robert Tait writes of

the kind of stand-off poetry that reflectively settles the hash of love-affairs, the hungry, wolves, insects of all species, empty rooms, etc., etc., in a purring voice that modulates smoothly through the gears of English syntax and prosody. Stand-off, because it betrays an incomplete understanding of how far the world we move in is actually formed for us by the symbols we use. The world does not stand apart waiting to be labelled.

Within the medium of language, thus conceived of as a creative rather than as a reproductive function, syntax is only one form, and not necessarily the best one. Some writers would, on theoretical grounds, reject, or at least gravely question, syntax itself. Their basic argument is that syntax is a form of language which stands apart from its subject, a method of talking about something rather than a method of being that something. (Cf. Archibald MacLeish: "A poem
should not mean / But be."3) These writers seek a non-referential type of expression.

The search is for a poetry which eliminates, as far as possible, any barriers between form and content, and fulfils the principle enunciated by Hugo Ball in 1916, at the outset of the Dadaist movement, that Ikon and Logos should be one.4 Syntax may be such a barrier. Dom Sylvester Houdard describes it as "gumming" words together; he expresses it most concisely and beautifully when he says "Words are wild, sentences tame them." He illustrates this by talking of the difference between comfortable picture of "The tiger on the river bank has come to quench its thirst", and the power of TIGER 5

Finlay himself does not fully share these theoretical doubts about syntax. His own reasons for abandoning it are much more pragmatic, as he wrote in a letter to Pierre Garnier.

'Concrete' began for me with the extraordinary (since wholly unexpected) sense that the syntax I had been using, the movement of language in me, at a physical level, was no longer there - so it had to be replaced with something else, with a syntax and movement that would be true of the new feeling (which existed in only the vaguest way, since I had, then, no form for it....). 6

Finlay's "justification" (if it can be called that) is much simpler: it is "a wish to put things down in an uncluttered way." (The word "uncluttered" is very important for Finlay; a good deal of
his criticism of other Scottish poets, such as MacCaig, is based on the fact that he finds their work "cluttered." When I asked him specifically about the question of syntax, he replied

I don't think syntax itself is really a fussy, entangling thing; in the case of short stories, I always used it precisely to make the kind of pure, detached effect I make in poems by not using it.

Concrete poetry, therefore, seeks for some kind of ideal form of expression (call it, if you will, "uncluttered"), and it seeks to find this goal within the creative activity of language itself. This activity, as our diagram indicates, is not merely syntactical, nor even merely semantic, but is an activity which also incorporates visual and phonetic elements. Syntax, in this context, is seen as only one of many possible forms of linguistic expression available to the artist.

The essential character of the deepest artistic perception is that it is a simultaneous perception of form and content, each indistinguishable from the other. The conventional poet attempts to do this within the medium of syntax, aided by certain formal characteristics, such as rhythm, metrical forms, rhyme, figures of speech, etc. The concrete poet, however, seeks this perception within the much wider medium of language itself. This obviously cuts him off from certain purely syntactical perceptions, but equally, it opens up to him a whole range of perception and expression for which syntax in itself is inadequate. (Of course, there is nothing
to prevent the concrete poet from writing non-concrete, syntactical poetry when he feels like it.)

This situation leaves the concrete poet totally free from all preconceptions of formal types. It involves, as Tait puts it, "a kind of serene submission to anarchy." It also deprives the reader of all his conventional guidelines; it is necessary, Finlay says, "to intuit the rules of the poem from the form that is given." Thus the discovery of form and meaning simultaneously by the poet is a process duplicated in the reader, as Finlay explains:

The reader does not begin at the top left-hand corner and work his way steadily to the bottom right-hand corner. He is first of all aware of the skeleton of the poem - its formal arrangement. Then he isolates groups of words in no special order. His appreciation of the poem is the enlivening of a skeletal form with flesh and blood. Parallel to the reader's exploration of the actual space of the poem is his discovery of the "semantic space" of the poem.

Or as Houedard puts it, "Concrete poetry communicates its own structure; it is an object in & by itself."

The idea of the "poem as object" is fundamental to the whole of concrete poetry. It emphasizes the non-referential character of the poem, which is not about its subject, but is its subject. This brings us to one of the consequences of concrete poetry's being non-syntactical: it is also, largely, non-linear.

Of course, some concrete poems, especially those of the "kinetic" pamphlet-poem type, do retain linear progression and sequence, "controlling
the poem in time as well as space." But the method of reading concrete poems outlined above would still apply to a poem whose "formal arrangement" included linear elements. The total "semantic space" of the concrete poem is almost always non-linear: the poem is an object for contemplation.

In this way the concrete poem is much closer to the "objects" of fine arts, like a single painting or a statue; it is a separate, autonomous object, existing by the laws of its own structure. Finlay quotes with approval Malevich's statement -

Man distinguished himself as a thinking being and removed himself from the perfection of God's creation. Having left the non-thinking state, he strives by means of his perfected objects, to be again embodied in the perfection of the absolute, non-thinking life.

- and adds, "That is, this seems to me, to describe, approximately, my own need to make poems." The idea of the poem as autonomous, perfected object has two extensions, or qualifications, which I would like to point out.

The first of these is the idea of the poem as **functional** object. The simultaneous perception of form and content may also be phrased, in Existentialist terms, as a perception of function. This can be taken quite literally: Finlay has a poem which is also a sundial. It is a poem "about" the passing of time, but since its total form is that of an operating sundial, it also measures the "actual" passing of time. This idea of the poem as a functional object involves getting
The poem-object is always intended to be a part of the environment, and if possible a useful part of man's social environment. "The aim of the new poetry," wrote Eugen Gomringer, "is to give poetry an organic function in society again, and in doing so to restate the position of poet in society." One of the jibes at concrete poetry has been that it produces, at best, a nice design for intellectual wallpaper. To which the concrete poet would reply, quite seriously, why not? Wallpaper is, after all, one of the major conditioning elements in our daily environment: surely a good poem is preferable to pink roses? The jibe reveals an attitude of mind which sees poetry and life as being divorced: when you read poetry, you go away and open a book and forget about your wallpaper. Concrete poetry rejects this attitude: although it often seems to be very aesthetically orientated, almost art for art's sake, its aestheticism has a social function also. One of Finlay's major concerns is with establishing standards of civilisation for the whole of life. "In an age", he told me, "when man has learned to control vast areas of his environment which were formerly left to chance and Nature, we cannot afford decadent art."

The second point about the autonomous poem-object is its impersonality. Concrete poems, whose forms often derive directly from elements within one language, which are common to all who know the language, rather than from personal associations of the poet, may
seem to have the same kind of impersonality as, say, a purely abstract design. This is undoubtedly part of the intention: the desire to create an object totally separate from the self, clean and perfect and alone. The statement by Malevich, quoted above, would apply here, as would the following, by Paul de Vree:

Sound and concrete poetry replace the conventional, subjective type of poem with a universal and autonomous object: the idiom is not very often devoid of an anti-individualising humour.

I would like to emphasize the idea of the impersonality and objectivity of the concrete medium at this stage, because one of the major points to be understood about Ian Hamilton Finlay is the degree to which he is an exception in this respect, the degree to which the impersonality of his form facilitates the very deep "personality" of his content.

Ernst Jandl has written:

There must be an infinite number of methods of writing experimental poems, but I think the most successful methods are those which can only be used once, for then the result is a poem identical with the method in which it was made. (The method, used again, would turn out exactly the same poem.)

This, I think, sums up a good deal of what I have been trying to say; and it also points to the greatest single difficulty in talking about concrete poetry in general terms. Since each new poem creates
a new and unrepeatable form, it is impossible to talk about the forms of concrete poetry except in very general or in very particular terms. One can speak of poems whose formal coherence is dependent upon, for example, typographical arrangement, but it is difficult to be any more precise or instructive without examining individual poems; and these poems will illustrate only themselves. Finlay has written:

For myself I cannot derive from the poems I have written any 'method' which can be applied to the writing of the next poem; it comes back, after each poem, to a level of 'being', to an almost physical intuition of the time, or of a form... to which I try, with huge uncertainty, to be 'true'.

In this dissertation, I shall therefore be concentrating upon the work of Ian Hamilton Finlay in particular. For the reader who wishes to explore concrete poetry further, there are two basic texts. One is An Anthology of Concrete Poetry, edited by Emmett Williams, and published by the Something Else Press, New York; the other is Concrete Poetry: an International Anthology, edited by Stephen Bann, and published by London Magazine Editions. The Williams volume is much larger, but less selective; it is rather like an encyclopaedia, whereas Bann's selection is more of a critical anthology, and also contains an excellent introduction.

Finally, a brief outline of the history and antecedents of concrete poetry will help to illustrate further the movement's scope and
vitality. Dom Sylvester Houedard has traced the history of concrete poetry as far back as "the origin of all graphics - cave-paintings pictographs ideograms alphabets hieroglyphs." He also quotes anagrams and word-squares used in early times by various religions, such as the first-century word-square anagram of Pater Noster. Byzantine poets wrote shaped poems centuries before Herbert. Edward Lucie-Smith cites Latin poems published by an Elizabethan poet named Richard Willy in 1573. Lewis Carroll, besides the "mouse's tail", wrote series of word-games, some of which Finlay published in POTH 12. Carolyn Wells' Whimsey Anthology contains numerous similar shaped and typographical "whimseys."

The Brazilian "pilot plan" of 1958 cites as forerunners in literature Mallarme, Pound, Joyce, Cummings, and Apollinaire. The movement has also revived ideas of several prominent Dadaists, such as the phonetic poems of Hugo Ball, Raoul Hausmann, and Kurt Schwitters. The Dadaists' uninhibited experiments with typography can also be mentioned; and various other artistic movements of the early 20th century, such as Malevich's Suprematism, have also left their mark.

(Finlay, however, is much more cautious than Houedard on the matter of influences.

I don't think there is much real connection between concrete and Dada. Dom Sylvester is not always very discriminating in the names and movements, he names. There IS a certain connection between Hans Arp and concrete; it was probably Arp who used the word concrete, of his visual works, first. But I think the connection is rather superficial, really.)
In the early 1950s, a good deal of work along these lines was being done, quite independently from each other, by poets in Central Europe and South America. There are several versions of the specific "start" of the concrete movement, but the most commonly accepted version is that these two groups came together in 1955, with the meeting in Ulm of the Swiss poet Eugen Gomringer and the Brazilian Decio Pignatari, a leader of the Noigrandes group. The movement grew quickly on an international scale, and in 1956 the poets on both continents agreed on the common term "concrete poetry" to describe their work. Concrete poetry is still strongest in South America and throughout Central Europe - France, Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Italy, Switzerland - but in the 60s there has been an increasing interest in the English-speaking world, spearheaded by Finlay, Morgan, and Houedard in Britain, and by Emmett Williams in the USA. Concrete poetry has also appeared in Japan, and there have been some fascinating collaborations between the Japanese poet Seiichi Niikuni and the French poet Pierre Garnier. The concrete poet's intense interest in language has, perhaps paradoxically, enabled the medium to transcend individual languages, and it is certainly the most truly international of contemporary literary movements.

At the present time, concrete poetry seems to me to be almost dangerously fashionable, and may offer attractions to writers who think of it as an easy discipline, which it most emphatically is not. But the solid achievements of the "first generation" of concrete poets have been established, and it is to be hoped that, once the merely
fashionable adherents have gone their way, we shall be left with the material for further new, and unpredictable, expansions of the medium.
EDWIN MORGAN

Edwin Morgan is, in the best sense of the term, a "man of letters." He has a magpie-like interest in all forms of literary activity. He is by profession a lecturer in English literature, and he is an excellent critic; he is also an editor, anthologiser, translator, and poet. His translations are from many languages, ranging from a complete verse translation of *Beowulf* to renderings of Maiakovsky's poems (for which he sometimes uses Scots.) He has also been very active in the translation of concrete poetry; Emmett Williams' *Anthology of Concrete Poetry* uses several of his translations of the Noigrandes group. He has been writing poetry for many years, and still does excellent work in the traditional modes; but, along with Ian Hamilton Finlay, he was among the first British writers to become interested in concrete poetry, and he has experimented extensively in that medium. His first collection of concrete poems, *Starryveldt* (1965) was published by Eugen Gomringer as number 9 of the magazine *konkrete poesie poesia concreta.*

Morgan's recently published collection, *The Second Life,* gives a good idea of the range of his work, except that it does not include any translations. There are four sections of poems, divided from each other by groups of concrete poems, which are printed on a slightly different colour of paper. The first section deals with literary themes and figures: elegies for Hemingway and Edith Piaf, and a very
amusing poem about Maurice Lindsay buying basset hounds, which contains a splendid burst of dialogue in verse. Most typical of Morgan, however, is the juxtaposition (pages 16 and 17) of two poems addressed, respectively, to Hugh MacDiarmid and to Ian Hamilton Finlay. Nothing better indicates the catholicism of Morgan's literary taste; and both poems are well above the average quality of such tributes. The poem to Finlay contains these lines, which do indeed sum up a great deal of Finlay's qualities:

You give the pleasure
of made things,
the construction holds
like a net, or it
unfolds in waves
a certain measure,
of affection.

(SL 17-18.)

The second section contains poems about Glasgow, a city which has had rather little written about it, in comparison with Edinburgh at least. These are among Morgan's best poems; they are aware of the city's grim beauty, of its tragedies, and of its moments of humour. There is a very funny and lively poem on "The Starlings in George Square" (SL 32), which comes to a finely understated conclusion:

One thing we know they say, after their fashion.
They like the warm cliffs of man.

(SL 34)

"Trio" (SL 44) is another very cheerful, optimistic poem; but these
moments of humour are balanced by a firm insight into the more unpleasant aspects of the city's life, such as the brutal events which may take place at night on Glasgow Green, or the memories of the great gang fights of the 30s. (SL 37,35.) The finest poem in this section is the narrative "In the Snack Bar" (SL 41), with its deeply felt portrayal of human degradation and the vestiges of dignity.

In contrast, the third section, which contains personal love poems, is less successful. The feeling seems more generalised and conventional. In all his serious poems, Morgan has a weakness for apostrophe and for pushing home with exclamation marks general comments which are already obvious. He is much better in a humorous vein, or in simple narrative.

The final section is much better again, for Morgan is at home in one of his preoccupations, the advances of science, computers, space travel, science fiction. The science fiction narratives in this final section are brilliant, and far more effective than most science fiction short stories. The poetic form condenses the narrative, and places more stress on the human and the imaginative aspects of ideas such as time travel. "From the Domain of Arnheim" (SL 82), for example, presents a group of time-travellers who interrupt the celebration of a birth in a primitive village:

A sweating trumpeter took
a brand from the fire with a shout and threw it
where our bodies would have been -
we felt nothing but his courage.
And so they would deal with every imagined power
seen or unseen.
There are no gods in the domain of Arnheim.  

"The Ages" (SL 86) is a very complex poem which traces a society's progress backwards in time. "In Sobieski's Shield" (SL 78), an extended and imaginative use of the no-punctuation convention, is a fantasy on the transference of personality which perhaps involves a metaphor of the poetic process.

These poems avail themselves of all the mind-stretching excitement of prose science-fiction, yet avoid the subordination of literary values to ingenious "ideas" which so often mars that form.

The above is, of course, a very brief account of Edwin Morgan's non-concrete poetry, which is among the most attractive being written in Scotland today; but I wish, for the present, to concentrate upon his achievements in concrete poetry.

These achievements stem from Morgan's intense interest and delight in language, in words. His concrete poems explore different ways of expanding the meanings of accepted words and phrases by using these originals as a kind of plastic material, subject to various processes of alteration. These alterations are usually determined by linguistic elements: that is, they are puns, rearrangements of letters, permutations of word order, variations upon set consonantal patterns, and so on. What gives Morgan's poetry its particular individual tone is, partly the astonishing ingenuity of these permutations, and partly the whimsical, self-deprecating humour which often accompanies them.
Morgan's latest collection of concrete poetry is called *Gnomes*, and the title's reference is to words and letters in themselves. These gnomes are active, mischievous, and unpredictable. The title poem takes a series of gnome-like phrases - "fast bets best", "cast fits fist", etc. - and arranges them in a manner which accentuates the abstract patterns of individual letters which form the basis of the permutations, and which makes the phrases themselves wilfully, or gnomishly, difficult to read.

Gnomes also includes one of Morgan's joke computer poems, which exhibit the quintessence of this humour: words as live little entities with independent wills, stubbornly refusing to submit themselves to the semantic schemes which the human mind tries to impose upon them. The best known of these poems is "The Computer's First Christmas Card"³:

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jollymerry
hollyberry
jollyberry
merryholly
happyjolly
jollyjelly
jellybelly
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Morgan is very interested in the serious use of computers in poetry and other arts, but his own computer (which has subsequently attempted a birthday card and a second Christmas card) refuses to take itself so seriously.

A comparatively small number of Morgan's poems depend on the visual form as well as on the phonetic and semantic elements. Outstanding among those which do, are: "The Chaffinch Map of Scotland" (SL 52), a concrete dialect map which takes the local dialect forms for "chaffinch" from all areas of Scotland and arranges them in the outline of a map of Scotland, with each form marking its area of origin; and
"Pomander" (SL 45). Here is the text of the poem, and Morgan's comment on it:

```
pomander
open pomander
open poem and her
open poem and him
open poem and hymn
hymn and hymen leander
high man pen meander
open poem me and her
pen me poem me and him
om mane padme hum
pad me home panda hand
open up o holy panhandler
ample panda pen or bamboo pond
ponder a bonny poem pomander opener
open banned peon penman hum and banter
open hymn and pompom band and panda hamper
o i am a pen open man or happener
i am open manner happener
happy are we open
poem and a pom
poem and a panda
poem and aplomb
```

It would take too long to expound all the references and associations here, but briefly, they are all meant to be in the area of "opening up" something sweet and fresh like an old-fashioned pomander (I have in mind the sort that opened up in segments from the top, like the liths of an orange), whether it is the "jewel in the lotus" (Om Mane Padme Hum) or a panda in a hamper, or a South American writer under the censors, or the whole conception of language in Spatialist poetry. It is both visual (in the shape of a pomander) and a sound poem in which I use a restricted range of letters and sounds to knit the wide variety of allusions together.

Morgan is particularly fond of playing linguistic games with what might be called "given" material. He takes proper names, phrases from other people's work, newspaper reports, spelling errors, and neo-
logisms (especially compound-words) and rearranges their constituent elements into new patterns.

Some of these patterns are almost abstract in quality. "Space-poem 1: Laika to Gagarin" (SL 75) sounds very much like the phonic poetry of Jandl and Schwitters; and "Canedolia" (SL 21) is a hilarious arrangement of Scottish place names into an imaginary (and very lively) conversation, which, though without actual meaning, is filled with an aura of suggestion. What visions, for instance, are aroused by the statement that "We play at crossstobs, leuchars, gorbals, and finfan. we scavaig, and there's aye a bit of tilquhilly"?

But for the most part, the permutations are designed to remain within the semantic area of the "given" material, either expanding or commenting on its meaning.

For instance, Morgan takes a statement by John Cage, "I have nothing to say and I am saying it and that is poetry." There are fourteen words in that statement, which means that the number of possible orders in which these words could appear is immense, in the order of millions. Morgan presents fourteen variations, which reflect the notions of permutation and chance in Cage's music, while at the same time forming a comment upon his statement. The majority of Morgan's permutations imply a more positive attitude towards poetry than that of his original, and this is also suggested in the title, "Opening the Cage" (SL 51):

I have to say poetry and is that nothing and am I saying it
I am and I have poetry to say and is that nothing saying it
I am nothing and I have poetry to say and that is saying it
I that am saying poetry have nothing and it is I and to say
And I say that I am to have poetry and saying it is nothing
I am poetry and nothing and saying it is to say that I have
To have nothing is poetry and I am saying that and I say it
Poetry is saying I have nothing and I am to say that and it
Saying nothing I am poetry and I have to say that and it is
It is and I am and I have poetry saying say that to nothing
It is saying poetry to nothing and I say I have and am that
Poetry is saying I have it and I am nothing and to say that
And that nothing is poetry I am saying and I have to say it
Saying poetry is nothing and to that I say I am and have it

Another type of poem evolved from "given" material is what
Morgan has chosen to call the "emergent" poem. He has written several
of these, and they have been collected in a pamphlet in Hansjörg
Mayer's _futura_ series. The basic form is to take a statement (usually
a quotation from literature) and then to construct words and phrases
from its constituent letters, preserving the correct order and spacing
of the letters of the original phrase. The effect is clarified by
the title of one of these pieces, "Message Clear" (SL 24): it is as
if fragments of a message were coming through, with the whole message
gradually building towards intelligibility. The words thus formed
should, of course, bear some thematic relation to the total phrase;
and "Message Clear" is perhaps the best of the poems in this respect.
In what are (once you have learned the trick of reading the poem) very
forceful rhythms, the fragmented lines move steadily towards the final
realisation of "I am the resurrection and the life."
Finally, I should mention what is perhaps the most perfect of Morgan's concrete poems, the "Summer Haiku" (SL 46), derived in part from Basho's famous haiku on the same subject.

Pool.
People
Plop!
Cool.

One could analyse this poem in terms of its visual form: the unifying column of 'l's, the displacement of the 'e' out of the second line to become a reflection in the third line, or the further reflections (as if in a pool) of o p / p o. But I feel that the poem's primary appeal lies in its sound, its deliciously cool rhymes, and the plosive 'pl's bringing in an exactly onomatopoetic effect, and the rhythm of the words which also expresses the sudden interruption of the "plop!" and then the return to tranquility. This small but perfect poem is a fine example of what can be achieved by the manipulation of words in a "concrete" manner.

I said that Morgan regarded words as gnomes, active and mischievous, playing games with linguistic conventions. His concrete poems preserve this energy and playfulness, but they also indicate the extent to which language can be controlled and used by the artist, especially if the artist shares any of Edwin Morgan's brilliant ingenuity and inventiveness.
IAN HAMILTON FINLAY

Letter from Finlay:

Stonypath, Dunsyre, Lanark
3 Jumy, '67
Dear Mr. Scobie,

thank you for your letter. Please forgive Jumy (above); it must be a sort of summer elephant.

Ian Hamilton Finlay has the dimensions of genius. He is, personally, a man of great sincerity, kindness, and patience; he is essentially "civilised." This quality shows in everything from his intense concern with the cultural standards of society down to such elementary things as his prompt and always stimulating replies to his large correspondence. But most of all, his personality is one of warmth and gentleness, informed throughout by a unique sense of humour, and an affection for the natural objects which constitute the world of his poetry.

These objects soon become familiar to any reader of Finlay's poetry: boats, especially fishing-boats, with sails; tugs on canals with long-armed windmills on the bank; small hill-ponies; strong black tea; fields and fir trees. All beautiful things, all friendly things, to which the only sane response is love. These are the objects in which Finlay and his poems take delight; that is, they are delight-full.

All of Finlay's poetry is saying, in effect, one of two things:
"This is what I find funny" or "This is what I find beautiful." Very often, they are the same.

Finlay's genius is one of such utter simplicity that it is often not appreciated by people who approach his work with certain preconceptions of what poetry "should" be. Some of these preconceptions are about the form of poetry, and I hope that the introductory section has established some understanding of the formal presuppositions of concrete poetry. Basically, what is required is a complete open-ness to the poem, however strange it appears, a readiness, as Finlay says, "to intuit the rules of the poem from the form that is given." This capacity "can't be taught, only encouraged."¹

But the reader also has to adjust his preconceptions about the "importance" and "significance" of poetry if he is to appreciate Finlay's basic attitudes and range of subject-matter and imagery.

Maurice Lindsay, for instance, told me, "I'm only very lukewarm in my sympathies towards concrete poetry, simply because it seems to me to be doing such a small thing that it's hardly worth doing."² And in a generally sympathetic article on concrete poetry, Edward Lucie-Smith comes to the conclusion that

The techniques being used can encompass only rather simple statements. It is for this reason that concrete poetry seems unlikely to establish itself as the dominant mode of English poetry. ³

But Finlay challenges these standards of "importance" and "significance". Too many contemporary poets, he says, especially in
Scotland, worry about writing "significant" poems rather than good poems. He questions MacDiarmid's stress on the value of the long poem: why should a long poem necessarily be "better" than a short poem?

I was thinking that those who discount the poem that can be 'seen' in a single minute, often like the poem which it takes ten minutes to 'see': they might argue that their sort of poem is nine minutes better. (Ha ha). But possibly the real difference is between the poem which presents the fish-rise or pebble-fall, and that which presents those and the ripples (not trusting the reader to see the ripples for himself.)

When I asked him if he could envisage a "long" concrete poem, he said Yes, it would be possible, but he saw no need for it, and would it necessarily be more "important" than a short one?

Nor is a poem "better" for being about a "serious" issue.

Mike Weaver quotes a letter from Finlay saying

You know, in one book of Salinger's, there's this character who says about having read all these poems, and how there's no poetry in any of them, because in the end there's nothing nice or beautiful to remember ... and I do think that's right. ------- was at this reading last night and said ALL the poets just had all these poems about the bomb and things, and nothing but chips on their shoulders, and all reading in a bitter way. ... The funny thing is, they are all such conventional wee people really.

Finlay has also questioned what he calls "the now-fashionable poetry of anguish and self". For him, a poem is not a weapon, or
an instrument for probing the uncertain depths of the self, but rather, a toy.

I also make wooden toys. I like toy poems. The toy is not cold, but is also un-connected; ie, it is pure. But brims with feeling. It is open in the right way. The new poetry will be a poetry without the word "I". It will be silent, & will be a sign of peace and sanity. I think the poets should bear the anguish of not writing anguish poems.

This lack of conventional "seriousness" in Finlay's subject-matter has led to the accusations that his work is "whimsical" and "sentimental." But the use of the word "whimsical" is, as Tait pointed out, begging the question of Finlay's standards of "importance." Finlay's works are an assertion of priorities; it is obviously impossible to judge them by standards which it is their intent to attack. What, after all, is a "whimsey"? I discussed this point with Finlay, and we agreed that it could be defined as an extreme oddity of language or situation, which happens to be pleasant. But, surely the true "modern whimseys" would be things like the Theatre of Cruelty, or the poems of George MacBeth. They are also extreme oddities, but unpleasant. But why not a "Theatre of Kindness"? Why should these works be considered "important" because of their unpleasantness while the pleasant whimsey is dismissed? Is the unpleasant necessarily more "significant" than the pleasant?

On the question of "sentimentality", Edward Lucie-Smith tells how
When I recently described some of (Finlay's) imagery as "Georgian" and "sentimental", he wrote to me, with a good deal of justice: "It would take a great fool not to see that warm or positive feelings about fields, horizons, sails, little boats, etc. are going to look sentimental to a critic in - say - London, so long as he judges by categories (as he is almost certain to do). If one wanted to avoid such a charge, one would merely need to write cynically about love affairs, streets, monuments, governments, and bombs. ... If sentimentality is - very roughly - the overcelebration of trivial and unexamined feeling, then I think we have a great deal of it ... though it meanwhile passes as 'stark', 'profound', 'objective', etc...." 10

This is the best definition of "sentimentality" I know, and judging by it, Finlay's poems are certainly not sentimental, though very often they cover ground which might well be sentimental for a lesser writer. Take, for instance, the beautiful poem "au pair girl" 11, in which these words are arranged within the outline of a stylised pear shape. The pun (oh pear girl!) provides the form for a condensed simile, with the typographical arrangement eliminating the roundabout syntax of "The girl is like a pear." That statement in itself is, potentially, sentimental; that is, it could become sentimental if presented in a "trivial or unexamined" way, as a trite simile in a conventional love poem. In such a form, the reader could easily pass over it without considering it, merely registering it vaguely as a polite compliment. But the non-syntactical formal arrangement, and the isolation of the statement as a complete poem in itself, indicate the extent to which the poet has "examined" the idea, and lead the reader to a similar examination, in which he will, hopefully, discover that the statement itself is neither trivial nor sentimental. As
Finlay wrote to me,

Why is it sentimental to say a girl is like a pear? It could be quite accurate, given that the girl had pretty curves, and a clean smell, and a pleasant taste, etc. Perhaps it is the girl who is sentimental for being like a pear when the age wants a dirty old sack of potatoes.

The poem also illustrates the "civilised" quality of Finlay's work, in that he has created this delicate and beautiful poem on a subject (au pair girls) which was normally treated in Britain as material for vulgar facetiousness.

A great deal of what I have been trying to say in the last few pages is summed up in Finlay's comments on the quotation from Malevich which we were discussing earlier. These comments indicate the extent to which Finlay's personality and values have, as Dom Sylvester Houedard says, "given something terribly very gentle and personal to his impersonal concrete." I quote this passage at some length, as it seems to me to be the most central and concise statement of his aesthetic which Finlay has yet made.

I approve of Malevich's statement, 'Man distinguished himself as a thinking being and removed himself from the perfection of God's creation. Having left the non-thinking state, he strives by means of his perfected objects, to be again embodied in the perfection of absolute, non-thinking life....' That is, this seems to me, to describe, approximately, my own need to make poems ... though I don't know what is meant by 'God'. And it also raises the question that, though the objects might 'make it', possibly, into a state of perfection, the poet and painter will not. I think any pilot-plan should distinguish, in its optimism,
between what man can construct and what he actually is. I mean, new thought does not make a new man; in any photograph of an aircrash one can see how terribly far man stretches - from angel to animal; and one does not want a glittering perfection which forgets that the world is, after all, also to be made by man into his home. I should say - however hard I would find to justify this in theory - that 'concrete' by its very limitations offers a tangible image of goodness and sanity; it is very far from the now-fashionable poetry of anguish and self.... It is a model, of order, even if set in a space which is full of doubt. ... I would like, if I could, to bring into this, somewhere the unfashionable notion of 'Beauty', which I find compelling and immediate, however theoretically inadequate. I mean this in the simplest way - that if I was asked, 'Why do you like concrete poetry?' I could truthfully answer 'Because it is beautiful.'

Finlay's world is indeed made into a home - a home, at times, with strange and beautiful, hidden rooms in it - but essentially a home, warm and friendly and funny and nice. His poetry continually presents to us "tangible images of goodness and sanity"; and it exemplifies throughout that "theoretically inadequate" necessity, Beauty.

* * *

Finlay's earliest publication was the volume of short stories, *The Sea Bed* (1958). None of the stories deal with large, earth-shattering events: an old man dies, a fish is caught, or an engagement is broken. Many are concerned with children, their limited but clear-eyed view of the world; or with fishing, an art of silence, calm, and contemplation. A slight note of bitterness creeps into "Literary Men", but more characteristic is the whimsical, self-
deprecating humour of "National Assistance Money."

Finlay's abiding love of fishing-boats finds early and almost perfect expression in the story "The Boy and the Guess": indeed, all of Finlay's themes and attitudes seem to be adumbrated in this story. The narrator sets a young boy a riddle, an object he has to guess from hints. The answer is a fishing-boat; the hints are a series of similes between the boat and a pony, the same comparison as is used in the 1964 poster-poem "Le Circus!!"

"It's like a pony in this way, that if you were standing on a high rock and then this thing came slowly ambling underneath the rock, like a pony might, you would get an awful itch in your toes. You would start to wiggle your toes and then, suddenly, with a yell like that of a cossack or of a wild, drunken tinker, you would take a flying jump down. Down, you see, onto this thing."

The climax is a miraculous integration of imagination and reality, poetry and fact:

"Has it wheels?" asked the boy.
"No", I said, "it hasn't wheels. It has - oh, better than wheels."
"Wings?"
"No, better. Better even than wings. And you would probably have to bend down while you were inside, and you might be offered a big mug of tea. Boiling hot, black tea with condensed milk."
"No", said the boy, now shaking his toes quite despondently.
- "no, I'll never get it. It's too hard. But then", he added, "I'm only thirteen."

And just with that, the same fishing-boat came drifting slowly back around the point of the next rocks. There was a sudden puff of wind, and the rough, red-brown canvas sail
filled out. Then the boat came gliding smoothly right under the lee of our own rock.

The boy was on his feet in an instant. He began to wiggle his toes and then, suddenly, with a wild, delirious, ringing yell, he leaped down on the deck. There came a second puff of wind, and the boat skipped away out to the open sea. I sat on there, watching the sand-patch, wondering if a big, bearded cod-fish would swim in with the tide. Sometimes I could hear the sand-donkey's bells.

The fishing-boat and the pony are recurring images in Finlay's poetry; and the strong black tea is another of his delights. POTH 23 was devoted entirely to that liquid, and was thus called TEAPOTH. The bearded cod comes from the title story of the collection, and the finest piece in it. Two boys are fishing on the rocks: one sees a great bearded cod glide in across the patch of sand "like a herald from the sea depths" ...

Then suddenly the sea-bed down there became real to him, and he could feel it going out and out, below the sea, further down than even it was there, and frightening to think of.

He is unable fully to comprehend his "vision", and certainly unable to communicate it to his friend. By the end of the story, the tide has come in and covered the rocks.

It would be contrary to Finlay's method to indicate any precise symbolic "meaning" to the cod, although the whole atmosphere of the story suggests the momentary, and majestic, intervention of something totally other into the cosy world of the fishermen's tea. And yet
there is no menace in it, the sense of an extra dimension brings only an even greater beauty into the world which is made a home. This sense continues to appear, always tentatively, unknowably, in Finlay's poetry.

Finlay's early, pre-concrete poetry is represented mainly in the volumes *The Dancers Inherit the Party* and *Glasgow Beasts, an a Burd, Haw, an Inseks, an, aw, a Fush*. The first of these volumes is mainly concerned with simple events in the daily life of the Orkneys. The style is generally simple to match, though in some poems the movement of the words seems unnecessarily involuted and awkward, as if at odds with the syntactic, stanzaic forms. But at the same time, there are easy, long, flowing lines, like these from the very attractive love-poem "Angles of Stamps."

Sir, she said, I have no experience of your kisses
I have never met you in a meadow, I am just a typist and a simple girl. *(DIP 2)*

The book also contains one of the very few effective parodies of Hugh MacDiarmid, in the series of "Orkney Lyrics" *(a comment on MacDiarmid's "Shetland Lyrics."*)

*MANSIE CONSIDERS THE SEA IN THE MANNER OF HUGH MACDIARMID*

The sea, I think, is lazy,
It just obeys the moon
- All the same I remember what Engels said;
"Freedom is the consciousness of necessity". *(DIP 31)*
Perhaps most characteristic is "Bi-lingual Poem":

Christmas, how your cold sad face
Leans on the city where everything glows.
Far in the fields stands the gentle animal.
Quel a pity il so seldom snows.

(DIP 21)

Here we have, not only the precision of the word "leans" and the delightful humour of the last line/title, but also the strange and beautiful image in the third line (which may perhaps be connected with the story "Midsummer Weather", SB 21.) What is most remarkable, and most characteristic, is the absolute simplicity of the language used. Finlay has the ability to rescue the most commonplace words and use them to greater effect than the most self-consciously startling image could have. Another example may be found in this later poem:

NO THANK YOU, I CAN'T COME

I hear they are having a party
A nasty party,
And I hear them say they are not inviting me.

And I shall remember all this later
By the water, or
In the water, fishing with the tip of my long grey beard.

O Lord, I shall remember
Come December. If
A fish should rise it would be a big and sad surprise.

What other poet could even attempt, far less succeed, to rest the weight of a whole poem on the words "big" and "sad"? The success comes, not
so much from any "technique", as from the general atmosphere of Finlay's work, the respect and the love he bears for "the small & beautiful & friendly, the peedie & wee"\textsuperscript{16} in language as well as in nature. "Big" and "sad" are words we are used to pass over, to look "through" rather than "at". Finlay restores their original meaning from the dullness of a million repetitions. This salvage operation on the little words of the language is one of Finlay's greatest achievements.

The \textit{Glasgow Beasts} are essentially joke poems, although they have the true elements of the fables of Aesop and Henryson, the animal situation viewed with a human consciousness, and vice versa. This juxtaposition can produce delightful effects, such as the highland cow enjoying scaring hikers with its "herr-do". The poems reflect an absolutely accurate ear for the vocabulary and rhythms of Glasgow speech (in this they are equalled only by the short, comic verses of Bud Neill\textsuperscript{17}), and show considerable skill in reproducing these rhythms in the verse structure. The very short lines indicate points of emphasis rather than prolonged pauses, and, together with the use of occasional but decisive rhymes, act as a very perceptive notation for the Glaswegian speech rhythms.

\begin{verbatim}
anither
 time
 ah wis a
 minnie
 aw
 the pond
 haw
 the shoogly caur
 gaun
 see s
\end{verbatim}
The main virtue of the *Glasgow Beasts* is undoubtedly their humour, but it should be stressed that they are more than merely good jokes; they are good poems as well.

Two other short poems will serve to show how Finlay was straining at the limits of conventional syntax. The first is called "On a wee boy drowned": there is an almost "concrete" element in the use of the line division, with the omission of hyphens for broken words; and the fantastic compression of the first line defies syntax to brilliant effect. Syntactically, it does not "mean" anything; rather, it contains the beginnings of several different meanings.

```
Wee six was not September
I remember
Your lovely ugly head
Stone
    how it said
IN EVER
    (and ever)
LOVING REMEMBER
ANCE
    (way above the head of)
OUR WEE FRED.
```

Finally, the following poem, written in 1963, the year of *Rapel*, Finlay's first collection of concrete poems, is on the verge of concrete poetry proper; the essential connections in this poem are not made through syntax but through sound similarities, the pun used for entirely
non-comic purposes. The words, without syntactic connections, remain still, dropped into silence; they become, as so many of Finlay's poems do, objects for contemplation.

Wind blows
Windows

The pane of a mountain pool

From here on, dealing with Finlay's concrete poetry, a treatment according to chronological order becomes more complicated. Most of the poems have been published individually: the only at all extensive collections have been *Rapel* (1963), *Telegrams from my Windmill* (1964), *tea-leaves & fishes* and *Stonechats* (1967). (*Rapel,* by the way, is a joke-title: it has a sort of intellectual, mid-European sound to it, but is in fact only the beginning, in Glasgow dialect, of the song: "Rapel moon was shining above ra green mountings.")

Further, the poem's published form is seldom its only, or its ideal form. At his workshop in Dunsyre, Finlay has poems realised in several media. Many are sand-blasted on glass; others are intended for large-scale architectural projects. The "au pair girl" poem has two different glass designs in addition to its appearance in *Telegrams from my Windmill.* Poems conceived of several years ago are still awaiting realisation in their ideal form.

All this makes it difficult to trace a precise line of develop-
ment in Finlay's ideas, and the order in which I shall be discussing his poems is based on technical and thematic links rather than on any attempt at chronology. Further, the fact that many of these poems cannot be reproduced in simple typographic form makes quoting from them impossible. I shall attempt, in most cases, to describe their physical appearance, but the poems can only be fully appreciated in their original forms. So close is the connection between form and content in Finlay's poems that often this description of the actual appearance of the poem's form will be at the same time an exposition of its theme.

A good place to begin a survey of Finlay's work is with his humorous poems. Many of Finlay's poems use elements of humour, especially the pun, but in the more "serious" poems the puns are used, not as ends in themselves, but as means towards establishing the thematic connections of the poem. However, there are also poems which are jokes simply for their own sake, and a feeling of gentle and affectionate humour is never very far away from the surface in any of Finlay's poems.

It would, further, be difficult to claim that Finlay's "serious" poems are any more "important" (in his understanding of that word) than the joke-poems are. The humour is of a very individual kind; it is essential to Finlay's personality, and to the appreciation and enjoyment of his world (which is there only to be enjoyed.)

For one thing, his humour is entirely without malice. It is never at the expense of any person or any thing. It is never even
remotely "sick" or "black". It has none of the concealed viciousness of slapstick, or the intellectual arrogance of satire. It is born out of a love for the objects of his writing, and it is in essence a celebration of them. Thus it is not a humour which fades; the jokes are not superficial ones which cannot stand up to re-telling. You can come back to Finlay's jokes as often as you like, and still find the same quiet humour and love in them.

This is, for instance, the quality of his "Pond-board", a simple wooden slab set on the edge of a small pool of clear water. On it is carved the word "cloud", and a finger pointing upwards to the sky, and a finger pointing downwards to the reflection.

*tea-leaves & fishes* (1967) is a collection of jokes on central Finlay themes like fishing, boats, tea, and fir trees. These poems are usually very simple, such as "scotch fish" (18), which reads "macmackerel", the silver printing portraying the glistening silver of the fish itself. "Canal scene" (11) is a good example of a "word-picture", a tug and its barges sailing between two dull banks, with a flag on the last barge:

```
ayellowmeadowanolderalderacharmingfarmasleepingsteading
atugand - - - 3offs - - - prin - - - (fla)g
acharmingfarmayellowmeadowanolderalderasleepingsteading
```

But notice that this is not simply a spatial reproduction of the scene. The atmosphere of the banks is evoked by the choice and sound of the words as well as by the typographical arrangement; and the image of
the barges as the tug's "offspring" contributes to Finlay's "humanising" of his objects. This is not to say that his boats are ever fully anthropomorphised: he manages to attach certain human emotional characteristics to them while still preserving their identity as boats. Thus, the jaunty flag on the last barge, or the "toots" which all his tugs delight in emitting, are certainly expressions of a lively personality; but it is still a boat's personality.

A more elaborate canal game is the poem actually called Canal Game, where a typical Finlay landscape of canal, windmills, and tugs is displayed on eighteen cards, arranged in three sets of six, and thus capable of two hundred and sixteen different combinations, each one of which is a concise, haiku-like poem, describing a scene on the canal.

Finlay often uses advertising posters and newspaper headlines in his poems (see especially "Le Circus!!") A recent poster-poem transformed an advertisement for Summer Sales into "Summer sails" (noun or verb?) Newspaper headlines provide the form for Finlay's richest collection of jokes, the "headlines / eavelines" series, sumptuously produced by John Furnival.

Furnival's young daughter Eve had sent to Finlay a drawing of "The Flying Scotsman" (a man with kilt and wings) and Finlay replied by sending to her on thirteen consecutive days thirteen postcards of joke newspaper headlines. Furnival gave these headlines to his students at the Bath Academy of Art, and had them design posters for them in conjunction with Finlay. The result is a really beautiful
collection of posters, the different designs exactly fitted to the poems, which cover such familiar ground as "Tug accused of loitering near bank" and "Windmills enter arms race." One of the most expert designs is that for "Hedgehogs announce annual turnover", in which the word "turnover" does in fact turn over, hinging on the letter 'r', a whole series of which are joined together so that the heads protrude like spines on a hedgehog's back. The words are, of course, printed in hedgehog-brown.

This very precise typographical enactment of meaning is a feature of Finlay's early works, such as those in the collection *Telegrams from my Windmill*, or the poem *Acrobats*. This poem consists of the letters of the word "acrobats" spread out over a large area, arranged in a formal pattern which yields the complete word in several different, but not immediately obvious, directions. The eye has to move among the letters, up and down and round in circles, in its search for meaning. This movement of the eye imitates the movement of the acrobats themselves, and thus the reader's perception of meaning is itself an enactment of that meaning. Of this poem, Finlay has written further

Isolated, single letters are pattern but letters joined in words (as these are) are direction. Those in the 'acrobats' poem are both, behaving like the real circus acrobats who are now individual units, now - springing together - diagonals and towers. Properly, the poem should be constructed of cut-out letters, to occupy not a page but an entire wall above a children's playground.
Thus *Acrobats* is another toy-poem. It is Finlay's gift to infuse a feeling of warmth and gentleness into even the most impersonally formal of his poems. Take, for instance, this rather forbidding structure from *Telegrams from my Windmill*:

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tendressetendressetendressetendressetendressetendress etendressetendressetendressetendressetendressetendres setendressetendressetendressetendressetendressetende rdessetenderdresstenderdresstenderdresstendresset
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The form is certainly what Finlay called "suprematist". (The term, derived again from Malevich, was used to describe extremely formal poems, as opposed to the less formal "fauve" poems. The distinction has become increasingly hard to make in Finlay's more recent works.) But the content is decidedly lyrical, as M.L. Rosenthal points out:

A kind of animated punning informs the verbal rectangle, based on the similarity of 'tendresse' and 'tender dress'; gently erotic texture results. Meanwhile, there are other half-accidental puns: 'tend', 'her dress' ('er dress'), 'tendered' ('tenderd'), and perhaps 'russet' and 'undress' and 'underdress' and 'entendre'. The final result must please the eye and ear and be as close to monotony as possible without losing its insistent suggestiveness and sense that a field of force has been established.
A similar square, alternating 'black', 'block', 'lack', and 'lock' is constructed as a "Homage to Malevich." 22

Finlay's later formal experiments have mainly been directed towards more ambitious structures, such as the "kinetic" pamphlet poems and the constructions in glass and wood and stone (such as the envisaged ideal form of Acrobats as a giant mural.) But one much more concentrated form in which Finlay has been interested recently is that of the "one-word poem."

These first appeared in POTH 25, an issue entirely devoted to one-word poems, which contains a fine series by George Mackay Brown and experiments in the form by many other writers. Finlay's basic method is to use the title, as concisely as possible, to indicate an area of metaphor, and then to insert the single word, the name of the object itself, as the true "poem". This reverses the normal order. Whereas, say, MacCaig might name a poem "Heron", and then write a series of metaphors on herons as the poem, Finlay in these poems relegates the metaphoric activity to the title, and insists that the poetry lies in the natural object itself, not in the fancy ideas we weave around it. Thus, for example:

THE CLOUD'S ANCHOR

swallow

Here, the swallow itself is the true subject of the poem, and constitutes the poem in itself; the title merely indicates the area in which
the poem operates. In another instance, the poem, by not containing the expected pun, firmly returns the title's metaphor to a beautiful reality:

THE WATER'S BREAST AND
ripples

At their best, these poems are beautifully condensed metaphors, with the inversion of the normal title/poem expectations, and the refusal to elaborate beyond the single word, leaving all the stress on the natural objects themselves. As with many of Finlay's forms, these poems appear at first glance to be just too easy, to require no effort in writing them; but practical experiment will soon convince you of the incredible difficulty in attaining exactly the right poise and delicacy and tact which make these poems so beautiful.

SCOTCH DAISY

snowflake
23

The most recent use of this technique has been in the delightfully playful series Air Letters, in which various words connected with letter-writing are seen as the "poems" of various natural objects, for example:

THE DAWN'S POEM

faithfully
All the messages in Air Letters are kind; even the rain and the mist say "Dear."

The form of the pamphlet poem was first used by Decio Pignatari in his brilliant development of the letters of the word LIFE, one of the central classics of concrete poetry, but the South American poets have not used the pamphlet form nearly as much as Finlay has.

Finlay's use of the pamphlet is well illustrated by Canal Stripe Series 3, which was published in the Times Literary Supplement "Changing Guard" issue of August 6th, 1964, but whose true effect can only be achieved in pamphlet form. It is another canal scene, and the elements are familiar inhabitants of Finlay's landscape: a haystack, a houseboat, and a windmill. These words appear in various combinations, each one a condensed image of possibility - hayboat, housemill, windstack, haymill, housestack, windboat - before returning to their proper form.

An extra dimension is provided by the incongruous but stable "cathedral", which doesn't take part in any of these metamorphoses, but remains solidly itself throughout. The unique formal aspect of the poem is that each word appears, in bold capitals, on the right hand page, and is repeated overleaf, on the left (i.e. reverse side of its original appearance) in lower case letters. This after-image acts as a link to the next word, as a memory of the object seen previously on the trip down the canal, and as an echo, or a reflection in the water.

The pamphlet is a way of controlling, in a concrete (i.e. non-syntactical) manner, the temporal movement of the poem. At its simplest level, this means that the rhythm of the poem is created by
the reader by the speed at which he turns the pages of the poem. Sometimes the same effect can be gained through other means. I want to describe now two pamphlet poems which also exist in construction forms, where the time element is introduced by the reader actually having to walk from one stage of the poem to the next.

**Ocean Stripe Series 3**, as a pamphlet, is described thus by Stephen Bann:

> The first four printed pages contain the single word "ark", recurring each time in the same position towards the low right-hand edge of the page. On the fifth page there is a leap upwards to the word "arc", which is in fact printed on a narrow strip of white paper, against an overlap of red, blue and yellow strips. The passage from Genesis which Finlay inserts tells us that the subject of the poem is the journey of Noah, whose covenant after the Flood was ratified by the appearance of a rainbow (French - arc-enciel). Genesis recounts that the "bow" was to be seen "in the cloud", and Finlay lets the final display of the coloured papers appear through the white film of the preceding pages. 25

> The construction form consists of four triangles protruding from the wall. Starting at the poem's left, the reader sees the word "ark" at the foot of the side facing him; he sees also the edges of the other three projections, each with the merest reflection of a colour on them. When he reaches the right of the poem, looking back, he sees that these middle sections contain the three primary colours, and at the top of the side facing him is the word "arc". Thus -
In this instance, the pamphlet version is probably superior, with the continuing "voyage" of the "ark", and the rainbow becoming clearer through the "cloud". But the construction version is also very attractive: one realisation of Finlay's poems need not exclude others.

Canal Stripe Series 4 uses the technique of the pun as a formal link in a progression. The pamphlet form presents each stage as a double facing page. The opening statement - "little fields long horizons" - is a basic antithesis: the safe and the adventurous, the local and the universal, etc. The next stage takes these two opposing elements and suggests a relationship by means of a play on the word "long": "little fields long for horizons." And of course the reciprocal is also true: "horizons long for little fields." The interdependence is complete. The one image only makes sense in terms of the other: fields are only little in contrast to the length of the horizon and vice versa. The security of the little field is attracted to the element of risk in long horizons, but equally there is a protective element: the long horizons like to encircle and protect the little fields, which crave that protection.

The pamphlet ends here, but the construction form does not. The construction is a triangular fence, with one stage of the poem on
each side, so that the reader, walking round the fence, now returns to the first line. This first line is now subtly altered: the reader sees not merely an antithesis, but an interpenetration, an attraction, an interdependence, formally realised in the latent power of the word "long", of which the reader is now aware.

Further, the construction is a concrete example of the poem's image. The triangular fence actually encloses a "little field" set against the "long horizons" of Finlay's home at Dunsyre, or in Wester Ross (where this fence was first erected.) With Canal Stripe Series 4, there is no doubt that the construction form is a far fuller realisation of the poem than the pamphlet is.

Whereas Canal Stripe Series 4 is, ideally, circular in its movement, the next two pamphlet-poems I want to discuss move towards a definite climax. Ocean Stripe Series 4 is a small-format pamphlet distinguished by a series of delightful drawings by Emil Antonucci. The design of all Finlay's publications is impeccable; he is himself a perfectionist as craftsman, and is very precise in his choice of collaborators. Again, the facing pages of this pamphlet are used to balance each other.

The opening pair balances "a patch on a sail" with "a patch of potatoes." Finlay is fond of patches, especially on sails. He has at Dunsyre a small sailing-boat on a pond, with a patch on its sail, which proudly proclaims itself "patch". It is typical of Finlay that he should see beauty in patches rather than sails, fishing-boats rather than yachts, hill-ponies rather than stallions.

Ocean Stripe Series 4 continues, in its first three double pages,
to play with a series of patches in the contrasted elements of sea and earth, sails and potatoes. But on the last double-page, the two elements come suddenly and dramatically together, on the left-hand page, in "the earth, patched with sea"; while on the opposite page, this union leads into a final, breath-taking jump into another element with "star potatoes star sails". The dialectical movement of the poem has been preserved, but this conclusion modulates suddenly, smoothly, and beautifully into a different tone. It is as if a great, bearded cod had majestically appeared.

Stars are always a source of great beauty in Finlay's work, associated with night fishing, though of course they are also pragmatically useful for steering by. (See the poem "star/steer", in which a wavy column of "star"s has at the foot "steer", directly under only one of the stars above, the star chosen to steer by: this star, and the final "steer", are set off in a different type-face.) The more aethereal, or mysterious beauty of the stars, or of the great cod, is a mood which finds its fullest expression in another of the pamphlet poems, Cythera, which I regard as the most perfect and the most beautiful of all Finlay's lyrics.

Cythera is the island birthplace of Aphrodite; Finlay also mentioned to me that the poem was prompted by Watteau's painting "Embarkation for the Island of Cythera" (1717). The poem, as set out in pamphlet form, begins by presenting the images which set the tone: " air / in blue / leaf" (The gaps represent the turning of a page.) The ambivalent "blue" establishes the twin moods of the aeth-
ereal but natural beauty of the air and the slightly fantastic beauty of the blue leaf; the latter is emphasized in the next section, "blue bark / and blue leaf". The final section begins on the natural level, "a leaf", then makes its transition by means of a pun: "a barque". The pun is integral, and there is nothing comic about it: once again, Finlay is rescuing a debased element of language and putting it to exquisitely lyrical use. The "barque" is indeed, probably, made out of wood; and the transition is made from the wooded grove where Watteau's "Embarkation" takes place, to the ship sailing for the enchanted island of Cythera. The rising crescendo continues: "a leaf / a barque / a blue leaf / a barque in leaf-blue". Each new combination of the simple images yields fresh meaning. Rhythmically, the poem reaches its climax here, and comes to rest on the final "aire"; in its associations, that final line/page propels the poem into the realm of magic. The ambivalence of the first section is repeated: the adjective "leaf-blue" can apply either to the barque or to the air, the vessel or its element, both enchanted. The boat sails, not in the blue sea, but in the blue air. The formal perfection of the poem lies in its sustained progression towards this repetition of its starting-point, but with the word subtly transformed, mysterious and remote and beautiful, like the island of Cythera itself. The effect is achieved partly by the slight surprise (the word has not been used since the first line); but mainly by the old-fashioned form with the final -e, which has already been prepared for in the Ovidian metamorphosis of "bark" into "barque." The associations of the Elizabethan spelling, with the double-meaning of
"song", add the final transforming touch to the delicate landscape of blue bark and blue leaf.

_Cythera_ is a perfect illustration of the artistic tact with which Finlay can transform the simplest elements, by the most economical means, into works of extreme and delicate beauty. One word wrong would be enough to destroy the effect. It would be an immense mistake to suppose that Finlay's kind of poetry is easy to write. On the contrary, it is a very demanding form, which affords no opportunities for relaxation, no escape-routes, no "padded" line or half-line. It demands the perfection and precision of a Japanese line-drawing or haiku; as Finlay wrote to Houedard, of his own poems: "They are not ambitious. I try to make them exact."^26

Another medium which can be introduced into Finlay's poetry is photography. Many of the construction poems can only be "distributed" through photographs of them; and there is a fine series of colour photographs of Finlay's constructions at Dunsyre available from a professional photographer in Edinburgh. The best of these photographs do more than merely record, they use the photographic form to add something to the poem. Thus, there is a photograph of the glass version of "star/steer" with a very strong spotlight behind it, like a star; and the inscription "The star in its stable of light" is beautifully framed in snow.

Finlay has twice used photographs in his pamphlet poems. The first use was in "Autumn Poem" (1966), a pamphlet which depends on repetitions of two phrases, "turning over the earth" and "the earth
turning over". The former, referring to the digging of the ground in autumn, is accompanied by a square photograph of a patch of earth with fallen leaves; the latter, referring to the equinoctial turn of the globe away from the sun, by a round photograph of a clear patch of earth, lit strongly from one side to increase the suggestion of a sphere. The text is printed on semi-transparent paper with the photographs visible through each page. The movement of the poem is from the local scene (square photograph) to the universal (round photograph), but there is a final, typical, and reassuring move back to the local scene at the last image.

In Autumm Poem, the photographs and their shape are an integral part of the image-sequence of the poem; in Ocean Stripe Series 5 (1967) photographs are used more as a counterpart to, or comment on, the text. This poem is in fact a montage, using selected sentences from three articles on phonic poetry which appeared in the magazine Form, juxtaposed with photographs of fishing-boats from the newspaper Fishing News. The poem as a whole is concerned with making certain critical points about experimental poetry; at the same time, its own form is quite unique and experimental itself. The judgments of the views expressed are indicated in two ways: firstly, by the selection and arrangement of the sentences from the original authors; and secondly, by the juxtaposition of the fishing photographs.

The original articles were about "phonic" or "sound" poetry; and Finlay's use of the term indicates that he is fully aware of the possible pun on "sound". He is concerned with establishing what is
"sound" within the field of experimental poetry; this means a rejection of certain things as "unsound." Finlay's position is basically more conservative than that of the authors whose original works he is using. For instance, he takes Kurt Schwitters' statement "Poetic feeling is what the poet counts on," which was originally intended as a criticism of "classical" poetry, and gives it a positive value, partly by isolating it from its context, and partly by setting it beside a very beautiful photograph of a fishing-boat called "Faithful" with clouds of spray and seagulls.

The structure of Ocean Stripe Series 5 has been analysed by Stephen Bann in an article to which I am much indebted for my understanding of this poem. Bann points out that the poem may be divided into three sections, the end of each of the first two being marked by the only two photographs (numbers 3 and 8 respectively) of fishing-boats in port. The first section deals with "definition and classification"; the second with "procedure and technique." The final section then opens with the central statement of the poem (taken from Ernst Jandl) which states Finlay's own view most clearly.

Selection, transformation, amputation, transplantation would, however, only yield exhibits for an anatomical museum of language, if they were not occasionally followed by a kind of rehabilitation.

The poem closes with Schwitters' statement "'It is impossible to explain the meaning of art; it is infinite' - accompanied by a photograph of a "white boat, lit by the sun, setting off into a dark firth."
But Finlay has indicated his values not only by selection and arrangement, but also by the use of the fishing-boat photographs. There are certain obvious connections between the text and the photographs on individual pages: for instance, the text "Disregard of the conventions of language was rewarded by the discovery of new ways of producing" is accompanied by a photograph which stresses the boat's name, "Dauntless"; and Schwitters' "A logically consistent poem evaluates letters and groups of letters against each other" has a photograph which conspicuously balances the bow and stern registration letters of the boat. The main purpose of the photographs, however, lies in the context which they provide for the quotations. As the *Times Literary Supplement* commented, the photographs "give such avant-garde dicta human perspective without at all discrediting them."30

It is to the "human perspective" of Finlay's fishing-boats that we must now turn. The fishing-boat is the central image of Finlay's poetry; his poems return to it again and again with love and affection. We saw in the short story "The Boy and the Guess" some of the things which Finlay loves about fishing-boats: they are small and sturdy, like hill ponies; they are beautiful, and the silver gleaming fish are beautiful; they have rough red sails with patches; strong black tea is brewed in their holds. The fishing-boat is the central exemplification of Finlay's values.

To speak of the fishing-boat "image" is not, however, to suggest that the fishing-boat is an image, or a symbol, of anything else. The poems are about fishing-boats, not about anything else seen in terms of
fishing-boats. But the **attitude towards** fishing-boats in the poems is capable of being communicated, i.e. made available for readers to use in their own situations. This communication, however, is only possible because of the thorough individuality of the attitude, the extent to which it is Finlay's alone. We accept it, we trust it, because we accept, poetically, the images of the fishing-boats in the poems. They are, after all, images: Finlay's poems are not - yet - things which float on the water and catch fish.

One critic has said that the images of fishing "predominate in Finlay's work as an expression of man's precarious endurance."  I feel that this suggests a false emphasis on the kind of "significance" which Finlay has explicitly rejected. While Finlay is certainly aware of the dangers of fishing, his poetry lays very little stress on it. It is not a poetry of anxiety; it is a poetry of affection. Finlay loves fishing-boats for their beauty and for their positive values, and the aim of his poetry is to share that love, to present to us the objects of his affection.

A survey of Finlay's fishing-boat poems might begin with these two columns of letters:

| W W | BK |
| PBD | GW |
| ZFM | BF |
| RF RF | A |
| TZPF TZPF | LK |
| MWT | PD |
| RFMR | K |
| RKT PCT | GN |
| SW SW | BCK |
| KPT | FR |
The left-hand column is a "sound poem" by Kurt Schwitters, quoted as a postscript to Ocean Stripe Series 5. The letters have no semantic reference at all; the poem is (with reference to our diagram) completely at the phonetic end of the axis. It is a movement in pure sound.

The right-hand column is Finlay's "Funnel Geography" (tea-leaves & fishes 16). The letters are the registration letters of fishing-boats, indicating in abbreviated form their port of origin. (BK is Berwick, PD is Peterhead, KY is Kirkcaldy, etc.) The unlikely funnel on which all these letters would appear would indeed be a concise geography of Scotland's fishing towns.

Schwitters' poem is abstract, pure form without human reference; Finlay's poem evokes a whole economy, a whole way of life.

Finlay is fond of using the numbers, names, and technical descriptions of boats as the texts of his poems. "Sea-Poppy" is an elegant spiral of registration numbers in different type-faces, including, incidentally, K47, the "star" of "Le Circus!!" The most sophisticated of this group is Four Sails, where the letter codes are expanded into words, all adjectives, and the adjectives then combined in small groups,
word-complexes which produce images of each boat. The groups are both simple:

\[
\begin{array}{l}
\text{Patched Broken Faded} \\
P D : \text{Peterhead} \\
B K : \text{Berwick} \\
A : \text{Aberdeen}
\end{array}
\]

and complex:

\[
\begin{array}{l}
\text{Rosy Far Black} \\
S Y : \text{Stornoway} \\
A : \text{Aberdeen} \\
K : \text{Kirkwall}
\end{array}
\]

The latter contains antithetical elements, "rosy" and "black", which are held in balance by the ambivalent "far". (One possible association would be the far, black sails of the Theseus myth.) *Four Sails*, like "Sea-Poppy", is sand-blasted on glass, but I prefer the pamphlet version, which is folded into sail-shapes.

In other poems, Finlay uses the names of types of boats. For example:

\[
\begin{array}{l}
\text{Purse-Net Boat} \\
\text{seiner} \\
\text{seiner} \\
\text{seiner} \\
\text{seiner} \\
\text{seiner} \\
\text{seiner}
\end{array}
\]

"The purse-seine", Finlay explains, "is a new kind of net that makes an actual ring round the fish: it has been immensely profitable."
There is a dual pun: the sound similarity between "seiner" and "silver", and the play between the technical and more common meanings of "purse". Both puns unite in "silver", which refers not only to the fish themselves, and how beautiful they look in the moonlight, but also to the cold hard cash they will fetch in the morning. And the typographical arrangement is another word-picture.

The sundial poem is similar. This functional poem-object is in the first place a sundial, mounted on an outside wall, which accurately tells the time. It is beautifully carved out of wood. The sundial itself is set in the centre of a square frame, and round the edges of this frame are two rows of lettering. The inner set of words reads (dashes indicating the sides of the square): "The Four / Seas / -Ons as / Fishingboats." The theme of the poem is the passing of time, going from the hours of the day, in the sundial itself, to the seasons of the year, in the text. (The complete poem is sundial and text.) The metaphor is established, as usual, by a pun, the word "Seas" being plucked out of "Seasons". On the outer rim, the seasons are each connected with the technical name of a type of fishing-boat:

Winter / Freezer Vessel
Spring / Ringer
Summer / Drifter
Autumn / Stern Trawler

At other times Finlay uses the names of individual boats. He will take the names of actual boats which he has seen, and arrange them
in small groups. The result is a "poetry of fact" of somewhat greater subtlety than that of Hugh MacDiarmid. The words in the names, isolated as the text of a poem, revert to suggestions of their original meanings, and these suggestions interact with the reader's awareness that they are in fact fishing-boat names.

Green Waters
Blue Spray
Grayfish

Constant Star
Daystar
Starwood

3 BLUE LEMONS, in a tidal bowl, in the town of Peterhead
(1) Anchor of Hope
(2) Daisy
(3) Good Design

The most beautiful of all these poems is the construction "Starlit Waters", which consists of these letters set along a keel, with a net thrown over them. It is, of course, the name of a boat, and also the boat's element, the sea by night with its dim light, perhaps its dangers, but certainly its beauties. The net over the letters suggests that, as the net is let down into the starlit waters, it may gather not only the shining silver fish but also the shining silver reflections of the stars. (R.L. Williamson has a beautiful photograph of this poem in snow.)

There is in "Starlit Waters" a hint of the beauty of Cythera; and there is such a hint also in one of the best of Finlay's fishing-
boat poems, the 1964 poster poem "Le Circus!!" Finlay's poetry is often a form of advertising, proclaiming, as I said earlier, "This is what I find funny" and "This is what I find beautiful." So when Finlay wants to extol the virtues and beauties of his fishing-boats, the advertising poster is an ideal medium, the essential concrete unification form and content into a functional object.

This poem is in the form of an old-fashioned advertising-poster for "Le Circus!!" Not just "the" circus, but "le" circus - and two exclamation marks. The metaphor of fishing-boat as pony, seen first in "The Boy and the Guess", here finds full expression. The boat (smack K 47, from Kirkwall) is the star of the show, a circus pony. The metaphor is established by giving the pony a red blinker on the right (starboard) and a green blinker on the left (port). At the side of the poster is a list of the other beautiful and entertaining things you can see at the boat/circus: "also corks, nets, etc."

But the star turn is the boat and its crew, who "leap BAREBACK through the rainbow's hoop" (the word "hoop" being enclosed in a circle). The hoop equals the rainbow: the circle round the word stands for the circus ring surrounding the pony, or the "ring of waves" surrounding the boat. (Further extensions, to the individual in the circus-ring of life, etc., are always possible, but scarcely necessary.) The key word here is BAREBACK, set off from the rest in capital letters and a different colour of ink. Here we feel again that extra dimension, the sudden flair, the delicate grace, the touch of magic, perhaps of risk, a breath of the "aire" of Cythera.
Against this element of sudden daring and graceful recklessness, the inspiration of a sudden moment, Finlay sets, in his poetry, another, quieter element: that of contemplation.

It's like fishing. The form of the poems demands it. Finlay's is not a discursive, temporally progressing poetry, that you follow from a beginning to an end, except, superficially, in the pamphlet-poems. It is a poetry in which beginning and ending are simultaneously present in the form presented to you, in which you have to look at the object in front of you and work your way into it, discovering form and meaning as one, together. Your journey is not from one end of the poem to the other, but from the surface deeper in. And then it is a poetry to return to, time after time, and discover new meanings. It is a poetry to contemplate.

This contemplation leads finally, I believe, to a feeling of unity, to a very deep sanity and peace. The last group of poems I wish to discuss are indications of this unity.

This unity is apparent in Finlay's habit of presenting the familiar objects of his world as metaphors of each other, as in the fishing-boat/pony identification of "Le Circus!!", or as metaphors of the whole natural scene, as in the one-word poem

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ONE (ORANGE) ARM OF THE WORLD'S OLDEST WINDMILL

autumn
34
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The small book Stonechats contains a series of such condensed
metaphors linking the land and the sea; and this union is fundamental within Finlay's work. We have already seen such a union worked out in *Ocean Stripe Series 4*, as the "patches" of earth and sea come together; it is also analogous to the secret union of "little fields" and "long horizons". Land/sea is not, for Finlay, as great an antithesis as it might be; for the fisherman, the sea is the field which he harvests.

"Land/sea" is in fact the title of one of Finlay's most recent works, which takes the form of a semiotic poster-poem. This is the first occasion on which Finlay has seriously used the semiotic mode, which he had gently parodied in his "Semi-idiotic poem" (*Tea-leaves & fishes*, p.25) In semiotic poetry, which is most prevalent in South America, the poet writes in a new sign-language of his own invention. Finlay represents "sea" by a horizontal blue stroke, and "land" by a diagonal brown stroke. In the poster, the two sets of lines are overlaid in a simple grid pattern, expressing interpenetration rather than opposition. It is difficult to imagine how Finlay could express his fundamental theme of unity more concisely or definitively than in the non-verbal form of this beautiful poster, which appears to reach a limit of concentrated expression.

More elaborate is the "wave/rock" poem, a word-picture in which the letters of the repeated word "wave" move against the massed letters of the word "rock". The v's and w's rise to the top, their arms leaping up like spray. Finlay has written of the poem, "Where the letters meet and are superimposed they suggest the third word, 'wrack' (seaweed), and the thickened stems of the letters suggest, visually,
seaweevy rocks." There are other words as well: "war", "wreck", and, right in the centre, one solitary "avec". Finlay concludes, "The poem is 'about' two opposing forces, but, being a poem, presents them in equipoise, resolved." 35

This unity can also be found in the poem "ring of waves." The printed text reads:

ring of waves
row of nets
string of lights
row of fish
ring of nets
row of roofs
string of fish
ring of light

The version in glass is much more attractive. There are four sheets of glass, three of which are clear, bearing respectively the "ring", "row", and "string" lines. At the back, and colouring the whole as you look at it, is a sheet of deep sea blue.

The poem can be expounded as follows. (This account is based on Finlay's own published interpretation 36, but the final stages of the argument are my own interpretation.) The situation is a fishing-boat at night within sight of land. The boat is surrounded by the sea, the vast dark ring of waves. The nets stretch out in a row. Away on the shoreline is a string of lights, the home port, houses, wives and children: the security of the land, as opposed to the uneasy ring of waves. When the row of fish appears, the nets are tightened, becoming another ring within the ring of waves. There are ambivalent
associations here: the ring of waves could close upon the fishermen, just as the nets close on the fish, but yet the catching of the fish is the basis of the land's security. The boats come home; closer inshore the village becomes a row of roofs, and the fish are taken home on a string. The fisherman is now within the ring of light, which, once he is on land inside it, becomes an enclosing ring of light (singular), rather than, as it was seen from outside, a disconnected string of lights (plural). Finlay describes the ring of light as "the lamp, and culture, as opposed to nature's 'ring of waves'." But the opposition is not, I feel, fundamental. The land is still surrounded by a ring of waves; tomorrow night, the fisherman will go out again. And for the fisherman, the true "ring of light" may not be on land at all, but out in the centre of the ring of waves.

I think this final point may be established by analogy with the poem "Sailor's Cross." This poem is a stone carving, in the shape of a cross, with all four arms of equal length. On each arm appears, twice, the word "seas". In the centre is the word "ease". That is, the true "ease" of the fisherman (the "ring of light", in a metaphysical sense) appears, not on the safety of the land, but out in the midst of the threatening but life-giving seas. It is an ease which might be death, but is more likely to be the fulfillment of a job, a vocation. Again we have the discovery of unity at the centre of what appeared to be an antithesis, as in the unity of earth and sea in Ocean Stripe Series 4, the unity of little fields and long horizons, the "avec" at the centre of the wave/rock clash. "The new poetry", Finlay wrote,
"will be silent, & will be a sign of peace and sanity." This ease in the centre of turmoil is portrayed by means of the classic symbol of Western consciousness: the Christian cross which signifies love in the midst of evil, hope in the midst of despair. It is a religious object. Imagine this cross, as a socially functioning poem-object, set in a fishing community. Or take it as a metaphor, to any profession, any concept of life; then let its meaning grow.

Part of the greatness of Finlay's poetry seems to me to lie in his ability to present the surface of his world in such a warm, affectionate manner while at the same time being able to reach very deep levels of emotion, still preserving there the good feelings of the surface.

Take, as a final example, the "First Suprematist Standing Poem." The title again derives from Malevich, and the poem is very formal and restrained in structure and design. It is a vertical card, white, folded down the centre. The words on the left are in yellow, those on the right in purple; looking at it, you tend to notice the exclamations, in their strong colour, more than the questions, in their tentative yellow.

how blue? how blue!
how sad? how far!
how small? how sad!
how white? how small!
how far? how white!

The reference of these adjectives is left entirely to the
reader. The words may be read in any order: down each column in turn, or horizontally as question and answer, or in isolated groups. They are questions - the eternal curiosity before the unknown - and exclamations - the unspoiled reaction of wonder. "how white!" alone might be an exclamation of glory; combined, "how sad! how small! how white!" is a reaction to something infinitely tender and fragile. There is any number of combinations, orders, associations. The questions remain; and the wonder remains. The formal structure is classically simple, limited, fixed; but it channels the whole of human emotion. The depths of this poem are infinite.

There is no break in Finlay's poetry between the depths of a poem like this, and his humorous celebration of strong tea, windmills, and fishing-boats. From the enchanting surface of his world, the poetry leads us deeper and deeper into the silent heart of things. He makes, as Houedard says, "this strange place, the world, a home", and the "home-ness" extends all the way through, from the canal game in which Tugboat Susie sets sail and toots to the enchanted island of Cythera.

Ian Hamilton Finlay is, in my opinion, the most profoundly original and rewarding poet working in Scotland today. He has immeasurably extended the boundaries of poetic expression, and has created for us a uniquely individual poetic world of joy. But to make such judgments about him, to say (as I most definitely would say) that he is a writer of the greatest genius, is far less important than it is to experience his poems themselves: poems as rare and unexpected, as whimsical and beautiful, as summer elephants.
APPENDIX

The following are transcripts of tape-recordings of interviews conducted by myself in the summer of 1967. The transcripts have been edited only to remove the hesitations and minor repetitions of normal speech. Copies of the tapes themselves are deposited with the Library of the University of British Columbia.
At the end of the interview, Hugh MacDiarmid read the following poems:

from *In Memoriam James Joyce*,

"I believe it will be in every connection soon" (page 142)

to "... providing for the developments to come." (page 143)
on which he commented: "I used that because it's programmatic,
it defines exactly what my attitude is."

"The Bemis Stane."
Q Dr. Grieve, can I start by asking you, after forty years of the Scottish Renaissance, and of your own work, are you by and large satisfied with what you've achieved, and with what the Scottish movement has achieved?

A On the whole, both so far as literature and politics are concerned. I think it's generally agreed now that the productivity of verse in Scots has made the last forty years one of the most productive periods in the whole of our literary history. It's quite true that there has been a recession in recent years, there hasn't been so much production of new poetry in Scots, but on the other hand, there's been a period of consolidation. A great deal of research work has been done on various aspects of Scottish history, Scottish biography, literary studies of various kinds, and so on, and I think that's all helpful. But the most marked sign of the success of the movement is the fact that now, in all the Scottish Universities, there are courses in Scottish literature. It's quite true that there's no chair yet in any Scottish University in the subject, but there are Lecturerships, and, although they're still handicapped by the lack of textbooks, these classes are attracting more and more students, and I think they'll all develop, in the course of the next year or two, into classes that have full-fledged Professors of the subject. At the present time, the development isn't limited at all to Scotland. The only literary or learned Journal with regard to Scottish literature is published in America. I was over in America recently, and I know that there are lecturers and professors in many
American and Canadian Universities who are doing excellent research work on various aspects of Scottish literature. We're bound to get the backwash of that in the course of the next few years, and that will further stimulate the movement. So far as politics is concerned, there's been a tremendous upsurge of interest in Scottish Nationalism. The Scottish National Party is now the largest political party in this country, and is in a position, so far as its membership goes, and so far as finances go, to put up Nationalist candidates in every Scottish constituency at the next General Election. At the last General Election, the size of the Nationalist poll was quite remarkable, and I don't think there's any question at all that within a very short period of time now, we shall have a number of Scottish Nationalist Members in the House of Commons.

Q Do you still hold to the view of the relationship between politics and poetry of the Second Hymn to Lenin?

A Oh yes, undoubtedly. Unlike most poets who have expressed themselves on the matter, that I have read about, I hold that poetry has a definite social function and has a social power; and as a Communist, a member of the Communist party and so on, I regard it as simply one of the gifts, one of the talents that I've got to place at the disposal of the Party.

Q Most critics of your work tend to draw a contrast between the earlier poems and the later poems, usually to the detriment of the latter.
Does this annoy you?

A I think they're wrong, myself. That's been quite true, until quite recently. It's quite natural, I think, because they've had longer to consider the earlier ones, and there's been all kinds of auxiliary evidence showing that they have made quite a remarkable impact in various directions. The later poems are more difficult to accommodate to conventional views of the nature of poetry and so on, but quite significantly, within the last year or two some of - I think - the shrewdest commentators on my work in this and other countries have come to regard many of my later poems as better, more substantial contributions to poetry than the early lyrics. After all, my position in regard to that matter is pretty much the same position as Heine's. Heine scored a tremendous success with his early short lyrics, and then said to himself, "No", he said, "I can't go on with this sort of thing, I must stop it." And it took him years of agonised effort to find a means of breaking up the tonality of the lyric and introducing new material on different levels. The later work, in which he succeeded in doing that, has never of course achieved a tithe of the popularity of his early lyrics: but it's a moot point, I personally think that his later work is of far greater importance, and that the course he took is the one that all poets must sooner or later take now.

Q The comparison could be made not only to Heine, but to other poets who have started in short lyric forms and moved on to much longer,
more obscure work. Iain Crichton Smith, in a recent essay on your own work, suggests a parallel to Blake, and one could also think of Rilke or Coleridge or even Ezra Pound. Do you think these are useful analogies?

A That's quite true, yes. The trouble, I think, lies in the fact that the short poem, the lyric, has become in the minds of most readers in the English-speaking world virtually synonymous with poetry. The long poem has been increasingly difficult to achieve in recent years, owing to the acceleration of change in the modern world, the development of science, and so on. But I think there are signs that the longer poem is coming back into its own again. I instance the work of the Welsh poet, David Jones. It may take a time yet, but I'm perfectly convinced that as far as I personally am concerned I had no option in the matter.

Q Do you see a direct line of development straight through from Sangschaw to In Memoriam James Joyce?

A Oh yes. I don't think the basic issues with which I'm concerned have changed at all. What has changed is the language involved. I found that even the aggrandised Scots in which I wrote my early lyrics and so on didn't provide a sufficiently malleable medium for dealing with the kind of themes that I find it necessary to deal with now. And consequently, a lot of my later poetry, in the last thirty years, has been written in English, with large admixtures of phrases
and words from other languages.

Q  Could I take some of the more common criticisms of the later poems, and ask how you would answer them. First, the charge that what you are writing is not poetry at all but "chopped-up prose". Do you recognise this distinction between poetry and prose?

A  No, I don't recognise it. I recognise that the vast majority of poetry readers are bound to feel that difference between my early work, which was in regular forms and rhyme and metre and so on, but I never accepted that myself. In the Preface to my longest poem, the In Memoriam James Joyce, I dealt specifically with that issue, and pointed out that it was impossible to say that a certain piece of work was not poetry but prose, and I instanced books from the Bible, Marcus Aurelius, and others. It would be impossible to fingerprint these and say that they were not great poetry, although they were written in prose. And I still feel that. I think the best test, although it's not one that one has an opportunity of using very frequently, is the question of public appeal. Recently in America and elsewhere, I have taken advantage of the public platform, and of poetry readings, to put across some of my long poems, poems of three to four hundred lines, to mixed audiences; and I find that they go across extremely well. And that seems to me to say that once you can break down the wrong idea about the nature of poetry that's inculcated in our schools, you can win right through to the general public. The trouble with the teaching of poetry in schools is that the teachers
take the great poets of the past and give children a false idea; if they began with contemporary poets, the children could key in more quickly, because the issues with which contemporary poets are dealing, and the very movement of their work and so on, is more accessible to the children, it's in keeping with the environment in which they're growing up. And if they begin in that way with contemporary poets, and work back, then they get the poets of the past in proper perspective, whereas at the present time they're simply stuck with outdated models that are no guide at all to the possibilities, the functions of poetry in the present age.

Q Another criticism of your longer poems is that they tend sometimes to be catalogues, to list the names without doing anything with them. What do you feel about this?

A Well, what I feel about this is, that some of the greatest poetry in the world has been catalogues in that sense. It seems to me that the criticism arises in the minds of people who accept too easily the conventional idea of poetry, that applies to the bulk of English poetry. But in Celtic poetry, and in Indian poetry, and if you go back to Homer, for example, with his Catalogue of Ships, and so on, you find the same device of cataloguing. And I think it's an admirable way of bringing together a sense of the variety and the massiveness of Creation; and you don't need to say anything, you don't need to do anything with these items that you pile up in that way. You simply leave it to the imagination of your readers. And
that seems to me a much more desirable thing than to spoonfeed them with things that are too easily assimilated.

Q What do you feel is the importance of organization in the poet's task? The construction of some of your longer poems is notably loose, when compared with the very tight construction of the lyrics. Is this just the nature of the poem itself, the length of it?

A I think, to feel that is really a fault of the reader's, because they haven't been accustomed to trying to see a long poem in its entirety as a unit, as an aesthetic unity. I'm perfectly satisfied myself that the poem against which most of these criticisms have been levelled, the *In Memoriam James Joyce*, is as unified an aesthetic construction as any of my shorter lyrics.

Q To come on to the ideas in these later poems: one critic, David Daiches, has described you as being a "mystic". Do you accept that?

A He has also qualified his statement by admitting that he knew that I would object to it. Which I do, insofar as the term "mystic" has any religious connotations. (By "religious" I mean appertaining to the established religions, the Christian or other religion.) But if you use it in a wider sense, of course, as simply meaning that I'm obsessed by the wonder of Creation, the marvel of the Cosmos and so on, then one naturally pleads guilty to it. I don't see how you can be a poet unless you have that kind of feeling. But it's not
"mystical" in any of the usual acceptances of that term.

Q Would perhaps "visionary" be a better term?

A I think "visionary" would be a better term, yes.

Q You seem always to be envisaging some kind of future state of society, either in political terms, or in terms of mankind's development of the human mind and the uses of language. Is this fair enough to say?

A I think so. Edwin Muir said that I was much more interested in the potential than the actual. I think that is another way of putting it, but I think it's a better and a more exact way. I couldn't be animated in the way that I am, either in poetry or in politics, unless I was concerned with the potentialities of mankind.

Q How far do you think you have succeeded in bringing a greater international awareness into contemporary Scottish poetry by your own translations and other work?

(A Note: * It is possible that Dr. Grieve misheard this word as "of". Certainly, his answer is to a slightly different question from the one asked.)

A Very considerably, I think. When I began going abroad to various European countries ten years ago or thereby, in most of the Universities, in Czechoslovakia and Hungary and Rumania and Bulgaria and elsewhere,
I found that it was difficult for the majority of the students to appreciate that Scotland is quite a different country from England, with a different past, people with a different psychology, different aspirations and so on, and that we had native languages of our own, and had had an independent literary tradition over a very considerable number of centuries. They had been led to believe that we were completely unified, and that there was no great difference between the Scots and the English. That was because the English persisted in using the term "English" when the term ought to have been "British". Very well; I've found more recently, in these Universities, and elsewhere, that a sense of the difference of the Scottish tradition has made steady headway, and indeed, in Germany and elsewhere there's been a considerable amount of translation of contemporary Scots work, and a good deal of writing about it, including - in German - a couple of books dealing with the Scottish literary movement of the last half century.

Q What kind of interaction has there been between your own original poetry and your translations? How do they affect each other? Do you translate someone because he is already close to you?

A Well, in a way that is true. Along with a collaborator, for example, I translated a Swedish poem, a sort of science fiction poem by Harry Martinson, called Aniara. I was attracted to Martinson, insofar as I knew anything about his work, by the fact that he is concerned, as I am, with the attempt to assimilate science to poetry. He's
concerned with the developments of science at the present time in the world, and the role it's playing in relation to mankind and the future of mankind. And these seem to me themes which couldn't but attract me to his work. On the other hand, another poet I'm attracted to for quite other reasons. I refer to Bertold Brecht, whose *Threepenny Opera* I've just translated - it hasn't been published yet, and hasn't been put on, although it will be put on both in this country and in America - I'm attracted to him, of course, for political reasons primarily.

Q: Who among the contemporary, post-war European writers are you most in sympathy with, or most admire?

A: Well, the poets that I've been primarily interested in - Neruda, for example, the Chilean poet; the Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet; the Russians, of course, Pasternak primarily: I introduced his sister's translations of Pasternak's lyrics some years ago, at the very time when he was being vilified in the Soviet Union and elsewhere for his acceptance of the Nobel prize. But it's the same duality of attraction: partly because I like their poetry, insofar as I have any access to it, and partly because I feel akin to them in my political and scientific interests.

Q: Could I ask you now about the movement that has grown up in recent years in Scotland, what might be called your followers. How far can you really call the Scottish poets of this century a "school"? For
example, although you are personally friendly with MacCaig, your poetry seems very different. What poets do you think are closest to yourself? I mean, if you had to name a "school of MacDiarmid", who would be in it?

A There are none, of course, that's the short answer. In America, MacCaig was with me, and on public platforms I called him a cultural Quisling. I regard him as a very fine poet, and after all, when we initiated this movement round about 1920, our object was not only to encourage production of poetry and other forms of literature in our native languages, Gaelic and Scots, but also to raise the quality of our Scottish production in English itself: and I think MacCaig has done that, so far as poetry by a Scottish poet in English is concerned. But so far as poetry in Scots is concerned, there has been quite a considerable production by men like Robert Garioch, Douglas Young, Maurice Lindsay, Alastair Mackie and others. None of these can really be called followers or disciples of mine at all. Their direction, insofar as the ideas in their work are concerned, insofar as their political affiliations or scientific interests are concerned, is poles apart from my own.

Q What do you see as the future now of verse in Scots? What do you see as the position of the Scots language in Scotland today? It seems to me that since you, forty years ago, were writing of the dangers of Anglicization, this in itself has gone on, and then we have also had the immense influence of America coming in. Do you think that
Scots can survive against these influences?

A I think so. I pointed out, of course, that it was a great victory for my point of view when after two to three centuries, the Scottish Education Department changed its attitude. When I was a boy, any lapse into Scots in the classroom would be punished, and was certainly frowned upon and prohibited. The Scottish Education Department, two or three years ago, said that on the contrary it should cease to be punished or prohibited, it ought to be encouraged. That has never been implemented, simply because the majority of the teachers themselves are too Anglicized. But it represents a very considerable victory, I think, for my point of view. And it's not at all necessary, as many critics imagine, that there should be a revival of spoken Scots. After all, languages have continued to be used extensively for purely literary purposes after they ceased to be used generally in a spoken way. Latin, for example: Scotland produced some of the best Latin poets in Western Europe, and the great majority of the Scots people, of course, at that time were not speaking Latin. I see nothing to prevent a continuance of Scots as a medium for poetry, in particular. It is contended, of course, that there's a handicap in the fact that we've never developed a Scottish prose. That's quite true: to any extent we haven't, although I think one of the most remarkable achievements of modern Scottish literature was the rhythmic prose, largely Scots in vocabulary, of Lewis Grassic Gibbon in his trilogy of novels, *A Scots Quair*. And there have been, in drama and in the short story and so on, there's been a continuing
use of Scots prose - I think that may yet be developed; but I don't think it's essential to the continuance of the use of Scots as a literary medium.

Q You've said that Scots appeals to some unconscious instincts in the Scottish race. Do you have in mind here something like the Jung idea of a collective subconscious?

A Something similar; I think it reaches down to deeper and more important layers of the psyche.

Q And how long would this survive if spoken Scots was to die out altogether?

A It's impossible to say. One can't predict, with any assurance, what types of writers are going to be thrown up at any time. I think it was the most astonishing thing in the world that I should have been thrown up, forty or fifty years ago. There are people who argue - and I think rightly - that not Scots but Gaelic is our real basis, and that I ought to have occupied myself with Gaelic rather than Scots. I think they're right. But it is significant that although emphasis is placed upon the difference between Scots and Gaelic, for several centuries their poetic development has taken a similar course. They're both tremendously rich in song, unlike England, which is very poor in song. The inspiration of their lyricism has dwindled into doggerel and moralistic verse and so on; but simultaneously with my
own emergence as a Scots lyric poet in the 20's, we found there were two Gaelic poets, two of the greatest Gaelic poets we've ever had, who began manifesting themselves at the same time. After the efflorescence of Scottish Gaelic poetry round about the '45, the thing had been going from bad to worse, just as it had in Scots after the death of Burns. So it shows a certain link between the two things, and that seems to me to be quite significant, that Gaelic should suddenly throw up, simultaneously with a revival of writing in Scots, two of the greatest poets that it ever had.

Q It seems to me that revivals of Scottish literature seem to take place precisely at the times when literature in England is at its weakest: at the time of the Makars, in the mid Eighteenth Century, and again just now. Would you agree with this?

A Oh I agree with that, entirely, yes. T.S. Eliot pointed out that Scots literature had come to the rescue of English at various points in the past, and he believed that it was essential that we should have a flourishing Scottish literature as a bulwark or support for English literature itself. I think that is perfectly true. I think English literature today is at a deplorably low ebb. J.B. Priestley said that it was at a lower ebb than at any time since the 11th Century. I agree with him, with regard to that.

Q Who among the younger Scottish poets writing today do you see as most promising for the future?
Well, that's another question that it's almost impossible to answer. One can't have any assurance as to how they're going to develop. My own development has been so unpredictable that I would hesitate to predict how others might develop. But there are a number, at any rate, who are trying, like Alastair Mackie - but he's not a young man, he'll be in his 50's I should think, and Garioch of course is still writing, I think he and Sydney Smith are the two best of my contemporaries in their handling of Scots. Whether they'll go much further or not, it's impossible for me to say. What I miss in both of them is the song element. After all, one of the reasons why Scottish literature is so rich in song is because the broad vowels of Scots are much more suitable for song than the clipped accents of contemporary English. But, on the other hand, it's very difficult to get our singers to sing new songs at all. They keep repeating sure-fire favourites, repeat them ad nauseam. Whether song settings of men like Francis George Scott or Ronald Stevenson will yet command a good enough platform to get across to the masses of our people remains to be seen. The quality of their work certainly deserves it, but, as with other features of modern Scottish literature, the work of these two composers - and there are one or two lesser composers - is better appreciated abroad than it is here, largely because in this country we are still dominated by the cultural values of our southern partner.

Are you in sympathy with the very political writing of, say, Alan Bold?
A Alan Bold is a very young poet; I prefaced his first collection when it was published. I think he has a great deal of potentiality. How he's going to develop, again I find myself unable to predict, but I certainly hope that he's going to develop along the lines that I indicated in the Preface I've just mentioned. And if he does, I'm quite sure he'll have quite a substantial significance for the future of Scottish literature.

Q Could I ask you one final question, about the role of the critic. At one stage you've said of your own production that it was like a volcano throwing up bits of fire and a great deal of rubbish. Now, do you think it is the job of the critic, like myself for instance, to separate the fire and the rubbish, or are they inextricably intermingled?

A No - I think it is the duty, if it can be done, of the critic to separate the rubbish from the real quality - but it may not be possible to do it. It depends, I think, on the critic's angle of approach and on his general background. Critics in Scotland have been about as rare as snakes in Ireland. We've had no substantial volume of criticism dealing with the values of the separate Scottish literary tradition. In the Studies in Scottish Literature, the Quarterly published in America, it seems to me that there's now emerging a body of scholars and critics who may remedy that lack. But until that is done, it'll be very difficult, I think, to criticise critics who aren't in full possession of a sense of that tremendous
difference between the Scottish tradition, largely potential, and
the English tradition, which has largely been actualised.

Q In closing, is there anything that you'd like to say on the subject
of my Thesis that I haven't asked you?

A No, I don't think so. You seem to have covered the field pretty
widely, and I hope I'll see the Thesis in due course, and that any
Degree that goes with it will be yours. There have been a lot of
Theses written about me, I don't know whether they're accessible
or not, in German and French and Russian and in American Universities.
But they should all be available somewhere. I don't know, I feel
handicapped myself in certain aspects of my own work by the
inaccessibility of these Theses. There ought to be some central
arrangement where copies of them could be deposited, and be available,
because it's becoming more and more difficult in literature, as it
is in all the sciences, to keep abreast of developments. There's
been an enormous output of writing on Scottish literature: I had
a collection somewhere, I don't know where it is now, of sixty or
seventy long articles on my own work published in this country and
other countries, France, Italy, and so on, five years ago, when I
was seventy. Quite an astonishing collection! But all that
wants winnowing, and it seems to me that that should be the first
job of the critic, is to get a sound basis for the claim that Scots
is an independent literary tradition in the fullest sense of the
term, and without that basis, it seems to me that we haven't got
any grounds for good critical work.
ROBERT GARIOCH

August 9th, 1967.

Edinburgh.

I began this interview by asking Mr. Garioch about the pronunciation of his pseudonym. (His real name is Robert Sutherland: "Garioch" is actually pronounced as "Garrick").

At the end of the interview, Robert Garioch read the following poems:

"Sisyphus"
"The Byordnar Theory of Sibness"
"Heard in the Cougate"
"At Robert Fergusson's Grave"
"Embrot the Ploy" (including extra stanza)
"Disparplut"
"Elegy"
"Judgement Day" (Belli)
"A True Story"
Q: Well, Mr. Gay-rioch, or Mr. Sutherland, or Garrick, or Geery... 

A: Garrick, I think, it's supposed to be. So let it be Garrick. 

Q: Let it be Garrick. I wonder if we could take a roughly chronological approach to your work, and start at the beginning, how you first came to write, how you first came to write in Scots, and the early association with Sorley Maclean which produced the first book. 

A: Yes. The first writing in Scots was at the University, in the third year, when we used to write, we all put up our little efforts on the corner of the English Library... 

Q: This was at Edinburgh? 

A: At Edinburgh, yes. And I, rather deliberately, wrote the sort of thing that I thought was suitable for us to write, an entirely different kind of thing altogether from what was being written by everybody else. I wrote it in Edinburgh "gutter Scots", as it's called, as a counterblast to what was there before, as a piece of impudence, if you like, and I was surprised to find that it was treated more seriously than I had expected. That was more or less the beginning of this writing in Scots, under the influence of A.D. Mackie, I would say, more than of anybody else. Sorley Maclean came later. I met him at the University and he was of course a
a great man even then, and the natural thing was to try to do something about his poetry. When I came to publish a little poetry of my own, I published his too, I had the honour in fact of publishing it in the *Seventeen Poems*. That was the beginning of the Sorley Maclean partnership, if you can call it that.

Q And then came the war, which figures a great deal in your poetry.

A Yes - well, does it indeed? I didn't think it did. The war came just at that time, yes, I don't know if there's such a lot of war in what I've written, but still, it came along all right, and then of course the next stage was that I got back home again to Edinburgh, which seemed rather a strange place, so I went to London and stayed there for a very long time, and came back to Edinburgh in 1959, and that's the story of the whole thing.

Q What do you think is the place of translation in your work? It's been estimated, I think, that a good deal over half of your work has been translation.

A Yes, it must be, it must be more than half. I must say just now that I have to think of reasons for having done the things I've done in the past, which I did at the time without any particular reasons at all. And I suspect that my reasons aren't always the right reasons, although they seem to make sense now, so anything I say now has to be treated with caution in that way. And
a good deal of it has been accidental - for instance, I would meet somebody who had a rough translation, or an exact translation into literal English, with notes, and he would say, "Would you translate that?" and I would say "Yes, I'll try it" and so I did. That's very often how it happened: somebody else's initiative, not mine at all. A pity about that, but there it is.

Q Did you always work from a prose literal translation draft?

A Yes, especially when it was a language that I knew nothing about myself. I can't think of any other way of doing it. I met Carne-Ross in London - he's in America now - and he was a great man for finding people to translate certain things that he had picked out, and he had an absolute genius, in a way, for giving you just the right thing to do, giving you an exact translation with very helpful notes; and the notes find themselves incorporated into the translation sometimes. It's one way of translating, it seems to work all right. After all, you know the meaning of the thing if somebody tells you what it means, so the first difficulty is overcome, and so you just go ahead. And of course he would read it to you, and you would know what it would sound like. He went to a lot of trouble; I just followed what was required, and there it was. The translation of Pindar, who's supposed to be very hard to translate, well there it is - "Translate Pindar." Perhaps the secret is not so
much in what I can do, as what the language can do. Nobody
has ever perhaps discovered, maybe that's the secret, the
Scots coming into it and so on, a marvellously powerful
language, after all; that may be it, an interesting idea.

Q

It's been said that to translate is a way of keeping the Muse
in practice when you've got nothing original to say. Do you
agree with this?

A

Yes, Tom Scott always says that. Quite right. I agree, if
you've nothing to say, and that happens to me a lot of the
time. You may as well keep on translating, if you want to do
something, why not? It seems a good enough idea to me.
People find fault with translations and translators as not
being original, or something. I'm not sure that originality
matters all that much. Anyhow, that is so, you can say that's
true.

Q

Of the people that you have translated, Buchanan seems to loom
fairly large.

A

Yes. Well, Dr. George Davie, a great Buchanan man, which is
only right, interested me in Buchanan at one time. And so I
had a go at translating "The Humanists' Trauchles", I called
it, the plight of the Humanists in Paris. I had the idea that
George Davie had translated that bit in the Golden Treasury of
Scottish Poetry, but I don't think he did after all, I rather think he didn't, I don't know who translated it. Anyhow, I thought he did, but it doesn't matter. And that of course just asked to be put into Scots, and so it was, and that called for a reply, so the "Repone" came along, and that's the history of that little bit. Then of course Jephthah, which would have been a good Scots play if Buchanan had written in Scots: well, the thing to do is just to put it into Scots, if you can, and The Baptist too. The thing about Buchanan is that he wrote in Latin because it was the only language that seemed to him to be permanent, so he did all his important writings in Latin, which of course is not read or performed nowadays, and so what he thought would happen has not happened. So it seems a reasonable thing to do, to try and put it into Scots. Hence all that Buchanan translation.

Generally speaking you translate someone because you like that person, and you like that person because he's the same as you (or perhaps directly opposite). Which do you think is the case with Buchanan, or with Belli?

I don't know. Belli I have a lot in common with, because of his local interests, and his local speech. I don't know ... Buchanan? Oh yes of course I sympathised with what he had to say about the teaching in Paris. And as for Jephthah and The Baptist, it just seemed an obvious thing to do. I got a
curious feeling when I was doing it, I got very excited, it was a long job and it took a very long time, and I got terribly worried in case somebody else should be doing it and should finish the job first. It seemed such an obvious thing, there must be twelve people at it, all racing to be finished. I got really concerned and worried, and the job went on for months and months. When it was finished, I found that my fears were quite unnecessary after all. Nobody had been translating it, and nobody since then has been reading it. So that's all right, yes.

Q Could we turn now to your original poetry: a great deal of it is centred on Edinburgh, of course. Do you find it easier to write about Edinburgh in Edinburgh or in London?

A Oh, in London, I think, on the whole. That's the famous thing, that you're told, if you want to write about a place, you're better to be not in it. I think so, perhaps, I'm not very sure. There's been a good deal about Edinburgh since I came back. Maybe it doesn't make very much difference where you're staying at the time, I'm not really very sure about that at all.

Q Was the Masque written in London?

A It started in Edinburgh, and it was finished in London. I don't know that it really makes very much difference. You would
have to visit the place once a year, I suppose, to keep track of it. Especially Edinburgh, which is different every time a visitor comes back, he must find that the place is different each year, the way they knock it down and build it up. However, I don't know if it matters such a lot about being in a place all the time and writing about it.

Q Tell me about the Masque; was it ever actually performed?

A Yes, the Scottish Renaissance Society in Edinburgh University did it a good many years ago, when I wasn't here. Sydney Smith had a lot to do with it, I remember, and it seems to have been a success. Audience participation took place, they all joined in "The Ball of Kirriemuir", and it apparently was great fun, though I wasn't there to see. Also in the Saltire Society in London we read it - and that was great fun, and everybody joined in there too, in Fetter Lane, in the Scottish Corporation Hall. It was so noisy that they say they could hear it in Fleet Street and wondered what was going on; it's just round the corner from Fleet Street and it was late at night when there wasn't so much traffic. However, it's been interesting enough, it's a good testimonial to the thing.

Q But it's never actually been put on in the Waverley Market.

A Not in the Waverley Market, nor in Leith Central Station, no.
Q A lot of your work seems to be in very strict forms, like sonnets on the old Italian limited rhyme pattern. Do you enjoy strict forms?

A Yes. I like doing that, it's fun, you have the difficulty of doing it, and you try to do it, and I like that sort of thing. It seems, whether you can make general statement about it (or not), that that is the best way to write poetry. I don't know, but for my part, I like a strict form. It's good to keep to it, and it gives you something that you try to do, which is difficult, and it's good if you manage it and very often you don't.

Q In this respect you've been compared to the older Makars, to Dunbar and the aureation principle of doing something difficult, and emphasising the craftsmanship of the verse.

A Yes, if I try hopefully to do what they did, you could compare the results. Yes, fair enough - otherwise, I don't know if there's much comparison to be made. However, you can learn from those people, and I'll tell you one thing, in Scots we still have a certain amount of artificiality. This is rather curious - you start with something which is less artificial than Edinburgh English, which is genuinely heard in the streets and round about: that's the real Scots, there's not very much to it, but it's genuine enough; and then you add to that from Scottish literature and you get your literary language, which
can be a highly artificial thing, and somehow you can manage to use it as an artificial language, which it has become, starting naturally and becoming artificial. It is a literary language and I think you can do things with it that would sound awkward if you hadn't got this artificial language to use; and your aureate diction somehow seems to sound not too strained. That's still so, I think.

Q

Let's stay on the Scots question for a minute. When I was talking to Hugh MacDiarmid last week, he said that he could envisage Scots surviving entirely as a literary language, even if it died out entirely as a spoken language.

A

Yes, I think so, it seems a very reasonable idea. I think he's right there. It would be so useful that people would use it just because there was nothing else so convenient or useful for them to have, and out of its sheer usefulness they'll preserve it. I doubt even if it will fail as a spoken language. The ordinary person is remarkably tough in some peculiar fashion. In spite of all sorts of influences, they all seem to go on pretty much as they did. The local speech survived the educators of the 19th century, and I think the Scottish education system was possibly even more powerfully working against the local dialects that the mass entertainment we have now. After all, I think the teacher is a much more alarming person than a pop singer, and he was really determined to alter your way of speaking, which
the entertainer isn't; so I feel, if the local speech survived that, it'll survive anything. And the idea that it'll survive as a useful literary language, I think it's quite likely that it will, yes. Somebody will want to do it.

Q This is with a definite admixture of archaic forms, creating a synthetic language?

A I think that is quite likely so. Why not?

Q One of the questions about Scots has been the lack of a standard Scots language in the same way as there is a standard English. Do you think this can be created, or is it worth creating?

A I don't think we need to worry about that; we do have our Scottish Style Sheet for the spelling, and that's a convenient arrangement so that the reader doesn't find it too awkward to read. I don't think you need to bother about a standard speech. I don't see that it matters a great deal. Anyone writing is going to use everything he can find, and it's a mistake to relate writing with speaking in any language, I'm inclined to think, to relate it very much. Poetic diction, I think, is one of those things that poets will use.

Q What is generally esteemed to be the most successful of your work has been comic, or humorous, and more serious poems, like
"The Wire", have generally been thought to be less completely successful. Do you agree with this?

A
I don't know. It's not for me to say. It's a pity about that, but I can't help it. I don't know myself, I think; somebody else can decide about that. I'd like to be regarded as a highly serious sort of person, but ...

Q
Do you have any serious theory of comedy?

A
Oh, no no. I don't even have a serious theory of serious things. So if I want to be regarded as a serious person, perhaps I haven't much right, it's just too bad, we can't help that. I've nothing to do with that, I just do what's there and leave other things to other people to see what they think best; and they're probably right.

Q
Do you write with any definite satirical intent?

A
What is a definite satirical intent? Do you want to annoy somebody? Or to correct him in some way? Or to show him a better line of conduct or to stop him from doing .... I don't really quite know. If I see something absurd, I like to point it out, and if it can be done in reasonably tidy verse I think that's something worth doing. I'd be sorry if there was nothing to be satirical about, like Belli when the Pope died:
they got a sensible Pope to take his place and Belli was quite sad about that. He loved Pope Gregory, he said, because he had the pleasure of hitting him - or knocking him, yes "knocking him" I think is the best translation. And it would be a great pity if everything was so well organised and so beautifully arranged that there was nothing to make fun of. I don't know if I'm much more serious in the matter than that. I don't want to reform the world by satirizing abuses, or anything like that, oh dear no.

Q  What work have you in hand at the moment?

A  None. Really not very much, no. I can't say there's very much at all.

Q  Do you have any ambitions to do any more along the dramatic lines?

A  I don't think so, I don't see anything else that needs to be done. The Buchanan thing seemed to need to be done, it was a thing that had to be done. And so I thought I'd better do it. I can't see anything else like that, at least I don't feel anything like that at the moment, no.

Q  To turn now to some of the writers that have been connected with you, or influenced you. Do you think you've been very greatly
influenced by anyone, or have you just gone your own way?

A  I've more or less gone my own way, I'm very lazy and I'm not a good reader of other people, and I'm rather inclined to be influenced by people if I do read them, so I have one reason for not reading too much of others, of contemporaries, and that one reason is laziness, and the other is caution, and so I'm not very competent to talk about what's going on.

Q  You're fairly close to Goodsir Smith.

A  Oh yes, that's true. But I'm not going to say how much I've learned from him: I'm too good a friend for that!

Q  What about Fergusson?

A  Ah yes! Well, there's of course someone that .. He's an obvious man to study, I can learn a lot from him. He's in an Edinburgh which was not so very different; he knew the surroundings that I know, and his background was somewhat similar to mine, and I take him as somebody to learn from. Yes, Fergusson certainly. I quite unashamedly study Fergusson and try to follow him, no doubt about that.

Q  Is there anything else about your own work that you'd like to say that I haven't asked you?
I don't think really I have very much to say at all. What I said in the beginning, if I produce a theory or an explanation it's liable to be something that has been thought up in order to explain something that has happened of its own accord. I haven't got theories; I don't do things because I have a theory about it. In fact, I haven't got very much system at all, I just go on in a rather haphazard fashion, and things gradually get done and they accumulate, but I'm not... I can't say very much that's helpful about how it all happens. I don't think so.
NORMAN MACCAIG

August 23rd, 1967

Edinburgh
Q  Mr. MacCaig, can I start by asking, do you consider yourself part of the Scottish Renaissance, whatever that may be?

A  Well, if you say "whatever that may be" I of course do, because I live in Scotland, I'm a Scot, I've never lived anywhere else. Even if I didn't want to be part of the Scottish Renaissance, I would be a part of it. I don't consider the Scottish Renaissance is a narrow thing. I don't think in terms of literature it's only restricted to writing in Scots. For the matter of that, I don't think it's restricted only to literature. All the arts are concerned in it, and in fact I believe myself that the most flourishing art in Scotland today is the art of painting, which has had its own flowering, even more perhaps than literature, although it hasn't made the same public noise, it hasn't been accompanied by the same warfare, half of it internecine.

Q  Have you ever yourself tried writing in Scots?

A  No, I never have, and there's an adequate reason for this: out of my parents and grandparents, that's to say my six immediate ancestors, five of them were Gaels, who spoke Gaelic. Only one was a Border Scot. I was born to speak English with a Scottish accent, the way I'm speaking now. I feel, of course, a relationship with the Scots tongue, but it's not my natural tongue. If I were to write in Scots it would be merely an exercise. I'm much more of a Gael, in blood, than I am a Border Scot, and in fact I feel more closely related to Gaeldom and its king of civilization than I do to the Border Scots.
So I never had this problem that so many writers in Scotland have had of choosing, or being chosen by, one language or the other.

Q What about Gaelic itself? How much Gaelic do you have?

A Well, I have enough Gaelic to understand simple conversations and to read Gaelic literature with a dictionary on one knee. But I spend six, seven months every year in the faraway Highlands, because that's where I feel most at home. And I know a great many Gaels, I know a good deal about Gaelic literature, and it chimes with the way I think and feel in a way that I suppose has simply got to do with ancestry.

Q In what particular ways does the Gaelic influence come into your poetry?

A I'm not the one to ask, to answer that, you know, because I'm very chary myself about regarding my own work with the kind of critical eye that can say this came from there and that came from the other. I should think it's more a way of looking at experience, because contrary to the rubbishy ideas that were started off mainly by Matthew Arnold about Celtic twilight-ism and the Romantic Gael, contrary to that the truth is that the Gael is an extremely practical man and his art is very formal, extremely formal, and unromantic. And add to this, which I get through generations, the feeling for form, add to this the fact that I took a degree in Classics, and you'll
see why the form of poetry has always been of special interest to me. I think I am a non-romantic fellow, if the only reason is that I don't like romantic writing and I don't like romantic music and I don't like romantic people.

Q Can you speak now about how you started writing poetry, your first books which you just told me you'd like burned, which came out in the 40s.

A Well, I started writing poetry in the usual, rather last-year-at-school sort of thing, 17, 18, and then at the University: deplorable stuff, that doesn't worry me, everybody ...

Q This was the period of the New Apocalypse?

A No, that was before the New Apocalypse were thought of. This was about 1930. And I wrote a good deal, masses of stuff, all of which was complete rubbish. I had no interest in showing it to people or trying to get it published, I just enjoyed making the things; and they were in fact very private and semi-surrealistic, of no value whatever, even to a psychoanalyst, because I had a mind as pure as the driven snow. And it was a good deal later, in fact it was during the war, I had my first book published - and it was my wife did it, behind my back. I was away in the army - sort of army, I was a Conscientious Objector. She put some together and sent them to Routledge and Kegan Paul and they published them - an
act for which, even to this day, I find it difficult to forgive her, not because of the fact that she did it but because of the appalling quality of the stuff that was published. They produced another book a couple of years later, which was hardly any better. And then I began to be more interested in what people like to call "communication"; I began to send poems to magazines and that sort of thing, and of course necessarily had to purify my appalling style. In the late 30s, while I was still writing in this semi-surrealistic way, my name was tangled with the so-called Apocalyptics. I think there's more to be said about that fatuous movement than has been said, because suddenly a number of writers, all of them young, from Cornwall up to at least Edinburgh, where I was, found themselves writing in this deplorable way. The odd thing was that they were all at it without knowing each other. Nicholas Moore I think it was, and Henry Traece, discovered this odd fact, published two or three magazines, gave it this awful name, wrote portentous, woolly, and extremely nonsensical manifestoes about it. All of us have been running away from that label ever since.

Q Let's run away from it. How does Riding Lights come out?

A Well, there was a sudden - this is perhaps the oddest thing in my experience of myself as a writer - there was a sudden complete and absolute change in the way I wrote, partly because of this dawning interest in an audience, and I started quite suddenly, in 1948 I think, writing the kind of poems that appeared in Riding Lights.
I sent them in to a poetry competition run by the Arts Council and got the award. Hogarth Press wrote to me, saying they'd be interested to see the MS, and they accepted it and they've printed all my books ever since.

Q By the time we get to Riding Lights, you're working with a very clear-cut form.

A I was always writing in strict stanza forms and strict metres, strict rhymes - but I was interested in exploring different sorts of rhymes, and this is a thing I get from Gaelic: all kinds of half rhymes and feminine rhymes and displaced rhymes and interior rhymes: this fascinated me. And also at that time, the time of Riding Lights, I was interested in a kind of waveringly conversational rhythm, trying to escape from the tyranny of the iambic pentameter. Form is always one of the sources of my poetry, never mind the clothes that it wears. At the end of Riding Lights, I thought these weren't too bad, some of them, but they could do with a stiffening up of brains, you know, paraphrasable content; and the next book, The Sinai Sort, shows this, where the rhythms and metres are much tougher, the texture of the verse is thicker, and there's an attempt to speak about things which weren't necessarily private to me.

Q Such as?

A Oh .. not private to me; they were things which I felt and experienced,
because I'm a man without any powers of invention at all, I've no imagination, I can only write about what I experience, what seems to me to be under my nose. I couldn't invent another man's experience; I could never write a short story or a play. If I wrote a play with six characters they would all be Norman MacCaig speaking in Norman MacCaig's way, and of course it would be just terrible. So that when writing poetry I can only write about what's happened to me, what I have thought, what I have experienced. But in The Sinai Sort I began to include notions and ideas that were more common to other people than, I think, the notions and ideas were that had been written about in Riding Lights. And in fact from then on I've been moving, in a rather helplessly guided way, towards a simplification of utterance, hoping of course that the content isn't reduced in its meaning, or importance of meaning, but trying always to become more and more lucid. And that again is a Celtic thing.

Q By the time we get to, say, A Common Grace, one of the main concerns in your own poetry seems to be the idea of perception and the relationship between the subject and the object.

A Yes, that has always been, from the very start, a fundamental interest of mine. I don't philosophize about it. I write a lot about that sort of thing - the appearance of a thing, and what it is in its reality. There's a tree outside the window there; Pasternak has a poem about a tree and he says, "That is not a tree,
that is a way of feeling." Well, this notion - before I'd read Pasternak - this has been a compulsive notion with me. What is the tree? The tree I can only know subjectively etc etc etc. Of course, this is a very feebly philosophical idea: they do it in first Philosophy in Universities, don't they. But all the same, the people in Universities and the philosophers haven't explained this away. And also, I go from a tree to all kinds, the outside world, which fascinates me. I've got a greedy eye. I love "landscape", landscape is my substitute for religion, and I love landscape not only for its aesthetic appeal, but because there seems to be a sort of web through all the outer world, never mind the inanimate landscape with the living people and creatures in it. It isn't a thing to be called Pantheism, because it doesn't seem to me to have anything to do with religion. I'm an atheist, by the way, a complete atheist; I'm not only not a believer, I hate the beliefs. But I have a feeling, which I can't explain, not being a philosopher, of a tremendous inter-connectedness of things and people and ideas; and a great deal of what I write are little probes and projections towards an understanding of this feeling, which I don't think is anywhere a private thing of mine, I think this is quite a common thing. But it is a compulsive one with me, I can never escape from it.

Q What is perhaps uncommon is your ability to find metaphors, similes, images which transform what you do see.

A Yes, well there must be something in that, or people wouldn't publish
the poems. I know that when I write about places in the Highlands, which I know very well, the local people there - and they're no fools, gamekeepers, poachers - who know that landscape in a way that I can't because they live among it, they please me very much when they say, "You know, I saw that, but I didn't really see it till you wrote it down." This kind of illumination of the ordinary is the kind of thing which some people say I have a little gift for. And indeed I don't really try to do very much more, because the ordinary seems to me to be most extraordinary.

Q As you've gone on, you've moved away from the stricter forms towards free verse.

A Yes. This happened two and a half years ago, I hadn't ever written a poem in free verse before then. And one night I sat down and I wrote a poem in free verse. I'd often wondered, you know; after all, I'm interested in verse forms, but I'd never felt the slightest impulse to write in free verse until two and a half years ago, and then for the best part of two years I wrote in nothing but free verse. And one of the reasons - there were two main reasons - one of the reasons was of course the nature of the form. If you change your form, you change the kinds of things you say, the quality of your utterance is changed. So that was something, and I also found myself able to talk, to write about more external things than I was up till then. For example, I've written a number of ... you can hardly call them political poems, but they're
ironical, or, in a Chanel Number 5 way, satirical poems, about, well, politicians, say. I hate injustice, but I was never able to write about it until I was writing in free verse. The change of form spread the area, widened the area over which I could walk with a pen in my hand. These are the two reasons, an interest in the form and the enlargement of the scope in which I could operate just because the form had been changed.

Q How long will this go on, do you think?

A Maybe tomorrow, maybe the rest of my life, I've no idea. In the last little while I've been writing some poems in strict form again, but the bulk of what I'm writing is still free verse. I imagine that I'll use a mixture of them according to whatever it is that comes into my mind asking to be said.

Q You're not able now, are you, to go back to the subjects which free verse has opened up and deal with them in form again?

A That I don't know; and that is one of the things that I'm rather hoping will happen, but it hasn't happened yet.

Q You've always been fairly prolific, your books have trotted out at a nice rate. Do you find it easy to write?

A Yes. I do.
Q  Too easy?

A  I hope not. Well, you can't lay down laws about this. Recently on television (I'm told, I didn't see the programme) Vernon Watkins was talking about writing fifty versions of a poem, and I know Stephen Spender in one of his books describes the writing of a poem, and I think he got up to seventy-two versions. Well, I write one. Hit or miss, you see? If I write ten poems, about seven of them go in the back of the fire, where they belong. I'd rather write a new poem than work on an old one. And this isn't a matter of choice, it's because I can't work on an old one. It either comes out straight, or else it's lost. So I write a great deal, and the bulk of it is burnt.

Q  Can we move on now to the more general sphere of influences. One of the names that you have mentioned in the past as being important to you is that of Wallace Stevens.

A  Yes. This is one of the things that enrage me, this narrow water between Britain and America, and the impossibility of getting the texts of poets whom we read are great poets. It wasn't very long since Wallace Stevens was available here, I'd only seen a few poems in anthologies, they didn't mean all that much to me. And then when Wallace Stevens' Selected Poems were printed here, I fell for them. I'm not now - be careful - I'm not suggesting that I'm
anything at all like Wallace Stevens in any respect whatever, except that his approach to his world, his real world, the continuous quarrel between the real world and the world of the imagination; this was just the way my mind works. Now his mind works better, and his poems are better - I'm not making that kind of comparison - but there was a feeling of "Good, good", you know, a feeling of friendliness, and for about a year I was influenced, not in subject matter, because I was already interested in his subject matter without knowing the man, but I was very influenced by his extraordinary style. And I had to write that out of my system. I did, in one of my books - I never remember which is which - in one of my books the influence is pretty clearly seen in a number of poems - I think probably A Round of Applause - where you can see where his rhythms and even his vocabulary sneak in. I was aware of this, and I didn't approve of it, but I knew that the only way to get out of it was to write through it, as it were. And I think I've done that, because I don't see any trace of Wallace Stevens in the books that came after it.

Q I gather that you and Crichton Smith carry on a friendly little battle between the rival claims of Stevens and Lowell.

A Oh well, yes. I wouldn't say we quarrel about this at all. I admire Robert Lowell tremendously, I could never be influenced by him the way I was influenced by Stevens. I think that now that Stevens is dead, Robert Lowell is the greatest poet writing in
America. Robert Lowell is a highly romantic and dramatic and rather solipsistic man, and if I may say so, so is Iain Crichton Smith. So they have personal affiliations in character, temperament, just as I had or seemed to have with Wallace Stevens. To me, Wallace Stevens is the greater poet.

Q Your own poetry seems to have preserved a fairly clear line free of any very noticeable influence from the contemporary Scottish poets.

A The only influence that I think would be noticeable in all these books is the Wallace Stevens one. I think somebody would have to be a truffle-hound to find any other. And this is not because of any particular virtue in me, but because of - I don't even know if it's a fault, but it's a fact, and that is that I'm a non-mimic. I cannot imitate people. This makes me the worst story-teller in the world if the story happens to be about an Irishman and a Scotsman and a Jew. I can't even imitate accents. So that although there are many poets I've loved very much, I've been saved from the squalid necessity of freeing myself from their influence by the simple fact that I'm not clever enough to imitate them.

Q Would this also account for the fact that, almost alone among the Scottish Renaissance poets, you have done no translation at all?

A Well, it must be connected with that, mustn't it? Translation seems to me an absolutely impossibly difficult art, and therefore
you can imagine how much I admire it. I've never been interested... I'd far rather write something of my own, for one thing.

Q You have no trouble keeping your own Muse in practice.

A That's so.

Q Can we move to a slightly broader topic, the Scottish Renaissance generally. How far do you think it has been successful in what it set out to do?

A Well, if you mean "what it set out to do" in the strict terms which were used by the protagonists and publicists and polemicists of the movement, of course it's failed miserably. But that's because they set their sights impossibly high. They used to talk - Douglas Young, Christopher himself, Hugh MacDiarmid that is - of the time when there would be a full canon of Scots spoken all over Scotland, newspapers would be written in Scots, teachers would teach in Scots, the lot, you know. Well, that seems to me a fatuous pipe-dream. The opposition is far too strong; the English ascendancy, in this respect, is bound to win, if it's not going to turn out to be an American ascendancy. All the same, by trying so hard they did more than they might have done if they hadn't tried so hard, and there has been an extraordinary illumination of Scottish artistic life since Grieve wrote his first book in the middle 20s. In terms of literature, in terms of poetry, everybody in Scotland, every writer,
owes a great debt to Grieve, whether they imitate him or not, whether they love him or hate him - and Scotland is sharply divided into these two classes, admirers or detesters. I am an admirer. I think that Grieve is not only the greatest poet since Burns, which people keep saying and which means nothing, because what poets have there been since Burns? I think he's a far greater poet than Burns. In fact, I think - I hate being pedagogical, you know, 8 out of 10 and 2 for neatness - but I think that he is the greatest poet that Scotland has ever had. But this admiration has got nothing to do with influences. He writes more of his work in English than in Scots, but he is an absolute idiosyncratic individual. If anybody imitated him, the result would be ruinous. But he must have influenced me, because not only do I know his work very well, but I know the man very well, and I think he must have influenced the quality of my thinking. He probably helped me to become - this is guesswork, you know, one isn't conscious of this while it's going on - he probably helped me to become more rational, because he is the most rational irrationalist that ever lived, and to examine ideas and notions with a much more balancing and weighing attitude of mind than I would have done. So that everybody in Scotland is influenced by Grieve, one way or the other.

Q Can we turn for a moment to the language. One of the things that you mentioned was the use of Scots in schools: as a schoolteacher yourself, how do you feel about the use of Scots in schools, as opposed to English?
Well, I teach children of 11 or 12, and I don't think it's likely that there's a class in Edinburgh, in any school, where the children know more Scots poems and Scots songs than the classes I get, because I love them, and so do the children. But I don't teach them with any political purpose. I don't see a time when Scots will be a viable language all over Scotland, that just seems to me impossible. It seems to me dying, just as Gaelic is dying, more slowly, but just as certainly. But that doesn't mean that you ignore it. If there's good stuff lying around the place, I don't care myself whether it's written in Algebra or Urdu, as long as it's good poetry. Well, you can't teach kids poems in Urdu but you can teach it them in Scots, because they're not so far removed from that language, and anyway that language isn't so terribly far removed from English. So that I give them a lot of Scottish stuff, I wouldn't call it teaching them Scots, they're too young for that sort of approach anyway. But they read a lot and learn a lot of Scottish poems and Scottish songs.

Could Scots survive as a purely literary language? Is that worth trying to do?

Is it worth trying to do? I wouldn't think so. The people like Grieve, MacDiarmid, he would say quite flatly that his interest in Scots was purely political. His interest in poetry is purely political. A poem has no value to him unless it is going to alter the life of the people who are going to read the poems. Now when
you say "Ah-ah-ah", then he knows what you're going to say, and interrupts you and says, "Of course it must be transmuted into poetry."

Well, I see his point, but I don't think, I can't anyway, think of writing in Scots except as an exercise. If one is a natural Scots speaker, of course, that's another matter. I can't see it, I can't see myself, I suppose it's as personal as that, writing poetry with a deliberately political or propaganda purpose. I know I couldn't do it. And I think that in MacDiarmid's most directly propagandist poems the imagination fails and the poems are bad ones. I can't see how valid political poetry can be written except by indirection, implicitly. So that whether Scots can exist artificially- I cannot see how that can happen either. Mind you, it's a long way to go from being dead. There are poets who write poetry in Latin, there was a Scottish poet who wrote masses of poetry in Latin. Well, it seems to me to be very bad poetry. The Latin's OK; but the poetry's a little missing, because nobody talked it, it wasn't a living tongue. And I don't think you can write poetry except in a living tongue.

Q Of the younger poets who are coming on today, most of them are writing in English.

A Practically them all.

Q Do you know any of them writing in Scots?

A Yes. I wouldn't like to name them, because I don't think very much
of their poetry.

Q What about those who write in English, who among them do you think anything of?

A Of the really young ones, do you mean, in their 20s to 25, 26, that sort of age? There are a number; most of them are at Universities now, so far as I know, both in Glasgow and Edinburgh University, who obviously seem to me have a growing point, whether it'll grow or not is another matter, it depends on what fertilises it, I suppose, and what depth of sub-soil there is. But there's D.M. Black, for example, in Edinburgh, interests me. He's got an odd imagination; he's a fantasist, but his fantasies are written down as if they were real, and they have rather the effect of generally nightmares rather than pleasant dreams. But he makes them good - I don't like poems about dreams, nor stories, people who tell me their last night's dream bore me to suffocation. But he does make valid little tough poems, which are comical as well as nightmarish. I think of all the people at that age he's the one I like best.

Q May I tread onto wary ground and ask you what you think of concrete poetry?

A I think about it libellously.

Q Is there anything that you'd like to say about the whole field of
contemporary Scottish poetry that I haven't asked you?

A Only one thing - and that is that when people talk about Scottish poetry they never ever mention Gaelic poetry, and there is in fact some very fine stuff being written in Gaelic. There's a man Sorley Maclean who's done with Gaelic something like what Chris Grieve did with Scots, that's to say, he took a tradition which had been dead for two hundred years and suddenly started writing pretty great poetry in it, of an absolutely contemporary kind. There are some others, one or two other Gaelic writers also. They are unfortunately trapped in this language, they must have an intelligent audience of about sixty, which is pretty depressing for a writer. But I don't think they should be absolutely neglected, especially when Scots are speaking about Scottish literature.

Q Would you like to read a few of your poems?

A Well, have you any in mind, or do I now suddenly have to start to think?

Q I thought you might like to read the ones that you yourself are most pleased with after the passing of the years from these various books.

A Oh, I never read them. Never ever. I never remember them either. But I'll read this one, because it says something about what we
started talking about, the outward world and the subjective
informations about it.

"Summer Farm"

"Half-Built Boat in a Hayfield"

Q I'd like you to read one of the free verse ones - how about
"Metaphysical Me"?

A OK

Q Do you think "metaphysical" is a fair adjective?

A That's tongue in cheek, you see, because that's what they call me. I don't agree I'm metaphysical at all. Some people say I'm a metaphysical poet, I don't seem to be a metaphysical poet at all. The first line tells the truth.

"Metaphysical Me"
At the end of the interview, Iain Crichton Smith read the following poems:

"End of the Season on a Stormy Day in Oban"

"Nightwalk 2"

"For the Unknown Seamen of the 1939-45 War Buried in Iona Churchyard"

"Envoi"
Q  For most of the poets in Scotland in this century, the major problem has been one of language, and for many of them the choice has been between English and Scots, but with you it's always been a choice between English and Gaelic. Which do you really prefer?

A  I prefer English, and I've been told by people who have read both my English work and also my Gaelic work that my English work is better. One of the difficulties with Gaelic is finding equivalents for the things that one wants to say in Gaelic. It's said that Sorley Maclean, the Gaelic poet, stopped writing partly because he couldn't do this, that he had reached a stage where he wanted to say certain things, and he found it difficult to say them in Gaelic. I don't see how this problem is going to be overcome at all. A thing I've been experimenting with is using English words in the Gaelic text, in order to give various shocks, setting the two languages one against the other; I've done that quite a bit; but I think there comes a point where Gaelic itself will then tend to become English. It's very very tricky. I find that my scope, my linguistic scope in English is probably wider, and it's easier to write in a certain way, though ideally, I suppose, it would have been better if, growing up where I have, it would have been better if the Gaelic language had been adequate enough for me to say the things I wanted to say.

Q  What about the audience for your writing in Gaelic - how many people
in Scotland today (a) understand Gaelic and (b) appreciate poetry?

A

The second part is very difficult to say. I think that very few people in Scotland have appreciated poetry at any time. As for those who understand Gaelic - well, I'd a book published some years ago, a book of Gaelic short stories. There were about five hundred copies, and they've all been sold out. But one of the markets for Gaelic work in Scotland is the schools, which is probably slightly different for English. You see, there are very few modern textbooks for schools in Gaelic, and I think if the work is not too complicated, and not immoral, schools are quite liable to take these books. Mind you, it's a very strange thing, there's a Gaelic magazine called Gairm, it's edited by Derick Thompson, who's the Professor of Celtic in Glasgow University, and it's been going for at least a dozen years, and shows no signs of cracking up whatsoever. When you compare this with equivalent Scottish magazines, there hasn't been, as far as I know, a Scottish magazine which has survived for so long; the New Saltire, the Saltire Review, and these various other ones have all collapsed; Lines Review I think has been going for some time but it's pretty erratic; but this magazine always comes out on time every quarter, and it's got quite a lot of good stuff in it, and it's definitely modernising Gaelic in every way. There have been articles on Kierkegaard and various other modern writers in it.

Q

What kind of interaction is there between your Gaelic and your
English poetry, either formally or thematically?

A Well, I don't know really if there is much. I can't very well judge myself, but I would say that probably there's a certain musical quality in my English poetry, which might arise from my Gaelic background and my reading in Gaelic, but I don't really know, I couldn't judge. There's certainly nothing conscious; I mean, I don't consciously, for instance, take Gaelic metres and try to adapt them in English, or the other way round. If there is an interaction, it's purely a subconscious one, I would think.

Q Do you continue the same themes in your Gaelic poetry as in the English?

A Yes, I think they're quite alike, because they both come from roughly the same environment - but sometimes I tend to experiment more with Gaelic than I do with English, because the field is wide open in Gaelic. You can practically do anything, because so little has been done, and therefore you get a very great sense of freedom. For instance, in some of the Gaelic short stories I did, there are some of them which are about concentration camps, and Jews, and nuclear war and things like that - things which I don't quite dare to do in English, but you can do it in Gaelic, you can try practically anything, because so few people have taken a particular thing and pushed it to its limits and exhausted it.

Q You mentioned your environment - how far is the environment of Oban,
Lewis, and the Western Highlands a determining influence in what you write?

A Oh, I think it's very strong.

Q Do you find it a limiting influence?

A I think there probably will come a time when I will, but it'll be very difficult to find out what to replace it by. I think one of the difficulties may not be so much the environment itself, that is the physical environment, but the kind of person one has become because of that environment. The change would have to be a purely psychological one, I think. I don't know whether this is possible. The kind of environment you're brought up in here is, I think, limited from an aesthetic point of view, from a psychological point of view. I think the ultimate determining thing is not the physical environment but what the environment has made of you before you've actually started writing.

Q You have summed up the themes of your work as dealing with contrasts, and trying to hold contrasts in harmony. How far are the contrasts that you have tried to present summed up in the titles of your books - The Law and the Grace or Thistles and Roses? And how far does that other title, Dear on the High Hills, succeed in producing a harmony for them?

A It's funny you should have noticed that, in fact I only noticed it
myself recently; the other funny thing is that this is reproduced in my Gaelic books as well. One of them is called "Bread and Water", and the other one is called "The Blue and the Black". And I can see now that is the sort of antithesis. That is what I've been trying to do. I've been trying to arrive at some kind of order; it'll be a sort of Hegelian thing, where you start off with two antithetical things and try and work out a thesis for them. But again I don't know how far this is conscious or not. The themes which I deal with from that point of view are old age - I've written quite a lot about old people - old age, youth, and inward passion and outward passion. I've also got quite a lot, I don't know why, Edwin Morgan noticed this when he was doing a long review on the stuff that I've done so far, he noticed that there was quite a lot in it, which I hadn't noticed, about geometrical things. For instance, there were quite a lot about geometrical order, there was one about yachts on a stormy day, where you get the sails of the yachts, which are made almost like something out of geometry, fighting against the storm - and this occurs in a very very early poem, so I think it's something that must be just deep in me. I don't know whether I can ever manage to create an absolute order which will hold the two things together, but then on the other hand I believe this is poetry, what poetry ought to be doing. I think that a good poem is one where you have energies from two sides, and if it succeeds, then it has succeeded in harmonizing the two conflicting forces. I think that's what Yeats does quite a lot, for instance in "Easter Rising" and some other poems like that. But I don't
know whether I will ever succeed in getting near to it.

Q How near success do you think you came in Deer on the High Hills?

A Well, Deer on the High Hills is a very strange poem, because I don't even know how I wrote it. Most of the other poems I've done, I've had quite a lot of intellectual control over them, but Deer on the High Hills was written in about ten days and - well, I was in school during the day, and I used to come home at night and I just used to write this down, it was almost as if it were actually dictated to me, I've never written a poem like this before. In fact, I don't understand Deer on the High Hills, I don't understand half of it myself, and I don't quite know how it got there or what it came from. I know the point of origin of it; some weeks before I was going along the road in a car and we saw a deer in the headlights, that had just come down to the road, and we passed it very quickly, but it was in the wintertime, and then some months after that I started writing this poem. I just don't understand how it was made, I had very little control over it, and it just started and then stopped, without my knowing why it had started or stopped.

Q When we were talking the other night, you were talking about poetry made out of ideas, and you were saying then that you preferred not to write poetry of ideas.

A Yes, I don't like writing poetry of ideas. The kind of poetry I
like, and the kind I would want to write, would be ones about human beings; it would be an existentialist poetry, not a mental kind of poetry. It would be completely about people, or about myself, possibly, in some kind of crisis or something like that; some kind of poem where the person is changed during the process of the writing of it. You see, when I was talking about that I was talking about MacDiarmid, and what I was trying to say was that if you take a poem like In Memoriam James Joyce, all you have at the end of it is just an additional bit of knowledge, that is to say, you've got an additional bit of mental knowledge, which you could get from a philosopher, or from a historian, but I don't think this is what poetry should be doing. One should feel, when one has written a good poem, when one has read a good poem, one should be changed by it. You could adapt Marx to this; he said that the main thing was not to consider the world, but to change it. A poem like "Easter Rising", which I think is a very good poem, operates in a dialectical way - like a lot of MacDiarmid's work. MacDiarmid also operates in a dialectical way; in a lot of his poems he sets out one set of structural ideas, and sets up another set, but they're not really resolved, because they remain on the level of the idea. But what happens in "Easter Rising" I think probably surprised Yeats himself; that is to say, I think that Yeats was a different man after he had written "Easter Rising" from what he was before he started writing it. I think it changed Yeats, the poem itself in the process of being written changed him. Whereas, in a lot of poetry of ideas, it's just a matter of additional knowledge, it's
not a matter of changing as a human being.

Q You've written a good many dramatic monologues. Is this the kind of thing that you want to do more of?

A Yes, I've done quite a few of these dramatic monologues, and they're mostly about people, people I like; but I'm not satisfied with very many of them, because a lot of them are just sort of historical analysis. But what I would like to do would be to write dramatic monologues in which I could see this sort of human change going on at a particular moment, or in which I would take someone who was like myself at a particular point, and see what happened to him and see if the same thing might happen to me.

Q This is the idea of the persona, of taking someone who is in some way an aspect of yourself.

A Yes. A person I'm fascinated with - I don't know why, I've often wondered why I should be fascinated with the man - is Kierkegaard. I think he was part artist and part moralist - well, perhaps not moralist, but one gets in Kierkegaard this stress between the artist in him and at the same time the spiritual or moralistic side of him - and I sometimes sense that there's something like that going on within myself: this moralistic Highland background, I'll have to break away from it, or be destroyed by it. And I think this is why I was talking about Lowell as well, because I sense this in
Lowell too. But Kierkegaard especially I'm fascinated by, and I've written a lot about him, I've written articles about him in Gaelic, and monologues about him in English, and I can't seem to get away from him at all.

At times in your poetry I seem to sense a sort of doubt about the whole business of writing poetry, as to whether it really is all that important.

I think probably I have said and done that. The doubt basically is that there's such a lot of poetry being written, and not very much of it can be very much good, and one often wonders whether one should write unless one is perfectly sure that one is really very good. I used to feel like that, there was a time when I couldn't see anyone who was really doing anything new, I mean the period before Lowell started writing, and it seemed that poetry had reached a dead end. But I've got a feeling now that Lowell has made it important again, that he's managed to make a breakthrough for everybody into a new kind of field. I've been very influenced recently by Lowell, and I shall probably be influenced by him until I can get rid of his influence, if I can eventually, or incorporate him. But I can see that in recent years there is this new breakthrough in poetry, and poetry can be made to be important. People listen to Lowell, they think he's saying something which is important, not just in poetry but, for instance, about Vietnam and things like that; he's writing about these in a very important way; and I think that men
of action even listen to him, which I think is important.

Q May I ask you about some of the particular images that appear in your poetry. You've described yourself as "late cold Roman", and the Romans and the Greeks pop their heads up every now and then. Which side of the Law and the Grace division do they come on?

A I've also been trying to work out why I use this Roman image, and I think part of it has to do with teaching, and part of it has to do with my Highland background. A teacher after all wears a gown and he looks like a Roman in a toga. I haven't seen very many people writing about schools; I write about schools partly because it's the thing I know a bit about, but there's also another reason, because I can see in a school the images of order and disorder. A school is a kind of society, it's a kind of crucible, where you can see the forces, the natural forces which are beating against the ordering forces, and I find this interesting to work out. This is the thing that I was doing partly in *The Law and the Grace*, I was taking Rome as an image for the order which was being imposed on a kind of chaos. Lowell in his last book, though I hadn't noticed this in Lowell till his last book, and I don't think he had it so consciously till then, was taking images from Rome and applying them to America; but I hadn't been thinking of it along these lines, I was thinking of it more as this business of order and disorder. It applies to everything you do, I mean, how much discipline does one need? And how much spontaneity does one need? It applies to
one's own poetry too, it applies all along the line; if you
discipline your own poetry too much you may be losing some of the
spontaneity, on the other hand if it becomes too spontaneous, without
discipline, it may become valueless.

Q Would your footballers work in here at all?

A Strangely enough, I saw the Celtic match, this match between Celtic
and Inter Milan, and I was trying to elaborate a theory of football
based on this. I was trying to work out what football was like.
And I tried first of all working out whether it was like chess, but
then I decided it wasn't; and then whether it was like drama, but
then I decided it wasn't like drama either because you never know
who wins at the end of a good play, but you always know who wins
at the end of a football game. And then I was trying to work out
whether it might be like a bad drama, like a Wild Western, where
you get the baddies and the goodies on one side; and then I decided
that it was probably closer to jazz, because, like jazz, it allows
for the instincts, and the spontaneity of the instincts, and yet
at the same time it orders the instincts in a particular way. And
it was also like jazz because I think football in Scotland is now
becoming a purely nationalistic thing, as it is doing in South America.
I find generally that football is a good image for order and disorder.

Q You certainly seem to have a fairly wide variety of influence: how
much influence has there been from the present Scottish Renaissance
poets, the other poets working in Scotland just now?

A I don't think I've been influenced by any of the Scottish poets at all. Of course, one of the things with me is that I don't consider myself really ... well, I can visualize a situation where I wouldn't have to think of myself as Scottish in the same sense as MacCaig and the others are Scottish, because I was brought up on an island in the Outer Hebrides, as Mhair and George Mackay Brown were out in the Orkneys, and I didn't really have any Scottish ... In school we only read English poetry, we never did any Scottish poetry, and my influences have been always far more English and possibly American in recent years than they have been Scottish. I admire people like Hugh MacDiarmid, and so on, but his best work was really in Lallans, and I don't understand ... well, I understand it, intellectually, when I look up the words in a dictionary and so on, but I've got no feeling for Lallans as such. I don't think I've ever been interested by any Scot, even in the past. I know vaguely a bit about Dunbar and Henryson and people like that, and a wee bit about Burns, but I don't consider them as being my ancestors in any particular way.

Q You mentioned detective stories: do they get into your poetry anywhere?

A No, not yet!
Q You've also written a good many short stories.

A Yes, a reasonable number, but I don't think that's ....

Q What about your Gaelic novel: do you see any future in writing an English novel?

A No, I don't think I could write an English novel. I have done one or two English short stories, but there was only one that I did which was probably rather like my poetry; it was a fairly long one, it was called 'The Red and the Black' or 'The Black and the Red' or something. This is a very funny thing, I had done it in Gaelic before, but then I didn't do just ... You were asking about interaction before, and this is possibly a point that might interest you - when I write a Gaelic short story, sometimes later on I write an English short story on the same theme, but very often it's not a translation, very often I have to change it, even if I start off with the same thing, in exactly the same situation, the ending which might be psychologically right for the English is not right for the Gaelic. It's very very odd that, and even that 'Red and the Black' one, which I'd done, I had to change considerably. It was just that the genius of the language, or whatever it was, can put up with certain things but won't put up with other things.

Q You've written a good deal about the war. Why is this?
Yes. This is the First World War?

Yes. I was thinking of short stories like *The Angel of Mons*.

That again, I think, is because I'm obsessed by extreme situations, and human beings in extreme situations. The First World War of course is very fascinating from that point of view. I think a lot of people have done this recently, Hughes has done some about the First World War as well. It's possibly because for a while it was a fashion, there was a fashionable element in it; but I've always been fascinated by that war, the sort of general chaos and lack of order about it, and the image ... I often think of the First World War as a lot of people splashing about in the mud in a very chaotic way, and then you have these planes flying above in a very geometrical way and all looking down on everything that is going on. And I think this also comes out in *The Angel of Mons*, the angel representing some kind of order, trying to impose it on this general chaos.

You've spoken today and the last time we met we talked a great deal about Robert Lowell. Could you try to sum up precisely what it is in Lowell that you most admire and in what ways you think he's going to be affecting your poetry over the next few years?

Well, first of all of course the thing that I admire about him is his use of language. I don't think there's anyone writing at
present who charges words with the same power that he does; I
just don't know how he does it, there's a terrific energy and charge
in all his work. I don't think I could be able to do this, because
Lowell happens to be living in a place which is now on the frontiers
of human consciousness, and I think he knows this, and therefore he
can use it. America of course is at the frontiers of conscious­
ness at the moment more than Britain, and certainly Scotland, is.
That's the first thing I like about him, his power of energising
language. Another thing I like about him is that, though he has
this power of seeing things in a very powerful, almost raw way, as
if they were completely new, yet at the same time he fits them into
a ... He's a very scholarly man; a lot of people imitate Lowell, but
I don't think they quite realise that when they're writing rawly
from experience, this isn't really Lowell. There is a very definite
order behind Lowell's work; he knows a lot about the past, and
he's obviously trying to fit the present into the past in a way that
many imitators don't do. The other thing I like about him is his
complete apparent open-ness to experience; he seems to be willing -
I don't think I could do this, certainly not to the same extent as
he does - he seems to leave himself wide open to experience, almost
unprotected, almost to allow experience to overwhelm him. I think
very few people have the nerve to do this now, and certainly very
few people in a place like New York. I think that combination of
rawness and open-ness to experience and at the same time the fitting
of what he sees into a kind of order, is what I admire in him.
It's the thing I would like to be able to do myself, but I don't
know whether I shall be able to do it, and Scotland probably won't allow me to do it. It's too provincial, really; if Scotland were somewhere at the frontiers, one might be able to do something with it.
EDWIN MORGAN

May 30th, 1967

Glasgow

(The reading took place on May 31st.)
Do you consider yourself a part of the Scottish Renaissance?

Well, I think this term is one that now is rather difficult to define. In the strict sense of it, as a historical movement, I don't really regard myself as being a part of it. But the word is of course used much more widely and generally now, as you can see in the Second Edition of Maurice Lindsay's *Modern Scottish Poetry*, which he still calls "An Anthology of the Scottish Renaissance", although it comes right down to the 1960s and includes people who wouldn't, quite certainly, regard themselves as being a part of the movement. But in the general sense of, I suppose, a new direction, a revival of Scottish poetry in the 20th century, this, I think, does spill over from what was happening in the '20s, and naturally anyone who comes after this has some relation to it.

How would you define the "Scottish Renaissance" in the more limited sense, in the sense that you're not part of it?

Insofar as it had as a main plank in its platform the use of Scots, I wouldn't regard this as being an essential part of my work. I don't use Scots in a straight way, in straight poems; I have used it on occasion, but generally for some special use, that is to say in a poem which involves Scottish characters speaking, where the dialogue comes in, and I rather like doing this. I use Scots for that, and I've used it a good deal in translation, where it seems you can get certain effects that come more naturally from Scots than
from English - in, for example, translating some of the Russian poetry of Mayakovsky. I find it difficult to do this in English, and much easier in Scots, for reasons that are quite interesting. On the one hand, the use of Scots there, just because it is fluid and flexible, enables you to work very inventively within language, as some poets like Mayakovsky have done; and also, you're able to draw on a certain Scottish tradition, which was similar to the kind of poetry he was writing, certain kinds of fantasy and the grotesque and so on, which come more easily in Scots, I think, than in English. But the great difficulty about using Scots is just that things like that - fantasy, grotesque, the comic - are so strong that it becomes very difficult to produce a full range of serious effects. I accept and enjoy a good deal of the poetry that has been written in Scots in the Scottish Renaissance, but I haven't found it possible to write directly in Scots myself.

Q You spoke about Scottish traditions. How far do you think the Scottish Renaissance can be fitted into a more general pattern of Scottish poetry?

A I think various things do link it to the poetry of the past. In fact, it's sometimes been said that it is too much linked to the Scottish past, and that it has not been sufficiently aware of the general trends in 20th century poetry elsewhere. I don't think this is entirely true, though Hugh MacDiarmid himself may perhaps give people reasons for thinking along those lines. I think that what he
saw himself as doing was something to do with Scottish Literature and Scottish Poetry, and of course slogans like "Not Burns - Dunbar" and so on do mean you to cast an eye back into the past. But I think MacDiarmid too, more than he knew, was doing things that were at least parallel to what poets were doing elsewhere in England and America. He of course has had very few kind words to say about modern English poetry, but I think he probably was more influenced than he thought he was, and I think that there are many signs of this in his own poetry. So it's partly a 20th century poetry, but not perhaps very strongly. But it does bear relations to various things: MacDiarmid's interest in earlier Scottish poetry of the mediaeval period, his interest in Burns (although it's a very ambiguous interest), his interest in ballad forms, his use of ballad forms in many of his early poems - I think all this does link up, and also the thing that I mentioned earlier, his fondness, the general fondness for satire and the grotesque and so on - this is very much a Scottish thing, which we find in MacDiarmid and Sydney Goodsir Smith too, and I think there are certainly links there.

Q Burns stood as the culmination of a tradition, and one result was that after him for almost a hundred years no younger poets seemed to be able to get out from under his shadow. Now this hasn't happened with MacDiarmid - can you suggest any reasons why this should be?

A You mean it hasn't happened yet - MacDiarmid is still alive and writing - I'm not quite sure exactly what the question is there...
What I mean is that Burns so dominated the ideas of Scottish poetry that any kind of originality seemed to be dead after him, whereas MacDiarmid has been followed by a whole flood of younger poets.

Yes ... though I don't think in the sense of having had a direct influence from his main ideas. The surprising thing about MacDiarmid is that his ideas have not had the influence he's wanted them to have. Certain ways of writing perhaps, as far as the use of Scots is concerned - that has been copied by many people; but the central MacDiarmid thing is very peculiar and idiosyncratic, very individual and eccentric in fact; and this has not been followed. I would regard myself as one of the few people who are really interested in the central ideas in MacDiarmid.

Which are?

Well, his interest in Evolution, especially evolution in the whole human species, over long periods of time; and also, of course, the smaller evolution in human societies. This wide sweep of his mind is the thing which interests me tremendously. And this has not on the whole made a very great impact; partly because it comes mostly in his later poetry, and people have not on the whole been so kind to his later poetry as to his early ones. The early lyrics are very good, and I suppose that they are generally regarded, even yet, as being the best part of his work, but I've always found a great interest in the longer, later poems.
Q What about MacDiarmid's political views? It seems that so many of the major poets in this century, such as Eliot and Pound, have also had political views which were eccentric or individual. Do you see anything significant in this political orientation of so much modern poetry?

A It's a very political time, these things are very nearly inescapable: even Edwin Muir, who was perhaps in a sense the man who was least likely to be affected by things like that, was, in his own way, strongly political, more strongly than most of his commentators make out, I think, in writing about his poetry. I think this is inevitable, given the period; it is quite simply reflecting the period. And the ambiguity of MacDiarmid's own political views, I think, is also a reflection of the period - the strange way in which, as a Communist poet, he at times almost seems to be very nearly the opposite, almost seems to be a man of the extreme right. But I think that although many of the other poets of the time have not perhaps been able to express these ideas terribly well in poetry, or expressed it in ways that have only perhaps roused opposition, as in the case of Ezra Pound, I think MacDiarmid is one of the few who have been able to quite successfully write a genuine political poetry, as in the Hymns to Lenin, which I think at their best are extremely good and are doing a very very difficult thing indeed. No, I don't myself find this surprising; I find it surprising in a way that there hasn't been much more really effective political poetry, especially perhaps political satire, in the 20th century.
Q How many of the followers of MacDiarmid, such as Alan Bold, would
you regard as writing political poetry to any successful extent?

A Well, Alan Bold is the most direct successor to MacDiarmid in that
line. I take it that his main, not perhaps his whole aim, but
obviously a large part of his aim, is to write a politically
orientated poetry, and he's obviously committed in the sense that
MacDiarmid was. In that he's probably different from Sydney Goodsir
Smith, who did in his earlier days write a much more direct political
poetry, but has rather gone off that in recent times. I think
that this is something which is always liable to recur in our time,
and perhaps even more in Scotland, where there is, after all, a
tradition of that in Burns as well. Although people think of Burns
as being a lyrical poet, he was very much a political poet too.

Q Do you regard yourself as a political poet?

A Not, I think, very directly. I feel these things, often very
strongly, but I haven't often written about them in poetry, and I find
it difficult to do so. I don't know what the reasons for this are,
exactly. I think I would regard quite a lot of my poetry as being
in a sense political, though it's not directly so, and occasionally
when it is direct I'm not sure whether it comes off or not. I
think you read the poem called "Starryveldt", which is about a
situation in South Africa. In a sense it is perhaps too easy to
write a poem of that kind, to have reactions to things which are very
far away, and one is almost ashamed of writing about them at all; and yet the impulse is there, and one tries to do what one can. But I find it on the whole not easy to write poetry of this kind.

Q What adjective would you apply to your own work?

A I don't know at all. It's very hard to do it in terms of adjectives. The first one that comes into my mind is "exploratory" but that's not a very good term I don't think at all. Something to do with feeling, I think of it as being a poetry of feeling, and I think feeling is important in poetry. I'm also very much interested in trying to write a kind of poetry of everyday things, but which will reverberate, a reverberating poetry of everyday events, which is often very difficult to write, because what you want to do is to write fairly directly about things that you see happening, or you feel happening, without erecting them, as it were, into symbols, without intellectualising them very much, and the risk is that the poetry will become too simple. I've taken various risks in recent years with simple poetry, which I'm very much interested in.

Q Would this be a point of continuity into concrete poetry?

A It might be, though I don't think I regard it myself as being this. Certainly some concrete poetry is simple, and this is sometimes brought forward as an objection against it, that it's too simple, and you get the point too quickly, and therefore it vanishes. But
with me - no, possibly the interest I have in concrete poetry is more the opposite, that it seems to fulfil a kind of necessity that I've always felt. I've got a tremendous interest in language, and linguistic effects, word-play and so on, and before concrete poetry I was interested in people like James Joyce and wrote some poems in a kind of James Joyce style. When concrete poetry came up, when I first came across it, I seized on this as another possibility of expressing a part of me that wasn't getting expressed in the ordinary, straightforward, syntactical poetry - the part that is interested in language, word-play, linguistic effects and things of this kind. So that with me it can often be quite a complex kind of poetry, though I nearly always try to give it links with some kind of simple point of wit or humour. Each of the concrete poems I write generally has a point of wit, or irony, or something of this kind, which does, I think, hold it together.

Q The charge most often brought against concrete poetry is that it is simply whimsical: how far do you think this is justified?

A I don't think it's justified, except in the sense that some concrete poetry is whimsical, and obviously there's concrete poetry and concrete poetry. Once you've read a lot of it, or seen a lot of it, you begin to distinguish, and I think some of it is, quite simply, not to be taken seriously; but at its best I think it's very far from being merely whimsical; I think it can in fact reach effects which are not to be reached in any other way at all, effects that are often
extremely beautiful from a formal point of view, and at other times can be extremely interesting from a witty point of view.

Q One of the things which seems strange to me about this is that a lot of concrete poetry depends upon puns, or re-arrangements of letters of words within one language: yet it works on an international level. I have heard Ernst Jandl reading his poems out of German to the Albert Hall audience and being received quite rapturously. Can you see any reconciliation between the way that it depends so exclusively on one language and yet can be translated?

A Well, going back to its origins, it has been an international movement all along; it began by personal contact and passing of letters and meetings and so on between poets in South America and Brazil and Switzerland. And this international thing has gone on all the way through. I think it's got something to do with a feeling that there are elements in all languages which do in fact cut across national boundaries, and although any one particular poet, such as Ernst Jandl may be using - well, in his case he's using not only German but Austrian German, he writes dialect poems which are very native and local indeed - but he's also got a very strong feeling for other languages. I think it may just be that concrete poets do have this linguistic consciousness, that there's been a great deal of contact among them, a great deal of travelling about for example, and a great deal of translation too of these poems from one language to another. Quite a few of these
poets write in various languages: Eugen Gomringer, the Swiss poet, writes in English and French as well as in German; I myself have translated poems from various languages into English. I think maybe it's just the general feeling - it may be something to do with the stage of languages - the feeling that something international can be done in language, that language can be drawn together in this kind of way. In this sense it does link up with Joyce, although it's doing a different kind of thing from what Joyce was doing, it does link with him to some extent, I think.

Q Do you see any reason in the Scots character or tradition why concrete poetry should have been more effective in Scotland than in England?

A It may be part of the Scottish interest in language and translation, which of course goes pretty far back. I think maybe it's another instance of this way in which, when you have a country which isn't fully a country, you have a kind of uncertainty about what your language is. Of course everyone in a sense speaks English and most people write English, and one admits this, but at the same time there's the consciousness of other things in the background, such as Scots and Gaelic, which are still there. And a great deal of translation has still gone on among Scottish poets, Robert Garioch for example, in the 20th century, MacDiarmid himself, and I've done quite a bit of it. And this seems to be something that is a part of this whole situation of trying to define one's own language,
one's own identity, one's own country.

Q The idea of translation is, as you say, very much a part of the Scots tradition, but is also, with the work of Pound and so on, very much a part of the 20th century tradition.

A Yes, I think in a wider sense it probably is. I don't know how far this is true of people like MacDiarmid - I don't think he's been particularly interested in Pound and what Pound has done, although I'm not sure about this - in my case certainly it is true, I have been interested in this for a long time. I think it has something to do with the whole idea of building up one's language and one's expressive medium in Scotland, but also I think it is a part of this far wider thing that was going on in the early 20th century, of just reactivating the whole language of poetry by whatever means. You would do it partly by getting interested in poetry of some past period, like 17th century poetry in Eliot, or you would go to some other country, like Eliot going to Laforgue, in French poetry, or in the case of Pound you would go to other languages or countries like Anglo-Saxon poetry, or Latin and Chinese and so on - but with an aim in the end of not being primarily interested in, say, the Seafarer or Propertius or Li Po, but of doing something with your own expressive medium, doing something with American English. And I think this has been pretty widely felt by Scottish poets as by other poets.
How would it work out in your own case, how much has the translation that you've done affected your own poetry?

Well, this is hard to say just in so many words. It must have affected me quite a bit, just because I do know a good deal of foreign poetry and a lot of it I've liked a lot. I suppose Mayakovsky, in Russia, and Apollinaire in France especially, I've been very interested in, and I dare say there has been an influence, but I don't know how far it can be actually traced. But I find that when I know a language and get to know some poet, there's a curious process of wild enthusiasm ensues, and you want to do something about it. Partly what I want to do about it, I suppose, is just to tell people, and therefore I translate this poetry and try to get it published and say, Well, here's an interesting poet, see what you can get from him. That is not perhaps a direct influence on me, it's just that it expresses my own enthusiasm for this poet, but I dare say that in the process of understanding and writing about and translating these poets, something must come across into one's own style. But it's a question of the hen and the egg, it's hard to say whether I go to Mayakovsky because he gives me something new, or whether I go to Mayakovsky because there's something there already that is similar, you know, between us, and that I just feel whenever I see his work.

Would you care to venture on the tricky ground of prediction - what's going to happen in Scottish poetry over the next few years?
It's very difficult to prophesy in Scotland, anything could happen, it's a very open situation. Poetry in Scots of course is not written so much now as it used to be, but there are still some of the young poets writing in Scots, and Robert Garioch is still writing of course, and writing very well, probably the best writer of Scots now. This might continue, but I would think that it would be not a very large part of Scottish poetry; but again, it's very hard to tell, one can never be sure that some young poet will not arise who would in fact write very well in Scots, even yet. But on the whole I think this is not terribly likely to happen, I think it probably will be in English. I think that there will be seen different influences at work on Scottish poetry from the ones that have been most obvious so far. I think you can see this to some extent in some of the younger writers like Robert Tait and Colin Kirkwood being influenced partly by certain kinds of American poetry, such as the poems of Robert Creeley, who is beginning to be an influence now; and also, an influence from the whole kind of William Burroughs and Marshall Macluhan area of thinking, in which there is an attempt to break up and rearrange language in ways that are more in keeping with what Macluhan regards as our visual or televisual age. I think Robert Tait is very interesting in this respect, and that his poetry already shows the influence of this. This is something which would bring in, clearly, influences that have no obvious relation to anything that goes before in the Scottish tradition, but they are beginning, they are there, and it's very interesting to see just what the impact of these ideas would
eventually produce.

**Reading.**

Another area of writing that has interested me a good deal is Science Fiction. I've been interested in Science Fiction for a long time in the ordinary sense of the term, that is to say short stories dealing with imaginary or fantastic scientific situations, but I've also regarded it as a kind of challenge to the poet, and tried to write serious poetry on Science Fiction themes. This, I think, especially after the first Sputnik went up, and the prospect of space travel became a possible thing. I've had poems about space travel and also about time travel. I've got very interested in this whole area of scientific exploration, not only in the possibility of actual exploration of space but in the background things like the computer and the possibility of the impact of the computer on the arts. I have written imaginary computer poems, and things of that kind, but I would regard this perhaps as less serious than the poems dealing with the exploration of space or time, and I thought that if I'm reading a few poems I might begin by one poem which is in fact on a time theme. It's called "From the Domain of Arnheim" and is meant to explore, not in an entirely clear way, there should be some mystery about it, the idea of different time scales, and what happens if two of these time scales did at some point intersect, and people met from different time systems.

"From the Domain of Arnheim"

I've one or two other poems here to read. The first of them, one
called "Trio", is one of a number of poems I've been writing about the city, about Glasgow, the city that I have lived in most of my life; many of these poems dealing fairly directly with events in everyday life, but trying to make them in some kind of way resound. This one is a winter poem, descriptive of the period round about Christmas, and just about something seen at that time.

"Trio"

Then I would like to read one poem on an American theme; I have a poem here about the death of Hemingway, which is called "The Old Man and the Sea"

"The Old Man and the Sea"

And I thought I would read one of the concrete poems. Most concrete poems can't be read aloud, but the one that I referred to, called "Starryveldt", is one that can, since it depends not just on the typographical arrangement of the words on the page, but is in fact intended to produce a certain dramatic effect of .. menace, mainly, which means that it can be read aloud. This is the poem called "Starryveldt", which was written about the massacre at Sharpeville in South Africa.

"Starryveldt"

Here is one other poem; this again is something different, and I don't think it needs any commentary really; it is just a series of autobiographical statements, and it's called "A View of Things". It's perhaps halfway between ordinary and concrete poetry.

"A View of Things"
This is not really an "interview": Stewart Conn simply read some of his poems, interspersing comments about himself and his poetry.
"Todd"

That poem, called "Todd", I think probably is very indicative of the kind of work that I've concentrated on trying to do for a long time. It's set on a farm, it happened that it was a particular farm in Ayrshire; although I was born in Glasgow, my father moved to Ayrshire when we were about four, and I was brought up in Ayrshire with the farm accessible. I find now probably a very natural tendency to identify the farm with my own childhood. The farm was sold, it's now inaccessible in the same way as childhood's inaccessible: this seems a very direct parallel, and a very natural use of the imagery, with the sense of loss very often coming into the poems. I wrote a lot of purely descriptive poems, became increasingly dissatisfied with these, and it was at that stage, I think, that the landscape began to be peopled by - not realistic copies of real people, of relations - but slight enlargements of them. There have been a number of poems about this man Todd, one particular sequence in Thunder in the Air, which I suppose resurrects them. To me, he represents not just the old bony man with the white hair, the Old Testament prophet figure, which I remember: he represents, I think, probably a whole way of life, something with a richness that increasing technology, mechanization presses into the ground: certainly a kind of man not nearly so common, certainly not as common in his environment now as he was at the time.

In my work I've found very often a difficulty, an internal difficulty, in expressing thoughts, or deciding whether to express thoughts in poetry or in plays. I tried for some time writing either monologue poems, dialogue poems: the next two that I'll read came out of this slightly more dramatic presentation than the poems that dealt just with landscape.
"Clown"

"Elephant Girl"

More and more I found that the poems which were beginning as monologue pieces were either deviating, moving away from poetry and starting off ideas for plays or grouping together and forming scenes from plays. More and more I found that I was getting back to the natural imagery, the farm imagery, the farm background, the farm memories, with little incidents now coming to the surface again in the memory, very often with some violence included, and I think there's probably been some development or a gaining momentum in the relationship of violence to the poems that I've been writing, apart from one or two obvious, very crude poems about Vietnam or about road accidents which I think were complete failures because they blatantly and consciously attempted to cope with an immediate situation on a newspaper level. I found violence - not motivated human malevolent cruelty but simply natural violence, necessary acts of bitterness, not bitterness at all, in fact, because that's motivated - but acts of violence coming into more and more poems. One is called

"Ferret"

Eventually the violence in the poems wasn't any longer a natural animal violence - some poems about hawks killing mice, foxes killing rabbits - eventually people became involved, and I think that the poems started using the same kind of natural imagery as the farm poems had used in the past but were using it for a different purpose, with a definite point to make. As for instance in this poem, called

"Ambush"

A lot of the work that I've done since that one, which was written I think
probably eighteen months or two years ago, a lot of the work since then has been in plays. Apart from the Glasgow one, which was I think getting an emotional obligation out of my system, so far as writing a play set in Glasgow was concerned; apart from that, there's been one called The King which deals basically with a man who in the pub has claimed that he has almost mystic powers over flowers, in order to get a job; he's taken in and he's held to answer for what he's said. The play exists on a superficial melodramatic level, there's tension built up, the householder and his wife appear, gain possession of the gardener, and then cruelty enters into it. At the end, the play was meant to be very moving, to illustrate the tragedy of forcing other people to fit into your own conception of things, in other words, of using other people. And I found it very difficult, after writing a contemporary play of this kind, getting back to writing poetry at all. The pure landscape poems and farm poems didn't satisfy me at all; I wrote a lot on literary themes, one or two on Shakespearean themes, one or two on Rimbaud, Strindberg, Ibsen: all, I think, men linked - a dual link, either in attitude to women (one about John Knox as well) but also repressed violence in them, and also illness, a lot of poems about illness, not the psychological approach, like, I suppose, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, but a physical approach to illness and pain. This fitted in, I think, with the Todd poems, the Todd sequence in Thunder in the Air, where he is dead and the poem, as well as resurrecting, is constantly reminding the reader, I hope, that he is dead. Mortality - I went through a spell of reading John Donne again, very concerned with mortality. Again - the pure business of newspaper headlines, international headlines, and, I think, the frightening thing that in
Scotland we still are so rarified that these headlines go right past us
and hit the wall behind us and we're preoccupied, or the climate round us
is preoccupied with irrelevancies that are blown up into ludicrous
proportions. I feel very aware of this, the energy that's dissipated in
writing to the newspapers, the small issues that are given banner headlines,
the concern in Scotland of creative and critical circles overlapping really
to no purpose. I was aware of this, I was part of this and can't criticize
it because I am part of it, but I think that it does present every writer
with something that he must somehow resolve. I find Scottish speech
rhythms natural to me, I don't use consciously Scottish vocabulary because
I speak, I use words that are in the Oxford English Dictionary. My
background was in Scotland, although a farm background's universal, a farm
can be in Scotland, Ireland, Canada, anywhere. What I therefore had to
try to do was, or felt I had to do, was to adapt my poetic style: because
I found that anything I wanted to say seriously was automatically coming
out in the form of a play. And I was very aware of failing to cope in
my poetry with things which were either disturbing or influencing or
affecting me as a person, as somebody reading the newspapers, knowing
what's going on in the world round about. I became very conscious of the
formal rhyme and rhythm of my poems. I didn't want to go to the opposite
free verse extreme of hacking lines into very sharp jagged shapes; didn't
want to use what I still very much think of as gimmickry, I don't find it
natural to think in terms of writing concrete poetry or experimenting from
a typographical point of view on the page. This meant that somehow, if I
was going to be able to go on writing poetry, I had to work out a form which
I felt could cope with the thoughts I was having. This next poem is
probably more an indication of struggle than a poem in its own right: in fact its present title is "A Struggle Towards Elegy", which is in itself probably an indication of weakness. I think what the poem's trying to say is there are things which, if the poet isn't going to become purely art for art's sake and purely living in an ivory tower, he must recognize and circumscribe in what he's writing. At the same time the poems's making the point how—and this the instance it takes—how, for instance, do you write in this day and age a formal elegy of the length of Adonais or Lycidas, how do you write an elegy in nice perfect iambics or quatrains and perfect rhyme-schemes when Death nowadays isn't the kind of slow anticipated thing that it so often was in the past. What sparked this poem off, I imagine, I can comment no more validly now myself than anybody else can now that the poem's in existence, but I think it was brought to a head by reading of the death of Jayne Mansfield in a rather horrible car accident. This affected me considerably, her beauty, the nature of the accident, the speed of it, and the fact that like this (finger-snap) the news of it was round the world, because of radio, television, what have you. So that this "Struggle Towards Elegy" is probably a personal fight at answering a problem rather than a finished poem in itself. But it does indicate the direction that I'm aware of having to go in; I think I'd probably like to read it, especially after having done the others. It was originally much longer than this, the process of writing it was rather grisly, it was like sitting typing inside a bottle of tomato ketchup. But it's now boiled down to seven very short, untitled sections.

"A Struggle Towards Elegy"
I think probably that the mid-point between the Todd poems which are part elegy and part celebration for somebody based on somebody that I did have experience of - the mid-point between that and "A Struggle Towards Elegy", which is really an elegy for people completely unknown, is this "Rimbaud at Harar" poem, in three sections, monologue, introduced by a couplet from Milton.

"Rimbaud at Harar"
Footnotes

PART ONE: HUGH MACDIARMID

1. The abbreviations used for the titles of all works by MacDiarmid quoted in this dissertation will be found in the Bibliography. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from MacDiarmid's poetry are from the second edition of the Collected Poems.


5. See G, pp.73 ff.


9. Quotations from my interviews with Maurice Lindsay and Robert Garioch. See Bibliography, under "Interviews", and also Appendix page 377.
10. From a review quoted in PW.


18. Appendix, p.361


22. Quotation from my interview with Douglas Young. See
Bibliography, under "Interviews."


25. Ibid., p.228.

26. Appendix, p. 419


PART TWO
INTRODUCTION


SYDNEY GOODSIR SMITH

1. See above, p.72

2. Edinburgh: Serif Books, 1951. See Bibliography for the abbreviations used in citing Goodsir Smith's other works.


4. Ibid., p.86.

5. This stanza is taken from Ewan MacColl's singing of "Waly Waly", on Folkways Records, FW 8755.
6. A recording of Sydney Goodsir Smith reading his own work is available on *The Poet Speaks*, record nine, Argo, RG 519.


13. This poem has not yet to my knowledge been published. I have a MS copy from Goodsir Smith himself.

ROBERT GARIOCH

1. Appendix, p.388

2. See Bibliography for the abbreviations used in citing Garioch's works.

3. *Lines Review*, No. 23 (1967), pp.8-15. All quotations from D.M. Black in this section are taken from this article.

Goodsir Smith, George Mackay Brown, Ian Hamilton Finlay (wrongly spelt "Iain"), and Iain Crichton Smith; but no Robert Garioch. Garioch also gets short shrift in George Bruce's anthology of The Scottish Literary Revival (London, 1968), which includes only four of the less well-known Edinburgh sonnets.

5. Appendix, p.379-80

6. Appendix, p.385

7. Appendix, p.380-1

8. Appendix, p.385-6

9. Appendix, p.382

10. Appendix, p.383


12. Appendix, p.388-9

13. By the Scottish Renaissance Society of Edinburgh University. See also Garioch's account of a reading in London, Appendix, p.384

NORMAN MACCAIG

1. Akros, Vol.3 No.7 (March, 1968), p.21. This was a special issue of Akros for MacCaig, and is referred to as A in the footnotes to this section. References to MacCaig's own works use the abbreviations indicated in the Bibliography.

2. Appendix, p.394-5

3. A, 11-17.
4. Appendix, p. 402


6. Appendix, p. 396


10. Appendix, p. 398

11. Appendix, p. 399


13. Appendix, p. 399


15. Appendix, p. 400


17. Cf. the line "That's no tree but a way of feeling," in the poem "Lies for Comfort" (SS 8).

18. Appendix, p. 398-9

19. From the poem "No End, No Beginning", published in Scottish


21. Appendix, p.400-1

IAIN CRICHTON SMITH

1. Appendix, p.415

2. See Bibliography for the abbreviations used in citing Crichton Smith's works.


4. Appendix, p.416

5. Appendix, p.427


7. Appendix, p.421-2


9. The section of this dissertation which deals with In Memoriam James Joyce should make clear my grounds for disagreeing with Crichton Smith's evaluation of the poem.

10. Appendix, p.418-9
PART THREE
INTRODUCTION

1. A selected bibliography of works by Alan Jackson, and by the other poets mentioned in this introduction, is included in the Bibliography.


4. Interview with Maurice Lindsay. See Bibliography.


**CONCRETE POETRY**

1. This diagram was prepared by Mr. Michael Rhodes and myself in connection with an exhibition of concrete poetry at the Fine Arts Gallery of the University of British Columbia, March 1969. However, the classification of concrete poetry by these three main orientations is commonplace, and we lay no great claims for the originality of our diagram.

2. Robert Tait, "The Concreteness of a Wild Hawthorn," *Extra Verse*, No. 15 (Spring 1965), p.2. This was a special number for Ian Hamilton Finlay, and was called "A Fushschrift" rather than a "Festschrift."


10. This quotation is taken from an essay by Finlay in a special issue of Image, 1965. It is quoted by M.L. Rosenthal in The New Poets (New York, 1967), pp.206-7. The section of this book on Finlay is good, but limited by the fact that it deals only with the works up to Telegrams from my Windmill.

11. Houedard, p.50.


13. Finlay, letter to Garnier.

14. Eugen Gomringer, "From Line to Constellation." This manifesto was first printed in Augenblick No. 2 (Baden-Baden, 1954), and was translated by Mike Weaver in Image (December 1964). It was reissued, along with six poems on postcards, by the School of Graphics, Chelsea School of Art, in connection with the Brighton Festival of 1967.


17. Finlay, letter to Garnier.


EDWIN MORGAN


2. See Bibliography for the abbreviations used in citing Morgan's works.


4. Williams. The pages of this anthology are unnumbered, but the book is arranged alphabetically by authors.

IAN HAMILTON FINLAY


2. Interview with Maurice Lindsay. See Bibliography, under "Interviews."


5. Probably the longest concrete poem is Emmett Williams' *Sweethearts* (New York: Something Else Press, 1967), which is over 200 pages in length.


7. Finlay, letter to Garnier.


10. Lucie-Smith, pp.44-45.

11. The exact footnoting of Finlay's works is very difficult, since many poems appear in several different forms, or are issued singly as volumes in themselves. In general, I shall footnote only poems whose source is not clear from the text and the Bibliography, as in the case of "au pair girl" itself, which appears in (among other places) *Telegrams from my Windmill*. The Bibliography also indicates such abbreviations as are used for Finlay's work.


13. Houedard, p.60.

14. Finlay, letter to Garnier


17. BudNeill was a cartoonist for the Glasgow Evening Times, in which he occasionally published small verses in Glasgow dialect.

18. This poem was published in 1962, but I have been unable to trace its exact source.


22. The "Homage to Malevich" first appeared in Rapel, but a new form of the text may be found in Concrete Poetry: An International Anthology, ed. Stephen Bann (London, 1967), p.141. Bann's introduction to this anthology contains (p.21) some interesting comments on this poem.

23. The "one-word poems" all appear in POTH 25, except for "Scotch Daisy", which appears in Tarasque No.9.

24. The best text of this poem will be found in Stephen Bann's anthology, pp.85-95.


26. Quoted by Houedard, p.60.

27. R.L. Williamson Studios, Edinburgh.

28. Stephen Bann, "Ian Hamilton Finlay's 'Ocean Stripe 5',"

29. Finlay, as quoted in Bann's article, p.52.


32. This is Finlay's comment on his own poem, published in Form, No. 3 (December 1966), p.15.

33. These poems have appeared, among other places, in POTH 15, and Lines Review, No. 23 (1967).

34. These poems have been published both in POTH 25 and in Stonechats.

35. See note 20, above.

36. See note 20, above.

37. Houedard, p.61.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Part I of this bibliography aims at completeness within the limits stated; Part II is selective. But for a more authoritative bibliography of Hugh MacDiarmid, the reader is referred to Duncan Glen's Hugh MacDiarmid and the Scottish Renaissance. A bibliography of Ian Hamilton Finlay presents unique difficulties, considering the various different media in which his works have been realised. I have attempted to give a complete list of his publications in book, pamphlet, or poster form; but this does not account for the construction poems, nor for such facts as that the poem "acrobats" was written in 1963, but appears in this bibliography only under the poster of it issued by Tarasque Press in 1968. The bibliography also indicates the abbreviations used to refer to books in the text.

Part I: Primary Sources

(a) Unpublished.

1. Letters containing material of critical interest.

   August 4th, 1967.
   November 1st, 1967.
   March 26th, 1968.
   June 1st, 1968.
   August 28th, 1968.
   November 12th, 1968.
November 30th, 1968.

January 14th, 1969.

Morgan, Edwin.

August 1st, 1968.

Scott, Tom.


Smith, Sydney Good sir.

August 20th, 1967.

All the above letters are in my possession.

2. Unpublished poems.

Conn, Stewart.

"Sisyphus Sequence."

"Farm Funeral."

"On Craigie Hill."

"Charm."

"The Visit."

"The Encampment."

"How to be a Poet?"

Morgan, Edwin.

"Brighton Festival Permutational Poem."

Smith, Sydney Good sir.

"Winter."

3. Interviews.

During the summer of 1967, I taped interviews with the following poets. Copies of all the tapes are available from the Library of the University of British Columbia. Interviews marked * are transcribed in the Appendix.

Bruce, George.

*Conn, Stewart.

*Garioch, Robert.

Lindsay, Maurice.

*MacCaig, Norman.

*MacDiarmid, Hugh.

*Morgan, Edwin.

*Smith, Iain Crichton.

Young, Douglas.
4. Addresses.

George Mackay Brown,
6 Well Park,
Stromness,
Orkney.

George Bruce,
25 Warriston Crescent,
Edinburgh.

Stewart Conn,
3 Hamilton Drive,
Glasgow W2.

Ian Hamilton Finlay,
Stonypath,
Dunyre,
Lanarkshire.

Robert Garioch,
4 Nelson Street,
Edinburgh 3.

Maurice Lindsay,
11 Great Western Terrace,
Glasgow.

Norman MacCaig,
7 Leamington Terrace,
Edinburgh 10.
Hugh MacDiarmid,
Brownsbank,
Candymill,
Biggar,
Lanarkshire.

Edwin Morgan,
19 Whittinghame Court,
Glasgow W2.

Tom Scott,
12 St. Vincent Street,
Edinburgh.

Iain Crichton Smith,
42 Combie Street,
Oban,
Argyllshire.

Sydney Goodsir Smith,
27, Dundas Street,
Edinburgh 3.

Douglas Young,
Makarsbield,
Tayport,
Fife.

(b) Published Volumes of Poetry.

Ian Hamilton Finlay.

The Dancers Inherit the Party. Migrant Press, 1960. (DIP)
Glasgow Beasts, an a Burd - Haw, an Inseks, an, aw, a Fush.


Three-cornered Hat. Wild Hawthorn Press, 1967?

Ring of Waves. John Furnival, 1967?


Robert Garioch.

Seventeen Poems for Sixpence (with Sorley Maclean). Edinburgh, 1940.
Jephthah and The Baptist (as Robert Garioch Sutherland,
Selected Poems. Edinburgh, 1966. (SP)

Norman MacCaig

The Far Cry. London, 1943. (FC)
The Inward Eye. London, 1946. (IE)
The Sinai Sort. London, 1957. (SS)
Surroundings. London, 1966. (S)
Rings on a Tree. London, 1968. (RT)
Hugh MacDiarmid

Books

Sangschaw. Edinburgh, 1925. (S)
Penny Wheep. Edinburgh, 1926. (PW)
A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle. Edinburgh, 1926. (IM)
To Circumjack Cencrastus. Edinburgh, 1930. (CC)
First Hymn to Lenin and other Poems. London, 1931. (1HL)
Scots Unbound and Other Poems. Stirling, 1932. (SU)
Stony Limits and Other Poems. London, 1934. (SL)
Second Hymn to Lenin and Other Poems. London, 1935. (2HL60)
A Kist o' Whistles. Glasgow, 1947. (KW)
In Memoriam James Joyce. Glasgow, 1955. (IMJJ)
Stony Limits and Scots Unbound and Other Poems. Edinburgh, 1956. (SLSU)
The Battle Continues. Edinburgh, 1957. (BC)

Pamphlets

O Wha's Been Here Afore Me, Lass? Blue Moon Poems, 1931.
Second Hymn to Lenin. Thakeham, 1932. (2HL)
**Translations.**


*Edwin Morgan*


*Poems from Eugenio Montale.* Reading, 1959.


*Scotch Mist.* Cleveland, 1965.
Gnomes. Akros Publications: Preston, 1968. (G)

Iain Crichton Smith

London, 1959. (WN)
in Gaelic:
Burn is Aran (poems and short stories)
An Dubh is an Gorm (short stories)
Biobuill is Sanasan Reice (poems)
An Coileach, A' Chuirt (one-act plays)

Sydney Goodsir Smith

Skail Wind: Poems in Scots and English. Edinburgh, 1941. (SW)
The Wanderer and other poems. Edinburgh, 1943. (WF)
The Deevil's Waltz. Glasgow, 1946. (DW)
Selected Poems. Edinburgh, 1947. (SP)
The Aipple and the Hazel. Caledonian Press, 1951. (AH)
So Late Into The Night. London, 1952. (SLN)
Cokkils. Edinburgh, 1953. (C)
Omens; nine poems. Edinburgh, 1956. (O)
Figs and Thistles. Edinburgh, 1959. (PT)
The Vision of the Prodigal Son. Edinburgh, 1960. (VPS)

Verse Drama.


(c) Published Volumes of Prose.

Ian Hamilton Finlay.


Hugh MacDiarmid

Books.

Annals of the Five Senses. As C.M. Grieve. Montrose, 1923; Edinburgh, 1930. (A)
Scottish Scene, or The Intelligent Man's Guide to Albyn.

Scottish Eccentrics. London, 1936. (SE)
The Islands of Scotland: Hebrides, Orkneys, and Shetlands.

London, 1939. (IS)
Lucky Poet. A Self-Study in Literature and Political Ideas.

London, 1943. (LP)

Pamphlets.

The Present Condition of Scottish Arts and Affairs. P.E.N. Club, 1927.


Scotland: and the Question of a Popular Front Against Fascism and War. 1938.


Fidelity in Small Things. J.W. Sault, ?


Iain Crichton Smith


Consider the Lilies. London, 1968. (CL)

Sydney Goodsir Smith

Edinburgh, 1964. (CC)


Part II: Selected Bibliography of Secondary Sources.

(a) Poetry by Scottish Poets mentioned in text.


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__________. A Calendar of Love, and other stories.


Bruce, George. Sea Talk. Glasgow, 1944.


__________. Landscapes and Figures. Akros Publications:

Preston, 1967.

Conn, Stewart. Thunder in the Air. Akros Publications:

Preston, 1967.


__________. The Seven Journeys. Glasgow, 1944.

__________. Second Poems. London, ?


Lindsay, Maurice. The Enemies of Love. Glasgow, 1946.


At the Shrine o the Unkent Sodger. Akros Publications: Preston, 1968.


(b) **Selected Anthologies.**


Bruce, George, ed. (with Maurice Lindsay and Edwin Morgan).


Lindsay, Maurice, ed. *Poetry Scotland*. Glasgow, 1943-49.

(4 vols.)


MacDiarmid, Hugh, ed. *Selected Poems of William Dunbar*. 
Glasgow, 1955. (D)

(c) Critical Works and Articles Referred to in Text.


Buthlay, Kenneth. Hugh MacDiarmid. Edinburgh, 1964. (B)


Daiches, David. Introduction to third edition of A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle, q.v.


Comringer, Eugen. "From Line to Constellation," Augenblick 2 (1954), translated by Mike Weaver, Image (December 1964.)


Smith, Gregory.  *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence.*

Edinburgh, 1919.


__________.  "The 'Renaissance' in Scottish Poetry," *Feedback,*


*Times Literary Supplement* (February 29th, 1968), 193-5.